

Role of Strategic Leadership and Marketing Initiatives in Business – Case Study on Café Coffee Day

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Abstract:

Café Coffee Day (CCD) is one of the most popular coffee outlets in the country, and it started with the slogan “a lot can happen over a cup of coffee”. Indeed, a lot did happen in their business: it initially succeeded, sustained growth for 20 years, and then declined due to stiff competition from foreign brands, especially Starbucks. Starbucks, a multinational company, first entered the Indian market in 2007, but its initial entry was a failure. It re-entered the Indian market with the support of the Tata Group in 2012. CCD could overcome the challenges of competition by re-planning the segments they served. However, the CCD, which opened the coffee shop in 1996, matched the competition by focusing on opening a variety of outlets suited to different segments of society. The company has made great strides, turning from a loss-making venture in its 2015-2019 downturn. It is poised to make great strides in the future. This company, once a successful, well-funded business, had its bad days and is poised for great success in the future due to the efforts of its CEO, Ms. Malavika Hegde, who took charge in 2012. The strategic leadership qualities she exhibited were evident in the actions she took to reduce debt and retain a loyal workforce, even as the company closed many of its failed units. The different phases of this business offer researchers and academicians, ample scope for case studies. The study paper on Starbucks motivated this Study. A framework for sustained growth as discussed in the Starbucks study has been used to analyze the success story of CCD. This Study is a descriptive study based on a literature review and secondary data. The data were analyzed using themes based on the theory, leading to the conclusion that the management demonstrated positive strategic leadership qualities, the importance of relationship marketing, and how they maintained their competitive advantage.

Keywords: Innovation, strategic leadership, relationship marketing, and sustainable competitive advantage.

1.0 Introduction

This case study uses the model of sustainable competitive advantage to examine one of the most successful Indian coffee outlets – Café Coffee Day. A brief outline of the company is given here. Coffee Day Global Limited (CDGL), founded by Mr. V. G. Siddhartha, owns coffee shops under the Café Coffee Day brand, popularly known as CCD. CDGL had twelve thousand acres of coffee plantations in Chikkamagaluru, Karnataka State, India. They were the largest producer of Arabica coffee beans and exported them to various countries in Europe, the USA, and Japan. They started Café Coffee Day in 1993 in Bangalore, targeting the Premium Segment and Youth. From a small outlet, it has grown into a global giant, with

Starbucks as its global competitor and Barista and Third Wave coffee shops as competitors in India. It has outlets in Malaysia, Austria and the Czech Republic through acquisitions. Fresh and Ground Stores sell coffee seeds and Coffee powder, as ordered by the customer's chosen blend. The Company was very successful in its initial entry into the market but faced many hardships as it tried to expand, and it incurred losses and debts. Kashmeera Sambamurthy (Sep 2023) [1] states, "By March 2020, the debt on the books was reduced to Rs.3100 Crore and by March 2021, the net debt stood at Rs.1731 Crore. The company has wiped out its losses, paid its debts, and is now on the path to sustained growth. There are currently the following business divisions: Coffee Day Fresh 'n' Ground/Coffee Day Xpress/Coffee Day Take away/Coffee Day Exports/Coffee Day Perfect/FMCG Packaged Coffee. Every marketing strategist will have to look into the turnaround of this company, especially a company that initially made profits, then went into debt and lost Ground, and has to re-establish itself in the highly competitive business of coffee outlets and allied products.

The founder, Mr. Siddhartha, had the advantage of owning large coffee plantations and was also familiar with coffee powder users through his retail grinding outlets. The advantage for the user was that he could choose the proportions of coffee seeds, such as arabica and robusta, to mix and grind. In 1993, he opened coffee outlets with the slogan of 'a lot can happen over coffee' which became popular hang outs for young and business people. These units were ideally opened in urban areas of higher and middle-income settlers. As seen earlier, the company got into heavy debt and the CEO took his life. Fortunately, the wife took over the business after his demise. When COVID disrupted many businesses, Ms. Malavika Siddhartha saw it as an opportunity to close down failing units and reorganize the business. With her steady progress in the business, she also repaid the loans and overcame the financial crisis. The company has not only come to stay, but many other companies aspire to acquire this business. She also brought the company to its present status. In the foregoing paragraphs, the rise and fall of the company will be discussed using secondary data and novel methods used to by the company for the turnaround.

1.1 Problems faced by the company

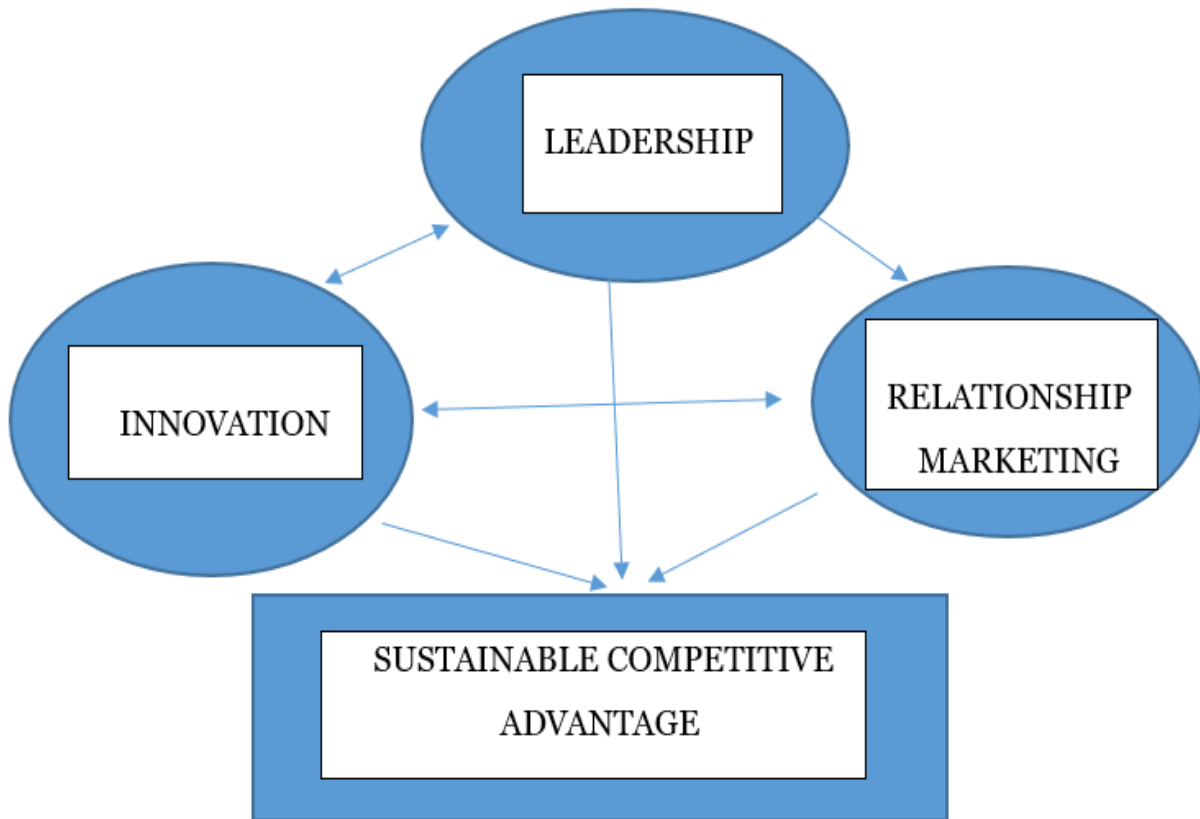
CCD has Problems and Constraints such as:

- a) Repayment of debts not allowing for further expansion or countering competitors due to resource constraints.
- b) Entry of Competitors in the last decade, like Starbucks, the global giant and Barista and Third-wave Indian companies.
- c) Scale of Promotional activities not matching that of competitors.

1.2 Conceptual Framework and Study Method.

Sustained competitive advantage is closely linked to leadership, innovation, and relationship marketing. The study has followed the sustainable competitive advantage model with independent variables of leadership, innovation, and relationship marketing, and the dependent variable is sustained competitive advantage.

Figure 1: Framework for Sustained Competitive Advantage Model.



Source: White, Benjamin Adam & Ettore Moraschinelli (2009)

Rijamampianina, Abratt & February (2003), [2] state that business competition is universal and cannot be avoided. They cite Zook (2001) in their paper and argue that diversification within the core business is ideal for retaining competitive advantage. Further citing Porter (1966), it has been stated that companies lose their competitive advantage due to poor diversification. They also stress that successful companies have the advantages of leadership, innovation, and relationship marketing. In this study too, these are the independent variables. Based on the above and further research, White, Benjamin Adam & Ettore Moraschinelli (2009) [3] have developed a conceptual framework for the case study on Starbucks Coffee Company, with sustainable competitive advantage as the dependent variable. This Study has adopted the same conceptual framework and has taken CCD for the descriptive Study. The framework is shown as Figure 1. The case study also follows the authors' research methodology, using secondary data for analysis. Secondary data has already been collected by someone, assembled, and interpreted, and is used for the Study relevant to the theory formulated.

2.0 Literature Review

Based on the conceptual framework, the study aligned with several themes during the literature review. The themes are sustainable competitive model, leadership facing challenges, leadership allied to marketing, innovative marketing, relationship marketing, market entry, competition, marketing mix and financial status.

2.1 Sustainable Competitive Advantage Model:

White and co-authors (2009) [3] have applied the marketing strategy with sustainable competitive advantage model to a Starbucks coffee outlet in a qualitative Study. In this marketing model, the dependent variable is sustained competitive advantage and leadership, innovation and relationship marketing are the independent variables. Favorable points they have cited for Starbucks in that Study are – the CEO, Howard Schultz’s Leadership, their innovation skills (“over 87,000 possible drink combinations” - Starbucks nutrition info, 2009) and their relationship marketing skills. Arman Kazemi et al. (2024) [4] states “In fact, sustainable competitive advantage allows companies to maintain a greater and more distinct advantage against competitors over a longer period of time and gradually secure themselves a prominent and unattainable position in the market”.

This study and its model have been the guidelines for the present Study of CCD. This has given ample scope to study CCD in the areas of leadership, innovation and relationship marketing and how they have contributed for sustainable competitive advantage to CCD.

2.2 Leadership facing challenges:

Salicru. S (2023), [5] states that leadership should be able to build relationships and should be bold, resourceful with determination and pragmatic. Each of these words have conveyed very deep understanding of the successful Leadership skills. Boldness should also be interpreted to be alive to the environment to take Risks. This can be achieved only with a good mix of professional and personal experience, the author says. The author also refers to the behavioral changes needed in the situation at hand, namely, adapting to the prevailing environment, as a requisite for successful leadership. Transformational leadership (Gasabeh 2017 Page 6) [6] requires the attributes of “four dimensions including: idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation.”

2.3 Leadership allied to marketing:

O’Keeffe et al. (2016), [7] have cited the authors mentioned for these observations on leadership in marketing. On a strategic level, successful leaders “project a clear and consistent picture of a desired organizational identity and put in place conditions that increase the likelihood of desired behaviors through enhanced employee satisfaction” (Bradshaw, 1998). The concept of “transformational leadership” (Bernard Bass, 1996) suggests “leaders transform followers’ personal values and self-beliefs, move them to higher levels of needs and aspirations”. Leaders grow in stature by their experience with such qualities and become indispensable too after some time. They show, by their deeds, where the company is now and where it should be. (Berry, Hensel and Burke 1976; Grönroos 1990). There are emerging views on leadership “as a collective activity, rather than individual competency”. Successful leaders constantly review all factors concerning marketing, namely people, place, promotion, price, and all other relevant factors. These aspects of transformational leadership will be discussed further in Para 3.1 with respect to CCD.

2.4 Innovative marketing:

Purchase, S., & Volery, T. (2020) [8] state that, from the days of changes to a product termed innovation, the product has now become market-oriented, with changes not only in the product but also in other areas of marketing and sales promotion. Digitization has been introduced in all areas of production, marketing,

sales, accounting to analyze customer satisfaction. Hence, innovative techniques have found way not only in production but in other areas.

2.5 Relationship marketing

Sheth, J. N. (2015), [9] states that relationship marketing has existed as long as business has existed in this world. The author stresses that awareness of this has grown considerably over the last 2 decades, with greater emphasis on 'share of heart' rather than 'share of wallet,' and that relationship marketing has achieved its objective. Its true meaning lies in managing customer relationships to joint venturing with customers. To some extent, influencer marketing can also be grouped with relationship marketing (Carmen Berne-Manero and Mercedes Marzo-Navarro 2020 Abstract), and the next piece of literature reviewed is on influencer marketing. Texas Coffee School (2024), [10] has given suggestions on how to start and sustain the business of coffee houses using usual marketing strategies, and the one that stands out is their suggestion for influencer marketing. (Page 8 of this literature). Influencers come in all forms - bloggers, coffee addicts, press reporters, news anchors of mass media, local leaders of institutions, celebrities etc. They are carriers of pleasant experiences and positive thoughts and pass them on to other potential customers in society.

2.6 Market Entry

Laura Blake (2019), [11] has examined strategies in a competitive environment and discusses the advantages and disadvantages for the company that enters early and for one that enters later. She says, while entry advantage is without competition, higher market share is retained as the competitor who enters later has to invest more. However, the latter who enters can take on those additional costs too, but could cater to more consumer preferences with the additional inputs he gets from the existing market. In fact, this article examines CCD's existing market presence with Starbucks and argues that the local leader is agile enough to counter the global leader, Starbucks, when it entered India.

2.7 Competition

Roshini. S et al. (2016), [12] have studied on the competition of Starbucks VS CCD in Chennai city. The study had adapted Porter's Five Forces model to compare the strategies of CCD with those of Starbucks Coffee. The authors concluded that CCD need not worry about Starbucks, as Starbucks focuses on the premium coffee segment, while CCD serves other segments. People aged 21-30 still prefer CCD over Starbucks. Both companies differ in their target segments, pricing, and adopted strategies, says Roshini, the author. It has to be agreed to that, in the last four years, CCD has made a profit to reduce its long-term debt.

2.8 Marketing Mix/Services, Brand Guide/Food and Beverages and Competitors/Companies

MBA skool (2023), [13] is a source of knowledge on the business strategies and is widely followed by Management students and professionals. Four of their articles - how it works, marketing mix, brand guide, and competitors - authored by the Content & Research Team, were taken for the literature review.

Salient points from these articles are:

Café Coffee Day is a leading coffee chain in India.

Fresh 'n' Ground is a retail outlet for Coffee Bean and Powder.

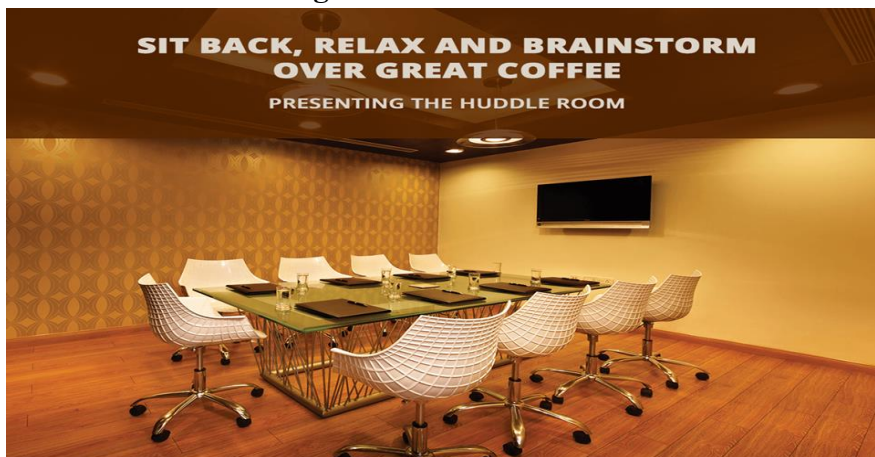
Coffee Day Square and Lounge are premium coffee bars. These outlets serve a variety of coffees, food – such as snacks and desserts- and beverages like shakes and lemonades.

The Café Coffee Day outlets sell apparel, cups, accessories, and gift cards. The Square has The Huddle Room, created for those needing the atmosphere of a meeting with coffee or a get-together. An unique idea to spend time and discuss – an aspect of Place in Marketing.

CCD undertakes catering services and takes corporate orders for supply.

They sell vending machines to corporate offices and colleges.

Figure 2: Huddle Room



Source: MBA skool (2023)

g) Logo and Motto: “A Lot can happen over Coffee.”

Figure 3: Logo and Motto.



Source: MBA Skool (2023)

2.9 Financial Status

Sakshi Bharari (2023), [14], in an article in Business Outreach, has commented on CCD’s success story. This article highlights the company's debt and how it is managing to minimize it. They have repaid the loans in the past 4 years, minimized them, and are likely to be completely out in 2023. The CDGL’s coffee division, Café Coffee Day (CCD) gives 47% of its total net revenue. CCD has 333 CCD value express kiosks in addition to 572 cafes operating in 165 cities and 36,326 vending machines that dispense coffee in various outlets, including colleges, workplaces, and offices, under its brand name.

Paragraphs 2.1 to 2.9 outline the themes and the literature reviewed. Based on the above discussion, analysis, and underpinning were done.

3.0 Research Method

Underpinning, Discussion and Analysis

The conceptual framework variables relating to the literary review discussions have been used here to underpin the study, and a descriptive analysis technique has been applied to arrive at the study's findings. The framework followed is the sustained competitive advantage model.

This Study of company CCD identifies the constraints as:

- a) Debts not allowing for further expansion or countering competitors
- b) Entry of competitors in the last decade, like Starbucks, the global giant, and Barista and Third-wave coffee, the Indian companies.
- c) Scale of promotional activities not matching that of competitors.

In the case, with a descriptive analysis of the qualitative method, the study, vide paras 2 to 3, has studied all aspects related to the framework and the constraints area. Recommendations based on that have been given in Para 3.5.

Secondary Data

Literature on the subject form part of Secondary Data. Secondary data is data that already exists, collected, assembled, and interpreted by someone else, states Gronhaug, (2005) [15]. Secondary data helps to establish ideas and theories. CCD being a popular Coffee outlet, there are number of case studies done already and data from these have been taken for analysis.

3.1 Leadership

CCD leadership has used delegation to its advantage. B Mathebula & B Barnard (2020), [16] state that the company relies on trust in using the men to the best of their capabilities and thus identifies and entrusts the right men within the group. Leaders' clarity and vision (Burns, 2008, p. 90), [17] help guide the team toward the specified goals. "Consistent communication is necessary with an aim of aligning visions and building bonds between departments to ensure cohesive delivery of brand promise" (O'Keeffe et al., 2016), [7]. Transformational leadership (Gasabeh 2017 Page 6) [6] requires the attributes of "four dimensions including: idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation". Bernard M Bass (1999), [18] also emphasized this as "Transformational leadership refers to the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration". The qualities of such leadership have been evident in many successful companies, and CCD is no exception.

The leader has exhibited the above traits, Mr. Siddhartha, while following vertical integration. The concepts with different color coding for Coffee Shop and Coffee Lounge and his Resorts are his own. When the expansion for these resulted in debts and the next in command, Ms. Malavika Hegde, took over the reins of this company, she ensured that the coffee outlets not only served the premium sector but also the middle-class, office-goers, and young men. She formed a solid team to overcome the financial crisis. While opening new outlets, she placed importance on the 'Place' factor. She has to face competition from global giant Starbucks, when it entered Indian Market in 2012. Ms. Malavika Hegde steered CCD well to meet the challenges posed by Starbucks and by Indian new entrants Barista and Third Wave Coffee. She has taken the company to new heights with transformational leadership (Gasabeh 2017 Page 6), [6]. The

Study has addressed the independent variable of Leadership in the areas allied to Marketing and challenges faced, adequately in the conceptual framework.

3.2 Innovation

Innovation, the independent variable in the framework, is discussed in literary review under Para 2.4 (Purchase, S., & Volery, T- 2020), [8] has a major impact on the sustained competitive advantage in business. Pricing differentiation has been the hallmark of this company (Roshini et al., 2016) [12]. Relocating or enhancing the current location with additional features has yielded positive results. Innovation, which contributes to the sustained competitive advantage of business, can be any one of the areas of 8Ps, including ‘personalization’ of Goldsmith [19] (Adeleke A 2019), [20], in addition to the 7Ps already practiced for market strategy. In the words of Paul Burns (2008), [15], with influence from Joseph Schumpeter, innovation is a “single mold-breaking development in new products or services or how they are produced or how or to whom they are marketed that can be linked to commercial opportunity and successfully exploited” (p. 287-288). This is how innovation contributes to the theory of sustainable competitive advantage.

Mr. Siddhartha ensured that an in-house facility for the product mix was established and that attention was focused on the areas of ‘Place, Price and Product’. Subsequently, when Ms. Malavika Hegde took over the reins of the company, she evaluated the performance of the outlets and successfully streamlined the working of them by placing them at prime locations and also closing down the non-performing ones. All these were possible when there was no competition. However, presently, there is fierce competition from Starbucks, Barista, and Third Wave. Sakshi Bharari (2023), [19] summarizes the following innovations that contributed to the success of CCD. In 2016, CCD teamed up with FreeCharge to enable cashless transactions. CCD through its App, tracks consumer behavior, personalizes offers and improvements, enables cashless transactions via implicit wallets, and consistently adds new areas for Study. Live performances in Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, and Bengaluru were organized in 2016 to increase customer participation, with a significant impact on the younger audience. CCD was the first to offer cafe concerts. They followed the 3A approach: Affordability, Accessibility and Acceptability - products were reasonably priced, cafes were easily accessible for customers and to consume their foods without sacrificing taste – ensuring brand recognition and taste. In 2014, ABP News named it “Retailer of the Year” (Organization Food & Grocery) for excellence in retail, as stated by Sakshi Bharari [14]. All the above are in conformance with the variable of the conceptual framework – innovation.

3.3 Relationship Marketing

This independent variable in the sustainable competitive advantage model has been seen in the literature review vide Para 2.5 and Para 2.6. Grönroos (2009), [21] says communication becomes an essential part of relationship marketing. The essential part of it, as Gronroos has stated, is that the customer looks for “friendly, trustworthy, and timely” service for a lasting relationship. Once this happens, customer loyalty is cultivated, the trust built differentiates the company from competitors, and its contribution to sustained competitive advantage is immeasurable (Duddy & Kandampully, 1999, p. 51), [22]. CCD’s slogan, “a lot can happen over coffee,” which is also displayed in their outlets, goes well with this.

The success of CCD in this area is more due to the courteous staff who were trained for the job. The long supply chain linkages for all products have been managed very well through a cohesive relationship marketing approach. They could sustain the market for 29 years through the relationship they had built

with customers as well. Loyalty coupons is a regular feature of CCD. CCD has not used food bloggers or celebrities, but has strong followers who spread the word by word of mouth. One area in which they have to improve is influencer marketing. There is a lot of scope to further improve the relationship marketing area by involving influencers. Thus, all aspects of relationship marketing within the framework have been addressed.

4.0 Conclusions

The company has reduced its debt and taken steps that will result in sustained growth. As the market is flooded with competitors, awareness of their strategies and challenges is essential to counter disruptive forces. Even with the presence of Starbucks, the highest market share in the coffee shop outlets is still with CCD as per Kashmeera Sambamurthy (2023), [1]. CCD has the advantage of vertical integration, enabling it to offer a range of services and products. Differentiation and corresponding pricing is being followed by the company already. It has a dedicated workforce. Hence the area of place, people and promotion are the factors for which CCD should concentrate for further growth. This would also take care of the challenges due to competition.

4.1 Suggestions in the areas of Leadership, Innovation and Relationship Marketing. (CCD and Sustained Competitive Advantage Model)

Leadership has shown promise by reducing debts. It now has to concentrate on market expansion and penetration in rural areas. All aspects of the marketing mix with respect to CCD have been seen in the Study. CCD has entered the rural market, but not adequately. The disposable income in rural areas has substantially increased, says Sylvester Taylor (2023), [23]. This has to be exploited initially through price differentiation, as these should also be considered as entry points for marketing in rural areas.

Advantage – Increased market penetration, company revenue, and Market share. Can have cost advantages in the long run.

Disadvantage – Will have to bear the infrastructure costs initially for outlets in rural areas. Additional costs may be required to maintain cleanliness and avoid Health issues.

a) Resources: New outlets in rural areas with additional structures and logistics costs. Expenditure required to maintain cleanliness, including staff and additional inputs such as the provision of clean water. All these, when addressed, would contribute to tangible benefits in the form of sales and Revenue.

b) People: When stiff competition exists, traditional ways of employees perform better with their personal touch. They have to establish closer relationships with repeat consumers. Training staff has become increasingly important in the changing times. Advantages - Increased sales and brand loyalty built, helping longer-term sustainability in the market.

Disadvantages – Cost of staff training.

Resources: Additional inputs of training in the form of staff and expenditure. The intangible benefits of customer satisfaction will result.

c) Promotions: Tapping into influencer marketing presently is inadequate, which is a main area of contribution to Relationship Marketing. Tie ups of Bakery products with Branded Bakeries would be ideal for mutual benefits of both the bakery and CCD.

Advantage: Increased presence in the Market and sales and also profit.

Disadvantage: Expenditure will be larger for this. Time consuming negotiations will have to be done for tie-ups and decision making should take into consideration of all aspects of tie-ups.

Resources: Infrastructure expenditure for opening new outlets in place of closed ones. Expenditure will be practically nil by bringing in Food bloggers as Influencers. Tangible benefits of sales growth can be achieved.

4.2 Pictorial Representation

Figure 1 Conceptual frame work – sustainable competitive advantage model

Figure 2 Huddle room

Figure 3 Logo and Motto of CCD.

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