

CONSUMER PERCEPTION FOCUS ON BRAND ALLIANCE

Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of Bachelors of

Science in Business Administration

In the Bertolon School of Business at Salem State University

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Salem State University

2024

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ABSTRACT:

Brand alliance is a marketing strategy where two brands collaborate. Brand alliances are fascinating, but the outcomes are difficult to predict. Studying why brands decide to join a brand alliance and what successful brand alliances have traditionally looked like can help identify profitable opportunities. Consumer reactions to brand alliances are also an important aspect of this relationship. Consumer feedback can be gathered instantly through social media analysis. Brand alliances are an increasingly common phenomena, as companies realize that these partnerships will cost fewer resources and can generate more revenue. This paper investigates the concept of brand alliance, specifically why brand alliances form and what aspects of brand alliance make the strategy successful. The focus will be on two kinds of brand alliances: ingredient branding and co-location.

Key Words: branding – consumer perception – promotion – fit – Store-in-Store agreement

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Introduction:

Brand alliance is a marketing strategy that involves two or more brands collaborating and presenting together for the consumer's benefit (Newmeyer et al 2018). This marketing strategy has been an important tool companies have used for a long time. Brand alliances help companies expand product lines and make more money while leveraging the risk of unsuccessful products with another company. Brand alliances vary in degree of integration, integration referring to the degree that partnering brands are joined in function and physical form (Newmeyer et al 2018). Strategies such as ingredient branding and co-development include high involvement from both brands. This is a form of brand alliance where there is a separate form of each product and the companies have come together to make a product that is integrated physically and functionally. Food combinations is a simple effective brand alliance example that is easy to understand—creating a new food through the work of two distinguished brands. The Mcflurry from McDonald's is a great example of this. Ice cream is already a great product on its own. It comes in a variety of flavors and most people know what ice cream is. Oreos also can be purchased on its own and enjoyed as a cookie sandwich. Creating an ice cream flavor based on Oreos with Oreos mixed in has created a new product out of distinct offerings. Brand alliance in cinema must also be acknowledged. Actors enter a project with their previous works establishing their brand. When a studio contracts an actor for a film or show the studio serves as the host brand in which the actor becomes a part of a new product. The actor's stopping power helps communicate the potential for the project they are working on. Established A-list celebrities such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Samuel L.

Jackson help sell movie tickets as they have accumulated fans loyal to their brands and excited to see their new projects.

Another brand alliance strategy that shows the low integration aspect of brand alliance is co-location. According to Newmeyer et al (2018) co-location brands are physically and functionally distinct, while the joint offering provides consumers with the products of two brands that the consumer enjoys. This brand alliance type does not allude to retail stores offering different brands of snacks. Retailers utilize co-location by renting space in the store to another company, most often a fast food or coffee chain. The business renting out the space will usually set established policies. Co-location is increasing in popularity in retail stores.

This paper will include case studies of successful and unsuccessful co-location and ingredient branding attempts and explore commonalities across the two strategies.

FIT PERCEPTION

Brand fit analysis is one technique consumers use to evaluate brand alliances (Schmitt, 2012, Samuelsen, Olsen, & Keller 2014). Fit is defined by Samuelsen, Olsen, & Keller (2014) as “an instance where two objects share some commonalities”. Consumers understand that there is logic behind two brands collaborating (Schmitt 2012). If consumers can understand this logic, it will be easier for consumers to evaluate a product’s value, ultimately positively affecting a consumer’s purchasing decisions when consumers consider the price compared to the value the product will provide. Consumers have an easier time evaluating brand fit when collaborating products are within the same category, such as complimentary food combinations or movie characters living in a

cinematic universe interacting. Brand alliances across product categories are quite prevalent and in these scenarios, brands must communicate fit through means other than the product itself (Samuelsen, Olsen, Keller 2014). Establishing fit through marketing is especially important for products in different categories. Adjusting the price to reflect value is an effective marketing strategy. If the price is cheaper for the new product consumers will value this price differential. The impact of consumers perceiving fit is significant. According to Samuelsen, Olsen, and Keller (2014) Higher fit leads to more positive consumer attitudes towards the brand alliance.

In a survey done by James (2005), lower consumer attitude scores towards the brand alliance were linked to lower brand fit perceptions. The low scores reflect the survey participants' low opinion of the presented brand alliance. This survey also incorporated how likely participants were to purchase a product. Attitude scores were slightly higher than likelihood to purchase, high attitude scores were closely related to a high likelihood to purchase, and the opposite was true as well (James 2005).

1. BRAND ALLIANCE TYPES

Ingredient branding is a brand alliance strategy, in which a branded product or service incorporates another brand as a component to differentiate itself through the use of the incorporated brand (Paydas 2021). Ingredient branding is a common occurrence in food items. Many sweet treats have a brand extension in which other mix-ins are added to the company's original confection. Ice Cream variants of popular brands can often be found including Oreos, a popular Mondelez International product.

A store-in-store agreement is a type of co-location brand alliance agreement where a retailer known as the housing retailer leases store space to another retailer titled the housed retailer (Pasirayi 2020). Housing retailers rely less on brand fit due to having more stable cash flow in store-in-store agreements from rent paid by housed retailers (Pasirayi 2020). A housed retailer would be any retailer that leases space to another company within their store. Starbucks and Macy's have a store-in-store relationship. Another example of this strategy is Walmart leasing space to Subway within some of its store locations. Two established popular fast-food brands perceived value in the partner brands' store locations and the corporations came to an agreement. Housed retailers are more reliant on positive perceptions of fit due to a reliance on a shared customer base.

2. CASE STUDIES

JCPENNEY AND SEPHORA

JCPenney and Sephora began their partnership in 2006. Previously JCPenney was pessimistic about the role of cosmetics in its locations, having ended a relationship with Avon Products in 2003 (Singh, 2012). Myron Ullman accepted the CEO position at JCPenney in 2004. Ullman had previously maintained an important position at LVMH which owns Sephora (Singh 2012). In 2005 JCPenney reported their main target customers were married women aged between 35 and 54 with an average household income of \$69,000. These women seek stylish clothes that are also not too trendy. JCPenny sought to provide casual clothing that was high-quality and form-fitting to this demographic (Lau, 2008).

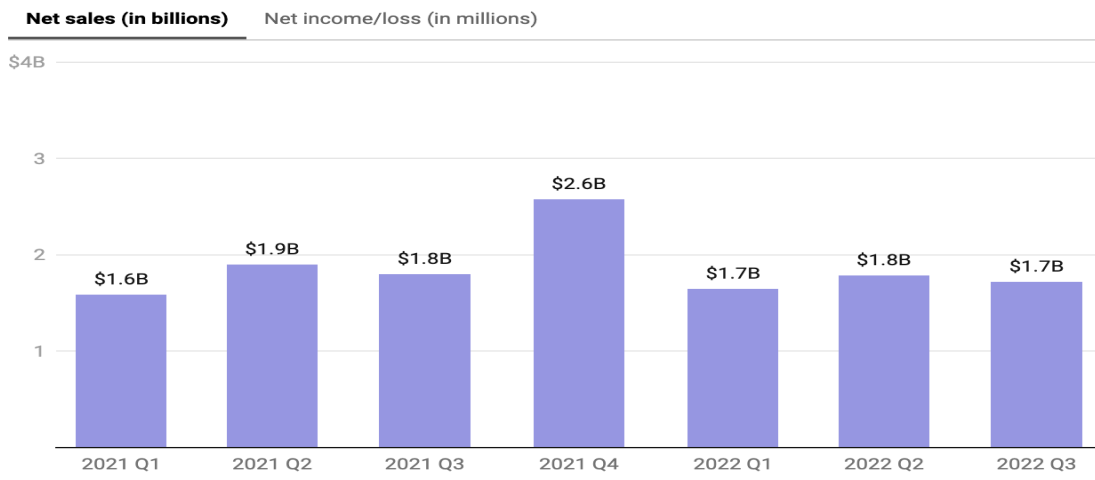
This overlapped with Sephora's target market, forming ideal conditions to reach a mutually beneficial deal. The partnership continued to make sense, expanding reach with 70 new stores in 2017, along with doubling the size of Sephora's retail presence to 32 stores within JCPenney department stores (Jensen. 2017). Jensen (2017) further clarified that JCPenney quantified the value added by the alliance with Sephora. CEO and Chairman Marvin Ellison made a statement about the partnership which highlighted how important beauty products were to JCPenney's strategy at the time, and how beauty products added a dynamic element to JCPenney stores. While this perspective on beauty products has not shifted (Flora 2021), the partnership between JCPenney and Sephora has ("Kohl's Announces", 2023, Bargh, 2021 and Flora 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 pushed JCPenney to file for bankruptcy (Meyersohn, 2022, Howland, 2023). JCPenney had been a struggling department store icon during the 2010s, reporting losses in the millions of dollars since the decade began (Smith, 2024). The company was also steadily closing establishments. JCPenney reportedly operated 1,094 stores in 2013 (Smith 2024), while five years later, in 2018, the company only operated 864 stores. Fast forward to last year, 2023, JCPenney reported operating only 650 stores (Smith, 2024, Meyersohn, 2022). Sephora has recovered well from the pandemic reporting \$6.92 billion in retail sales (Petruzzi 2024), and \$3.15 million in revenue with a 6.3% market share in the US beauty, cosmetics, & fragrance retail

industry (Zambrano, 2024). IBIS world reported a market share of 8.7% and revenue of \$4.82 million for Sephora in 2024 (Zambrano, 2024).

The partnership with JCPenney and Sephora elected to part ways in 2020 following JCPenney's bankruptcy announcement (Meyersohn 2022) (Howland 2023) (Bargh 2021). These brand partnerships cannot be dissolved overnight, slowly closing Sephora boutiques over two years (Flora 2021) (Bargh 2021). JCPenney is reverting to a more traditional retail technique following the separation, by launching JCPenney Beauty which will be an amalgamation of "mass, masstige, and prestige brands" (Flora 2021). Meyersohn (2022) noted an e-commerce company Thirteen Lune is expected to contribute one-fifth of JCPenney Beauty's offering. A JCPenney spokesperson quoted by Flora (2021) cited the ability to offer a broader assortment at different price points was a significant factor in this decision.

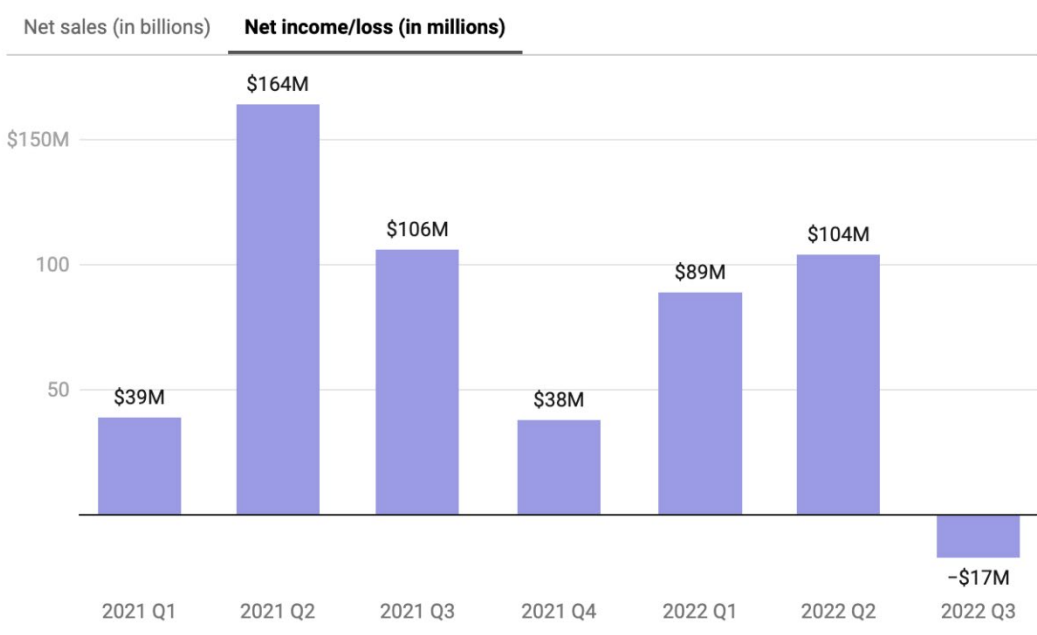
LMVH determined the store-in-store strategy to still be effective, putting pen to paper on a contract with Kohl's months after agreeing to part ways with JCPenney (Bargh 2021). Kohl's plans to finish opening its Sephora outlets by 2025 (Kohl's Announces 2023). When that article was published Kohl's already incorporated 600 Sephora boutiques which maintained 2,500 square feet, and expanded Sephora to Kohl's locations in 48 states (Kohl's Announces 2023). Kohl's announced on its corporate website that Sephora locations within Kohl's surpassed sales of \$1.4 billion dollars in 2023, and provided a projection to pass \$2 billion in sales by 2025 (Sephora at Kohl's 2024).



Toggle between the tabs above to see net sales, in billions, and net income or loss, in millions. J.C. Penney has not reported earnings for 2022 Q4.

Chart: Cara Salpini/Retail Dive • Source: Financial statements filed by Copper Property CTL Pass Through Trust with the Securities and Exchange Commission. • Created with [Datavrapper](#)

Figure 1 Howland 2023

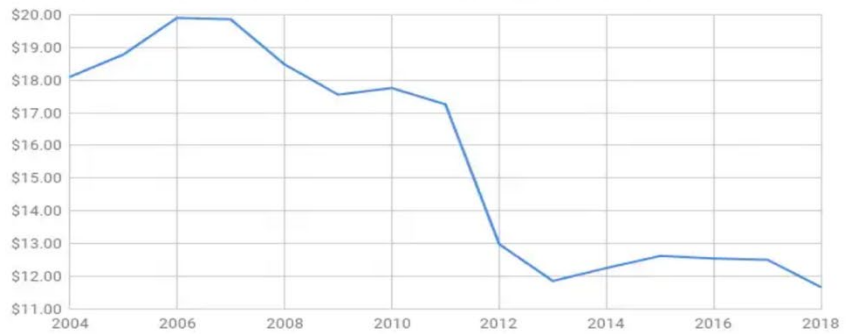


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Figure 2 Howland 2023

JCPenney Annual Net Sales | 2004-2018 | DMR (in Billions)

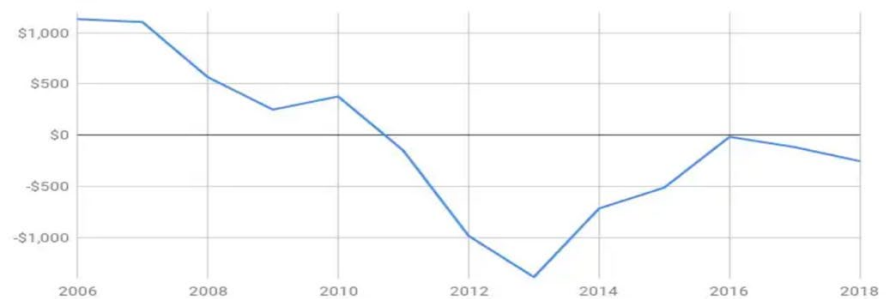


JCPenney Annual Net Sales Chart 2004-2018 (in Billions)

- 2018: \$11.664 billion
- 2017: \$12.506 billion
- 2016: \$12.547 billion
- 2015: \$12.625 billion
- 2014: \$12.257 billion
- 2013: \$11.859 billion
- 2012: \$12.985 billion
- 2011: \$17.26 billion
- 2010: \$17.759 billion
- 2009: \$17.556 billion
- 2008: \$18.486 billion
- 2007: \$19.860 billion
- 2006: \$19.903 billion
- 2005: \$18.781 billion
- 2004: \$18.096 billion

Figure 3 Smith 2024

JCPenney Annual Net Income | 2006-2018 | DMR (in Millions)



JCPenney Annual Net Income Chart 2006-2018 (in Millions)

- 2018: \$255 million loss
- 2017: \$118 million loss
- 2016: \$17 million loss
- 2015: \$513 million loss
- 2014: \$717 million loss
- 2013: \$1.388 billion loss
- 2012: \$985 million loss
- 2011: \$152 million loss
- 2010: \$378 million
- 2009: \$249 million
- 2008: \$567 million
- 2007: \$1.105 billion
- 2006: \$1.134 billion

Figure 4 Smith 2024

Sephora

Overview of the company's industry revenue, market share and profit margin over time

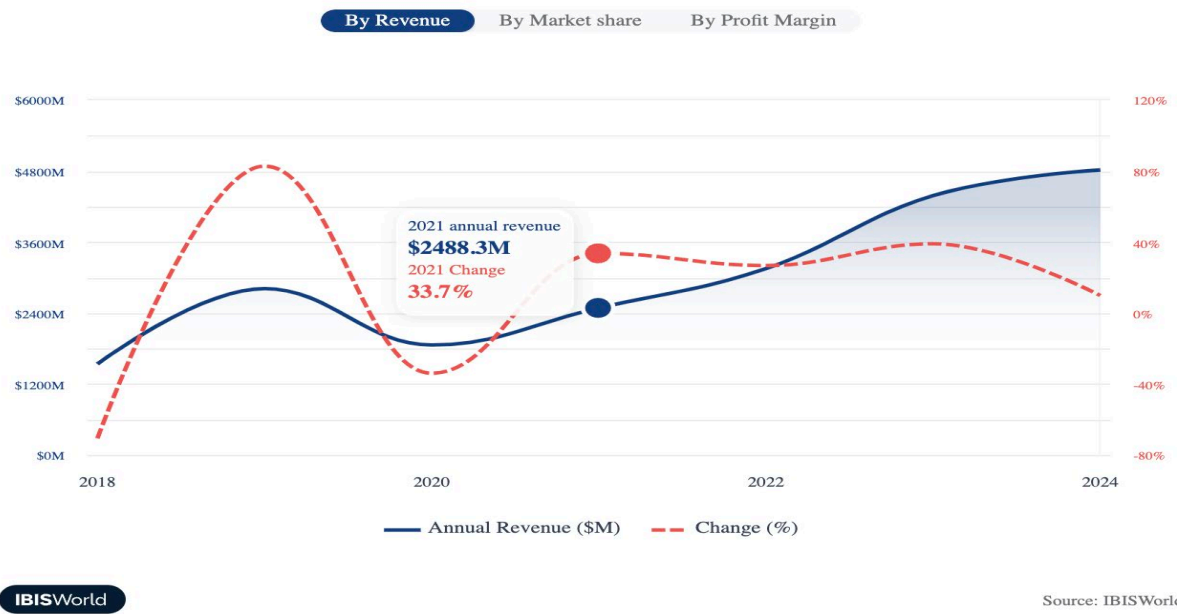


Figure 5

Sephora

Overview of the company's industry revenue, market share and profit margin over time



Figure 6

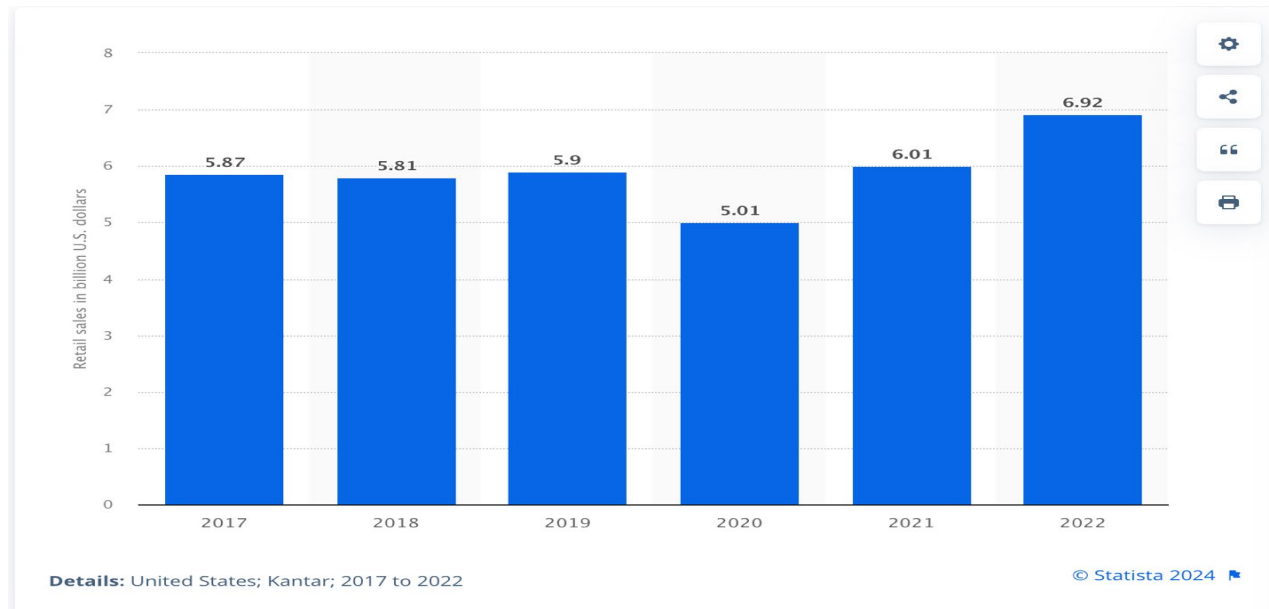


Figure 7

MONDELĒZ INTERNATIONAL

Hershey started a collaboration with Mondelēz International cookie brand Chips Ahoy! Mondelēz stays committed to innovating and increasing product offerings, even adjusting their formula regardless of a 53% market share (Morris 2024).

Morris (2024) provided insight on the philosophy of Mondelēz International by incorporating a quote from a senior director at Chips Ahoy! Sabrina Sierant: “in a category where taste is king and many chocolate chip cookies look the same, we wanted to challenge ourselves to step up our quality while staying true to what our fans already love” (Sierant via Morris 2024). This product change was not arbitrary or on a whim, Morris (2024) noted that over 5,000 hours and 60 different recipes were tested by the cookie conglomerate before settling into this change.

Market research is an essential aspect of understanding consumer sentiment to best meet customer expectations. Mondelēz International’s State of Snacking Report is one of this corporation’s methods for studying consumer sentiment. FY

2024 marks the company's fifth release of the report conducted through a partnership with The Harris Poll (Mondelēz International Releases 2024). Key takeaways for the company were: snacking is preferred over traditional mealtime, consumers budget for their favorite snacks, consumers report greater emphasis on snacking for health and well-being benefits, and consumers choose brands that align with their values (Mondelēz International Releases 2024). Another important fact that likely had an impact on the cookie ingredient change is that "74% of customers report that the novelty of the flavor and texture combination are important to them when choosing a snack" (Mondelēz International Reports 2024). According to Chris Casey (2022), CEO of Mondelēz Dirk Van de Put declared Oreo and Chips Ahoy! to be the company's top cookie brands and noted a 10.4% increase in sales during the summer of 2022. Van de Put attributes this to the rise of snacking and its prevalence in consumption (Casey, 2022). Mondelēz reportedly accumulated 8.6 billion dollars in sales from September 2021 to September 2022, a 7.7% increase and 4.04 billion dollars in yearly sales (Casey, 2022). Mondelēz used ingredient branding in their Chips Ahoy! and Sour Patch Kids products to create new innovative products.

CHIPS AHOY!

Chips Ahoy! is an extremely popular cookie brand founded in the 1960s by Nabisco (Doering, 2023 and Baar, 2023). The company's tenure of prevalence has not affected its willingness to change its branding strategy, foregoing advertising through television as executives perceived younger audiences had abandoned the

medium (Baar, 2023 and Doering, 2023). The commitment to attracting Gen Z consumers garnered the attention of Morning Consult which surveyed Gen Z's favorite brands, ranking Chips Ahoy! within the top 25 (Doering, 2023). In 2020 Chips Ahoy! entered a partnership with Hershey's which would place Hershey's chocolate and Reese's into Chips Ahoy! cookies (Global 2023). Chunks of Hershey's and mini Reese's Pieces were rolled out nationwide. Sabrina Sierant an executive of Chips Ahoy! commented that Chips Ahoy! is constantly innovating to fill customer cravings (Global 2023). Statista accurately and dutifully compiled relevant financial information regarding Mondelez and Nabisco, a subsidiary of Mondelez Chips Ahoy! which generated the relevance for one of the below graphics.

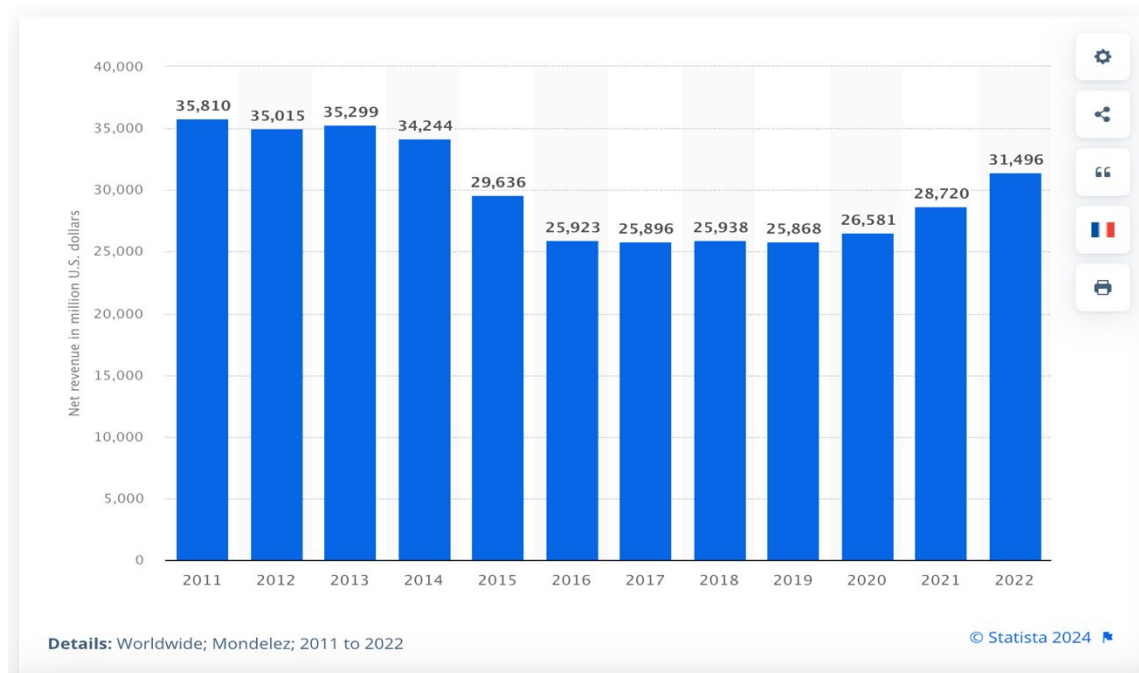


Figure 8

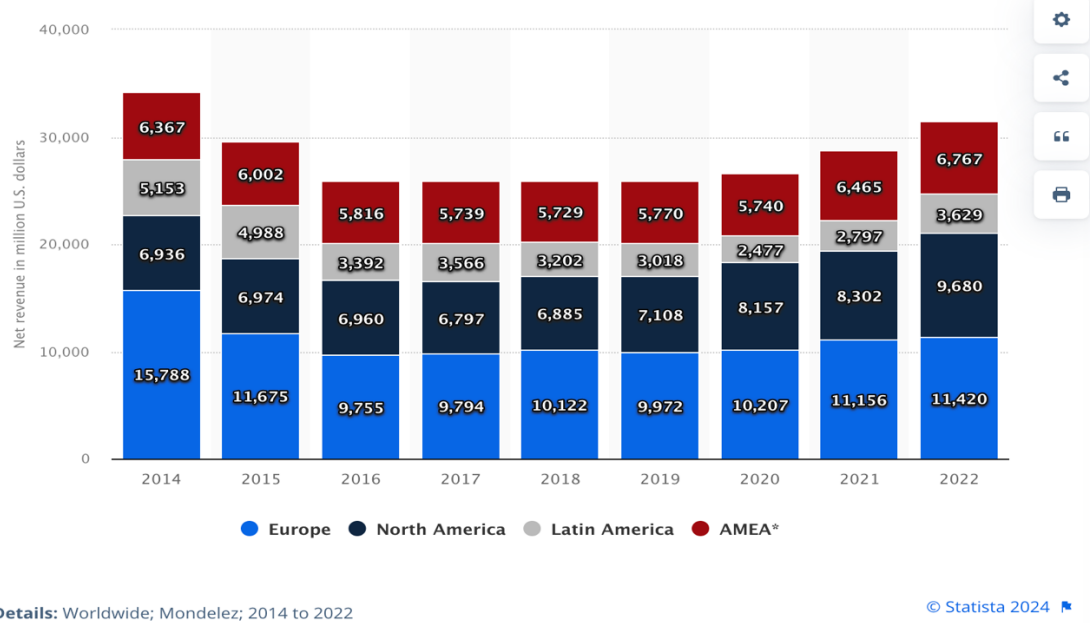


Figure 9

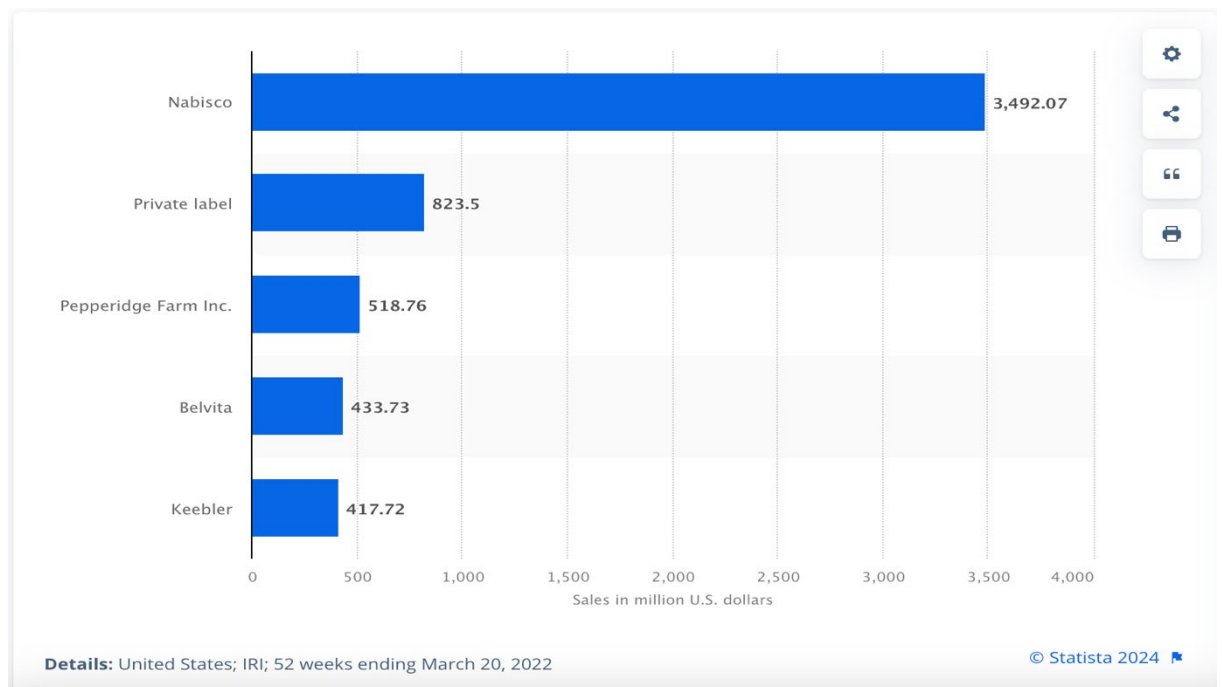


Figure 10

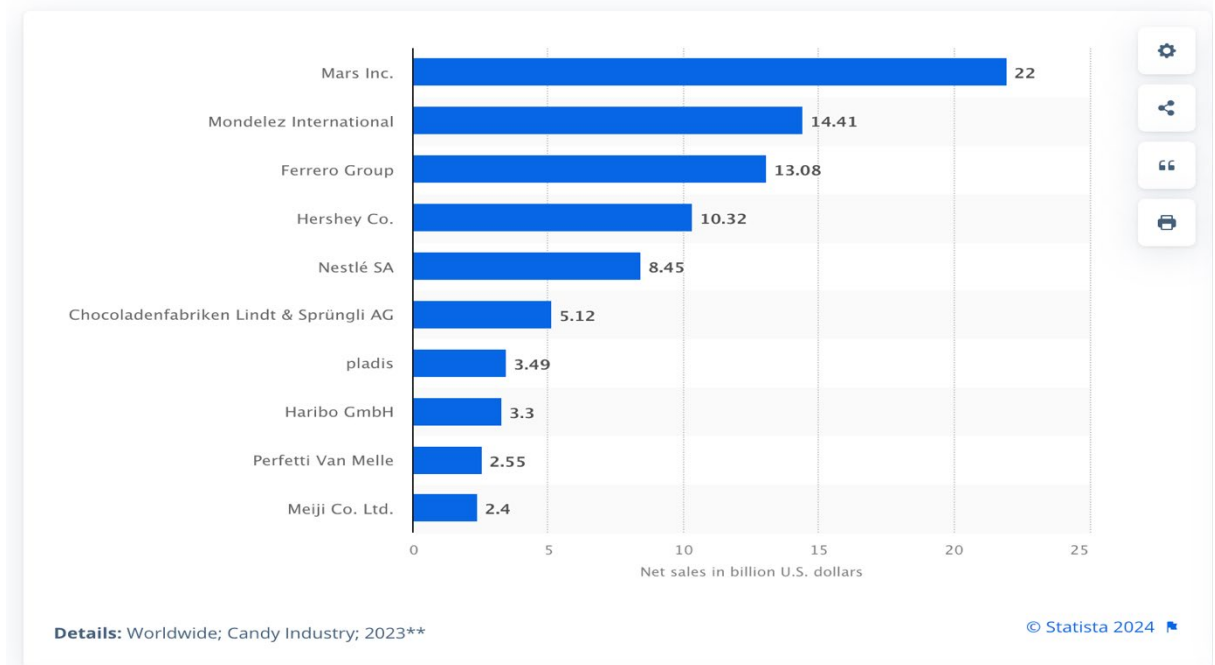


Figure 11

SOUR PATCH KIDS

Sour Patch Kids is a popular candy brand well-known for its “sour-then-sweet” taste. The candy brand was concocted in the 1970s as Mars Men (Wilson n.d).

Initially operated by M & A Candy Company, the sweet treat was acquired by Mondelez in the late 1990s (Wilson n.d). The brand has grown massively following the acquisition, existing in multiple taste and shape variations.

Mondelez began connecting Sour Patch Kids in 2014 with the release of redberry and lime-flavored Stride gum (Stride and Sour Patch Kids, 2013). Sour Patch Kids was an attempt by Mondelez to strengthen the struggling brand. The gum producer brought in Olympic Athlete Shaun White two years prior accompanied by a new flavor to drum up business (Martin, 2024). In 2016, Stride conducted a publicity event that involved skydiving to jolt life back into the brand (Martin,

2024). Mondelēz elected to pull out of the U.S. market in 2019, as CEO Dirk Van de Put acknowledged the gum segment was “challenging” (Martin 2024). Despite giving up on the Stride brand in 2019 Mondelēz operated several other gum brands (Doering, 2022). The brand of interest in this paper is Trident. Trident was first manufactured in the early 1960s with the positioning of teeth health (Trident (gum) 2023). The company changed hands several times before becoming acquired by Cadbury Schweppes in 2007 before Cadbury was purchased by Kraft Foods in 2010 (Trident (gum) 2023). When Stride U.S. production was shut down Mondelēz no longer had a Sour Patch Kids flavored gum on the market. This product gap lasted until the middle of 2022. Kiner (2022) and Gignac (2022) both reported on the production of three Sour Patch Kids branded Trident gum. Trident attempted to trigger a viral marketing campaign with the release of the new product (Gignac, 2022). Partnering with a TikTok influencer to promote the company's hashtag; cash prizes and a repost of the top videos to the Trident Gum TikTok account appear to be the incentive for engagement (Gignac, 2022). Whether this campaign was successful is unclear, what did become clear is that Stride was the first step in Mondelēz leaving the United States and Europe gum market. Perfetti Van Melle Group purchased the rights to several Mondelēz -owned gum brands and a few other European candies for \$1.35 billion (Doering, 2022). Suspicion of Mondelēz’s desire to exit the gum market had circulated for years, according to Doering (2022) the gum segment was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The future of Trident should be in good hands as a subsidiary of Perfetti Van Melle. The gum and confectionary

titan has updated their corporate website to include Trident, adding that the subsidiary is “the number one chewing gum brand in the world” (Perfetti Van Melle, 2024). Perfetti Van Melle has kept the Sour Patch Kids flavors on the Trident website, with four flavors of Trident Vibes Sour Patch Kids currently available: Blue Raspberry, Redberry, Tropical Peach Mango and Watermelon. It will be interesting to see how Perfetti Van Melle operates Trident in the future and what new flavors the company will produce.

3. CASE STUDY RECAP

This paper reviewed the store-in-store relationship between JCPenney and Sephora along with Mondelēz International’s ingredient branding partnership with Hershey’s and the use of the Sour Patch Kids flavor in Trident and Stride. Consumers found great value in the JCPenney and Sephora relationship. The partnership benefitted from an overlap in the target market. Despite the successful partnership, JCPenney was facing a decline which partially can be attributed to a decline across the department store sector. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed JCPenney to file for bankruptcy and Sephora to jump ship. The new ownership of JCPenney favored partnering with several smaller beauty brands to fill the beauty and cosmetics gap. Sephora saw great growth through this brand alliance strategy, forming a partnership with Kohl’s to create Sephora locations as Sephora departments in JCPenney shuttered operations.

The second case study focused on Mondelēz International subsidiaries Chips Ahoy! and Sour Patch Kids. Chips Ahoy! executives cited the importance of

recipe testing and maximizing product flavor. This commitment is consistent with Chips Ahoy! partnership with Hershey's. Hershey operates a popular chocolate brand that offers Chips Ahoy! an advantage in communicating the taste and quality of the combination. Along with the base chocolate, Hershey also produces a chocolate peanut butter cup brand Reese's. The chocolate peanut butter treat is a common Halloween candy in the United States. Chips Ahoy! executives perceived these treats as a potential mix-in for a new cookie product to satisfy customers. Sour Patch Kids is the final ingredient branding example. The infamous sour-then-sweet taste tagline effectively communicates the taste to consumers. Mondelez International launched a Sour Patch Kids flavor of Stride gum. Stride closed operations in the United States and Canada disbanding access to a Sour Patch Kids gum in the area for a few years. Mondelez revived Sour Patch Kids gum in 2022 with their Trident brand. A change in Mondelez's positioning sold the rights to Trident and other gum brands to Perfetti Van Melle in 2022. This product does not appear to be in immediate jeopardy based on Perfetti Van Melle's company website commending the brand.

4. CONCLUSION

Major findings and takeaways include fit perception and how to increase fit perception. Sephora has developed its market share and sales significantly since partnering with JCPenney. While internal data from individual departments within JCPenney are unavailable for external use, Sephora demonstrated its perceived value of the alliance strategy with strategic decisions following the partnership dissolving.

JCPenney learned from the partnership the value of offering distinct quality private label brands, adjusting the strategy slightly to include more private labels to minimize the loss if one party becomes dissatisfied. Chips Ahoy! is a superstar in the cookie and biscuits segment, frequently monitoring and measuring market sentiment and testing new recipes. Partnering with Hershey's was not a decision that could save the brand from collapse or cause one, rather it was a strategic decision to increase the company's product offering. Hershey's Chocolate is a popular chocolate brand, Chips Ahoy! representatives recognized the value and equity in the Hershey's brand name, predicting that an alliance with the company could improve profit. The final case study mentioned was another Mondelez International brand. Sour Patch Kids are known for their sour-then-sweet tagline. This positioning clearly communicates to customers what to expect from products with this flavor. Mondelez manufactured Sour Patch Flavor into two different gum brands in Stride and Trident. Perfetti Van Melle purchased Mondelez International's gum department in the United States and Europe for \$1.35 billion. Perfetti Van Melle has adjusted its company website to reflect how critical the Trident brand was in this decision.

Several limitations affected the coverage of this paper. Brand alliance is a marketing strategy. Many companies avoid explaining the deeper logic behind strategic decisions or the data that supports making such a tactical decision. A minimally invasive quote will explain that the company is seeking to expand offerings or to adjust to the changing market. Financial data is also sparse for large corporations that operate many different brands. Companies are required to file with the FTC, and publicly traded companies are required to announce financial records to potential

investors. This requirement is for an overview of company financials, including revenue, EBTIDA, cost of goods sold, and many other important statistics. This does not give insight for how each individual brand is performing and generating income. There is also a limited number of academic papers with case studies examining brand alliances. These logistical issues are consistent with the few reasons why a business professional would create such an article. The researchers interested and able to gather enough information would be working within the company. These individuals would turn their research over to their managers and present it to executives rather than add it to free academic journals. Future research should examine other brand alliance strategies. Co-development, component branding, and co-promotion are a few examples of strategies that could benefit from introspection.

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