



## A Battle for Sweet Success in the Dessert Premix Category in Sri Lanka: With Special Emphasis on Brand Equity Perspective

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Sri Lanka's Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector has embarked upon in practicing different marketing management elements, given the fact due to, stiff competition prevails in the industry sphere. This paper endeavors to look at the importance of building brand equity in managing a brand with a practical perspective by considering the dessert premix category. This looks at what has made Motha reign as an undisputed leader in the concerned category over competition. Colossal amount of prior research articles has provided ground reviewing theories on the notion of brand equity, but this case study article attempts highlight the practical notions attentive to dessert premix category in Sri Lanka. The author has conducted one on one personal discussion with concerned professionals in the organization. However, since there weren't any direct articles found related to branding in dessert premix, writer has gone through previous related articles, research data to ascertain certain information to the best of ability.

**Keywords:** *Brand Equity, Dessert Premix, Fast Moving Consumer Goods*

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## 1. STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

### 1.1. Overview of the FMCG Market in Sri Lanka.

Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) are products that are sold quickly, widely available and at relatively lower price points (Rishi, 2013). The industry can be mainly categorized into three broad areas which are food, personal care, and home care. Over the past decades the industry has developed tremendously, luring more and more players to compete in each of the above categories which, eventually has increased the bargaining power of consumers, giving them wider choice of products to select with. Even in Sri Lanka, the FMCG industry has leapfrogged over years with representation of more multinational and local brands entering and competing intensely.

Figure 01:



Overall the segment contributes approximately 34% to the GDP of the country and providing close to 14% of local employment (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka, 2020). Broadly the industry reaches to its target consumers through general trade and modern trade. The total outlet universe in the general trade stands at 267,000 (Nielson, Sri Lanka, 2020) which are reached directly or indirectly and more than one thousand modern trade outlets managed by different companies which are serviced directly since those channels require special attention. But lately the industry witnessed the emergence of e-commerce as a new channel to reach consumers. Although at present it generates minimal contribution in terms sales, but appears to be lucrative in years to come.

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## 2. An Outline of the Dessert Premix Category

A Tale of Two Cities," the classic historical novel written by the great Charles Dickens in 1859, begins with an amazing statement "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." which represents who does not want to enjoy a dessert whether it is a good time or a bad time. Desserts fulfill our pleasure impulse; hence consumers often demand rich, fatty desserts. The range of desserts is immense which ranges from sweet baked goods to chilled items and array of frozen types of desserts. The concerned category in this article is from dessert premix, which means a unique mix of blended ingredients which comes in premix method fosters in making desserts much better and also permits you to develop your own desserts. Therefore, the dessert premix category under discussion consists of products to prepare jelly crystals, puddings and beverages. According to the Retail Measurement Statistics (RMS) deployed by renowned market research agency ACNielsen's the total dessert premix category accounts approximately LKR 720 million per annum including both general trade and modern trade sales. The key category players are Motha, MD, Go Jelly, Delish (New entrant) and other small to medium size competitors. From the total dessert premix category, jelly range constitute nearly 76% which is around LKR 547million per annum, hence the existing competitors and any intended new entrants to the category would eye the jelly crystals market initially. Accordingly, this whole case discussion revolves around the jelly product since it accounts the highest portion in the whole dessert premix category.

### 2.1. History of Motha

The steppingstone for Motha was way back in 1930's when the visionary founder, Mr. Tiburtius Motha formed T. Motha & Sons as a trading house involved in importing candies and jelly crystals. After the retirement of Mr. T. Motha, paved the way to his son who is the current Chairman, Mr. Julius Motha. Following his father's footsteps started the Motha Confectionery in 1960's with the aim of initially manufacturing hard boiled sweets and subsequently entered into producing most

sought-after jelly crystals. This decision was influenced due the political landscape prevailed at that time which purely encouraged local manufacturing. Since then the brand Motha has become an iconic brand touching the hearts, souls and minds of both young and old discerning consumers delighting their sweet cravings and making those moments special. Motha as one of Sri Lanka's legacy brand has dominated the dessert premix category as an undisputed market leader for over six decades. The consistent growths generated over the decades is a result achieved due to sheer emphasis in consistently maintaining quality of the product and concerted effort made to build the brand. With the success achieved in jelly category, paved the way for the company to introduce a range of ground-breaking products into the market which demonstrated the innovative spirit of the organization. Revolutionizing the market, Motha introduced Faluda and Milk shake mixes giving a soothing new experience in the indulgence market which attracted many in the target audience. With all these, at present Motha's product portfolio consists of dessert premixes category which comprise of original jelly with twelve delectable flavors, diet jelly, moss jelly, pudding mixes and custard powder. The other categories in the portfolio includes the beverage mixes such as Faluda and Milk shakes and cake ingredients category which is the most sought-after range by culinary experts in Sri Lanka.

The core values of Motha are consistency in maintaining superior quality which differentiates it from competitors. Core values of the company transcend to employees to other stakeholders as well, where special relationships are built on trust, transparency and a deep understanding of mutuality.

## **2.2. About Competition**

Among many industries exists food and beverage are a lucrative business to operate with which has immense growth potential in future. In the dessert premix market there are large to medium scale organizations operates in the country offering their products in different brand names. Out of the many strong players functions in this

category are Motha, MD Jelly, CBL Go Jelly and Delish.

Lanka Canneries carrying on a 90-year brand legacy is the manufacturer, distributor and exporter of natural food products such as Jams, Sauces, Cordials, Nectars, 100% fruit juices, Chutneys, Pickles, Sambols, Fruit Purees, Canned Fruits and Vegetables, Pure Treacle, Vinegar, Coconut Milk, Coconut Cream, Spices, Jelly mixes, Pudding Mixes, and much more under its renowned brand name “MD,”. MD brand is a now a market leader in food and beverage categories like jams and cordials in the market. Lanka Canneries introduced a jelly under the brand name MD a decade ago and is a challenger brand to Motha in the market.

On the other hand, Ceylon Biscuits Limited (CBL) began its operation in 1968. CBL launched their own biscuits under the brand name Munchee, which in fact marked as a significant turning point for the organization. Since then they never turned back and shift to the top gear by drawing up and executing marketing plans with the objective of clinching major portion of share in the biscuit’s category in Sri Lanka. Without just confining themselves to biscuits, they spearheaded into other new businesses such as confectionery category where they revolutionized the segment with innovative range of products under the brand Ritzbury, which is at present the number one confectionery brand in Sri Lanka. Later Convenience Foods Lanka Plc (CFLP) a subsidiary of CBL which manufacture and markets Textured Vegetable Protein commonly known as TVP launched CBL Go Jelly aiming the dessert premix category. CBL as a prominent player in the FMCG market in Sri Lanka which has revolutionized the market with the introduction of innovative products occupying the market leadership position in respective categories those products belong to. According to published statistics on top 20 FMCG companies operates in Sri Lanka CBL stands within the top five as a strong player in the food and beverage category which clearly epitomizes the strength they have in the industry (AC Nielson, 2018). Recognized as an innovation and marketing led organization through which they gained superiority in reigning leadership position in most categories, the company launched Go Jelly in early year twothousand with the objective of gaining leadership

position in the dessert premix market. Invariably they were empowered and had all the muscle to do so having strength in retail distribution, higher bargaining power with retailers in influencing purchase and of course the marketing strength. They applied vigorous marketing techniques to gain leadership position in the category. Consequently, after some years of market existence the management of CFLP noticed the dessert premix market is too competitive to continue and took a rationale decision to moveout from the battle for the sweet spot, where they strategically withdrew the Go Jelly brand to concentrate more in growing the market shares of their other potential products in their portfolio (Convenience Foods Lanka Plc, 2014-15). In the backdrop of this, what intrigues is to look at from brand marketing perspective why some brands succeed with limited advertising muscle and some crashes with such a roar, even after enormous spends behind brands. Also, how the strategic influence of brand equity and elements such as brand loyalty greatly inspired brands to keep momentum.

### **3. Brand Aura**

Branding is a deep expression of the human soul (Low & Fullerton, 1994). Branding has very long history, where prehistoric communities who applied brands on cattle before it being applied to products (Rajaram & Shell, 2012). Modern companies have associated with such affiliations and adopt logos and trademarks to market their products and services. A product when it becomes a brand, promises immense benefits both functional and emotional to the consumer in terms of quality, trust and a distinct place amongst a range of choices (Shabbir, Khan, & Khan, 2017). Brand is the name associated with one of more items in the product line that is used to identify the source of characters of the item(s) (Kotler, 2003). According to Mats 1999, earlier brand was considered as an offhand concept or just a step in the marketing process, but today brand sounds more than that. Brand can be clearly defined as a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the products of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate from competitors (Kotler, Armstrong, Agnihotri, & Haque, 2010). As this definition clearly denotes

brand is an important component in a product mix and particularly in today's competitive business landscape it simply helps to distinguish from rest of the products. Brand epitomize as a true representation of who you are and how you intend to be perceived. Once the brand name is decided it must determine a clear brand identity by providing direction, purpose and meaning for the brand. It is central to the brand's strategic vision and a vital element of one of four principals of brand equity: associations which are heart and soul of the brand.

Although there are macro-economic challenges country faces, we witness a colossal amount of investments been done by organization, particularly the private sector, to bombard the consumer with many advertising messages through Above the Line (ATL) and Below the Line (BTL) mechanisms to trigger brand purchases. This shows the amount of optimism the organizations have towards building brands. According to David Aaker (1996) having a strong brand is an asset to the organization because of the impact it creates for the organization in terms recognition. On the other hand, having a strong brand avoids an organization stepping into price competition, which is an element that most organizations are burden with in current context (Aaker & Jacobson, 1994). Therefore, it is encouraging to note the obligation companies have towards brand building and it is so critical that this sort of resilience to be maintained to build brands which will also makes an impact to the economy.

### **3.1. What Made Motha a Powerful Brand - Importance of Strategic Influence on Brand Equity**

Stiff competition prevailed from giants like MD and CBL Go Jelly where they were empowered and had all the muscle in retail distribution, higher bargaining power with retailers in influencing purchase and of course the marketing strength to compete against Motha.

Brand equity has become an important element in brand marketing and it has gained

enormous popularity among brand marketers today as brands are considered as the most valuable asset for any organization. Brand equity is a set of assets linked to a brand's name or symbol that add to (or subtract from) value provided by the product or service to a firm and to its customers (Aaker D. A., 2002). Managing brand equity has become a strategic marketing tool, which creates a competitive advantage and managing the brand effectively reaps enormous results to the firm in terms of generating sales & profits (Hanaysha, Hilman, & Abdghani, 2013). Having a strong identity for the brand has enabled it to create a preference in the market place by adding value to the category and even charging a price premium over competition (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Hence, Motha is recognized as an iconic brand among young and old Sri Lankans. Let's try to capture some salient points from brand equity perspective which has made Motha a powerful brand in the dessert premix category.

### **3.1.1.Brand Awareness**

Brand awareness is the strength that a brand has in the minds of its customers (Aaker D., 1996). Brand awareness has two dimensions; recall and recognition. Brand recall advocates upon seeing the product category consumer recall the brand name specifically. On the other hand, brand recognition is where consumers' ability to identify the brand when there is a brand cue (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Furthermore, according to Hoeffler (2002), complete awareness will be distinguished from depth and dimension. Depth refers to how to make consumers easily recall or identify a brand, whereas width implies that when consumers want to purchase a product, a brand name will immediately come to mind. Consumers will think of a specific brand when they want to buy a product if it has both brand depth and brand width. That is, the product has a higher level of brand recognition. Furthermore, name is the most important aspect of total awareness (Davis, Golicic and Marquardt, 2008).

Strong brands get engaged with their key stakeholders in the market constantly. In this case, Motha engages with several stakeholder groups. The key segment are their



consumers who primarily comprise of mothers and secondarily the children. Next is the customers or the retail partners and another important stakeholder group are the professionals in the culinary industry.

Motha consistently and coherently creates brand awareness, which means to create a presence in the consumers mind. This is created with proper depth which is to make consumers recall or identify the brand easily and with width which infers that Motha brand name comes to consumers mind the moment they want to purchase a product in the dessert premix category (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). The traditional mass media mechanisms are used with a professional media planning approach to generate maximum yield for the advertising spends. High burst of media presence is witnessed for the brand specially targeting festive seasons in March, April, and December. Since the advertising monies are scarce, the professional approach to media buying has paid results over the years to create high top of the mind recall for the brand in the dessert premix category over their competitors. Adding to this are other experiential brand marketing campaigns during Sinhala and Tamil new year festivals, World's children day event, cookery demonstrations done by culinary experts and also competitions that encourage students to showcase their entrepreneur skills are some brand engagements to mention herewith. Also, at the point of purchase in retail points both in general trade and modern trade suitable visual merchandising using point of sale materials is carried out to create brand recall to trigger purchase. Therefore, all these holistic integrated brand communications conducted throughout has made the brand to have top of the mind recall in the category outpacing competition.

### **3.1.2. Brand loyalty**

Brand loyalty is defined as “a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, resulting in repetitive same-brand or same-brand set purchasing despite situational influences and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause switching behavior” (Oliver, 1997).

According to Aaker (1996), a loyal customer base serves as a barrier to entry, a foundation for a value premium, time to respond to competitors, and a barricade against harmful value competition, and complete loyalty could be a core dimension of brand equity.

Thus, brand loyalty should be enhanced to increase brand equity (Mishra & Datta, 2011). Customers who are loyal to a brand are the foundation of a business. Higher levels of loyalty result in lower marketing expenditure because customers act as positive brand advocates. Furthermore, a company can add more products to its portfolio that are aimed at the same customers while spending less money. Brand loyalty is comprised of both behavioral and attitude factors. Repurchase behavior is represented by behavior loyalty, and loyalty perspective is defined as psychological commitment to a whole (Aaker, 1991; Assael, 1998; Oliver, 1999; Prus & Brandt, 1995; Hollis & Farr, 1997). As a result, purchase frequency does not equal loyalty. For example, customers who repurchase a product do so not because they like it, but rather because of a convenient issue or a spread seeking behavior to buy a specific product on occasion (Tseng, Liao, & Jan, 2004).

This iconic brand has always identified the pulse of their consumers from its inception and have delivered results by delighting all their customer segments. For instance, consumers always show preference to buy Motha products to meet all their gastronomy requirements and on the other hand customers demonstrate greater degree of loyalty in selling Motha products due to high shelf turnaround. Another important customer segment which comprise is culinary experts and food service professionals in the industry establish higher loyalty towards the brand and always recommend or influence to purchase Motha because the brand has kept the promise in terms of quality and also on all other aspects. These culinary experts and professionals act as brand evangelist and they play a pivotal role in influencing purchase intentions for Motha. Brand evangelism can be described as spreading constructive and encouraging opinions committedly and actively in persuading others to purchase the brand (Munasinghe & Dissanayake, 2018). As in modern era

company's needs to absorb new techniques such as evangelist marketing to attract new customers using their existing clients. This customer segment is important because, from one aspect they are diehard brand loyalist who are in addition to purchasing Motha products repeatedly promote the brand through their strong word of mouth appeal to recruit new customers. At the same time, they disparage competitor brands. These professionals conduct culinary classes; hence the brand can recruit new users as these professionals promotes the Motha brand's products to these new comers who enter the world of culinary art and influence them to purchase. Also, these evangelists influence peers in the industry to use Motha. Therefore, it is evident the brand absorbs unique techniques such as through evangelist marketing to motivate existing customers to recruit new customers. These evangelists, simultaneously keep on purchasing Motha brand and through their strong word of mouth absorb new customers as well (Sajoy, 2018). The company constantly provide prompt feedback on queries made by these customers to keep them satisfied. Also, the company practice a concerted effort in promoting Motha using these evangelists by conducting numerous workshops, seminars related to culinary arts targeting different parts of the island. As these seminars are attracted by larger number of people, the impact it creates on the brand is great.

### **3.1.3.Perceived Quality**

Perceived quality is a critical component of brand equity because it has been linked to price premium, price elasticity, brand usage, and stock return (Aaker, 1996). The customer's perception of the overall quality of a brand is referred to as perceived quality. The term "perceived quality" refers to a consumer's assessment and perception of a product's overall quality, superiority, or excellence (Keller K., 2003; Zeithaml, 1998).

Once a brand promises certain features and benefits to the customer, it needs to be delivered without any hesitancy. This is one-way a brand can secure customers without allowing them to migrate to another brand. Therefore, it is important that a

powerful brand, analyze what motivates customer to get into the bed with the brand. In other words, why a consumer buys Motha? Because the brand delivers superior perceived quality to provide delightful indulgence experience that no other brand can meet with. Perceived quality is a brand association which is part of building brand equity (Aaker D. A., 2002). Perceived quality is like goodness that spread on all elements of the brand like a thick syrup and reflects as the heart, what consumers are buying. Achieving this perceived quality is a miracle without proper substance, and the quality that you build should be in the eyes of the consumer. Significant components which makes a good jelly are the ingredients the product inherits. As we all know firms are compelled to reduce cost specially in times of tight economic conditions. The significance of this brand is that they never compromise on quality of the product under any circumstances and always source the best ingredients to manufacture the products. Specially, for a food product like dessert the ingredients used will play a critical role, as taste will differ making the consumer disappointed. This iconic brand always identifies the pulse of their consumers from its inception and have delivered results by delighting all their customer segments. For instance, culinary experts and professionals in the food service industry always recommend or influence to purchase Motha because the brand has kept the promise in terms of quality and also on all other aspects.

#### **3.1.4.Brand Associations**

According to Aaker (1996) brand association is a concept that consumers have deeply embedded in their minds about a brand. It establishes a connection between the consumer and a brand. Keller (1998) defines whole associations as informational nodes linked to the whole node in memory, which contains the meaning of the whole for customers. Marketers use brand associations to distinguish, position, and extend brands, to foster positive attitudes and feelings toward brands, and to suggest attributes or benefits of purchasing or using a specific brand. Consumers use whole associations to help method, organize, and retrieve data in memory, as well as to help them make purchasing decisions (Aaker D. A., 2002).

Brand innovation perhaps is considered as one of the important capabilities of any business today. Innovation coupled with marketing should be the core of organizations DNA, which enables to drive growth and profitability. Business growth will come through the introduction of new products and profits will generate from innovation inspired margin increases (Aaker D., 2007).

Motha, at the inception started off with one flavor, which is strawberry and gradually start adding many other flavors into the original jelly range such as Orange, Greengage, Blueberry, Raspberry, and wood apple to the existing line. All these variants introduced are compatible to Sri Lankan consumers and introduced with proper prior research. As the brand showed better performance and image in the market and with the objective of providing total convenience to the busy, discerning housewives they introduced a range of pudding mixes comprises of Sri Lankan favorites Watalappan, Caramel and most recently Almond chocolate. With all this success, they extended the Motha brand into beverages and ingredients categories where they introduced famous Faluda mix and a range of cake ingredients items such as baking powder to icing sugar which ultimately became the most sought-after range among consumers and professionals when it comes to cake making. This clearly exemplifies the depth of clear understanding who their consumer is and such innovations clearly has improved the attraction of the product to the potential customers and fostered to increase loyalty among existing customers. Through proper branding, all these innovations gained momentum in the market resulting a powerful impetus to the business in the long term.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This paper attempts to highlight the importance of having a strong brand and what greatness can be achieved by having a strong brand equity. The above is illustrated by taking the brand equity model and relating the success story of Motha to the elements of the brand equity. The case explains the strategic importance of associating a holistic branding approach to create a strong equity. We most believe

to build a strong brand you need to invest colossal amount of money behind it and mass media advertising is the sole remedy. We have witnessed in the market there had been brand failures even after busting enormous amount of monies behind communication campaigns.

This remembers the ancient epic David and Goliath dates back to over three thousand years ago. David the shepherd boy took down Goliath regardless of him being a giant who everybody was terrified to challenge (Auld & Ho, 17(56)). As the age-old fable David and Goliath denotes that even unsurmountable tasks can be achieved and to do so, what you require is the clear focus and the attitude.

In the above case it clearly shows Motha had clear focus and attitude towards a concerted effort to nurture and build the brand over competition in the dessert premix category. They build speed and agility in reacting quickly and do things before their competitors. They were precise in what they were doing and challenged the status quo, specially doing things such as evangelist marketing to build a set of brand evangelist to rally around the brand. Hence, the readers can observe the brand strategy initiatives taken by the brand in overcoming a strong market challenger brands to dominate in the leadership position. Therefore, this emphasizes that brands have the power to change the world – not just to sell products and make profits, but also to make life better!

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