

Sweet talk

How chocolate tablets in Romania talk

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Abstract

Featuring a visible growth trend in the last two years, the Romanian chocolate market is shared by four big players, ubiquitous in each and every price segment. Despite distinct market strategies, they fail to present enough brand choices to an unpretentious public, who is rediscovering its appetite for sweets.

Chocolate: business and brands

Although they like it, Romanians eat little chocolate¹, especially in the form of tablets (70% of the chocolate consumption in the country), which they regard as energizers and even as a substitute for coffee². Chocolate bars and truffles settle for lesser consumption shares of 20% and 10% respectively.

Since 2003, the Romanian chocolate market has significantly grown and now has an estimated value of 120-150 million Euros³. Four important players together hold a tight, 90% grip on this market:

1. Kandia-Excelent, a Romanian producer, between 30% and 40%.
2. Kraft Foods Romania, the local subsidiary of the multinational Kraft Foods, between 30% and 35%.
3. Supreme Chocolat, a Romanian producer, part of the local Supreme Group, approximately 25%.
4. Heidi Chocolats Suisse, member of the Swiss group Läderach Chocolatier Suisse, approximately 7%.

In all price segments (premium, mainstream and budget), these players' brands clearly dominate the chocolate tablet shelves of the big retailers in urban areas:

- the premium segment is shared between Milka, Poiana Sensations (Kraft), Heidi and Anidor (Supreme)
- the mainstream segment belongs to Kandia, Poiana (Kraft) and Primola (Supreme)
- the budget segment is the realm of Laura (Kandia-Excelent), Africana (Kraft) and Novatini (Supreme).

The Romanian consumer has thus a limited choice when it comes to chocolate tablet brands (3-4 in each segment). But the consumption preferences seem to be influenced mainly by the additional ingredients/flavors, an area where options are much more abundant, at both brand and market segment levels. Much like in other industries, the verbal identity of chocolate brands concisely reflects parts of the underlying brand strategies. A quick look at the aspects that unite and at those that divide these identities can prove this rather easily.

Shared features

In Romania, chocolate tablet brands have short⁴, feminine names. Except for three of them (two proper nouns - Heidi⁵ and Novatini - and an artificial word: Anidor), all brand names end in a and are newly-coined

¹ The annual per capita consumption is around 1.5 kg, compared to 4-5 kg in countries such as Poland or Greece, or 12 kg in Switzerland.

² Cf. Capital, August 2, 2005.

³ Cf. Ziarul Financiar, August 15, 2005.

words (Milka, Primola), common nouns (Poiana, Africana) or proper nouns (Laura).

With a standard 100⁶ metric gram weight, chocolate tablets here employ secondary packaging⁷ made of either paper or cardboard, with a design that is always dominated by the featured ingredient (chocolate, fruit or another type of cream etc.) Identifying the ingredient is by far the packaging's most important role⁸, as the prominent graphic representation of the former clearly demonstrates.

Down

Beside being a penny- and cocoa-pincher, the lower market segment is also a rather untalkative presence. Brief and to the point, the texts (exclusively in Romanian) that appear on the packaging of budget tablets don't even use the word *chocolate*⁹, showing instead an obvious preference for the redundant *tablet*. The brand descriptors all use the formula „*ingredient X tablet*” except for Laura, who is more willing to talk and adds a *fine* next to its *tablet*. The color schemes are rich and use warm colors, while the front design orientates all the package designs in the segment horizontally.

The brand names and descriptors are the only verbal elements that offer clues about the brand architecture¹⁰. The only exception to this rule seems to be Africana Cremă, an Africana sub-brand that also stands out through its simple, single-sheet plastic wrapper¹¹. The budget brands have no other verbal elements in their arsenal, as the exclamatory *new!* stamped on some Novatini varieties fails to provide a point of interest or significant differentiation for an

audience with unwavering preferences¹². On the back side of the same wrappers there is nothing to read except the mandatory nutritional and manufacturing information. Africana is, once again, an exception, offering in a sparsely decorated frame a completely predictable value proposition (*cheap, yet highly delicious!*), a short story about the brand name and a notice on the extension of its product range.

Middle

The economic segment is more talkative, starts speaking foreign languages¹³ and brings in far more cocoa¹⁴. Chocolate brands begin to talk about themselves on their packaging. They introduce explicit quality claims, such as *extrafine* (Primola) or *Premium Quality* (Kandia), as well as implicit ones, like Kandia's 1890 (founding year, part of the graphic signature), or the *traditional* attribute in the mandatory information on the packaging of the same brand. There is no more tablet, the irrepressible new gets rid of the exclamation mark and is paired with authentic benefits (such as *real fruit*). At last, the word *chocolate* is ubiquitous in the segment's descriptors. The color schemes use the same warm colors, but the package design makes the entire segment stand up (it orientates the tablets vertically).

The product names in this segment don't suggest the use of any sub-brand. Only Kandia's descriptors are grouped along chocolate types (*milk chocolate* with 4 sorts and *white chocolate* with 3), while the season-specific offerings of the same brand resort to additional descriptors such as *Special Edition*. The back side of the tablet takes on a diversified,

⁴ 2-4 syllables.

⁵ Heidi is also a German feminine name.

⁶ The 60 g Heidi Intense or the 300g Milka are merely exceptions that confirm the rule.

⁷ The primary packaging is the one that comes in direct contact with the chocolate, and is made of either paper or metallic foil.

⁸ After the basic and all-too-obvious brand identification role, of course.

⁹ Because of the segment's standards, which impose a minimum level of cocoa of only 10%.

¹⁰ In this case: flat, with only one, all-inclusive hierarchic level.

¹¹ Which is specific for bars here, not for tablets.

¹² The consumers in the budget segment are more loyal to their preferred brands than those in the upper segments.

¹³ Poiana and Primola don't, but Kandia, with its premium type identity, talks exclusively in English on the front side of its wrapper.

¹⁴ Ranging from a minimum of 28% to the 55% high of Kandia Dark Chocolate.

utilitarian role, featuring the Romanian version of the descriptor (for those Kandia consumers uncertain of their English skills) or a graphic representation of the other products in the range (Primola, at an unbearably small scale). Only Poiana tells stories that are not necessarily longer, but a bit more elaborated than those of its Africana stablemate.

Up

As expected, the premium segment has time to chat, is fluent in several languages and, most of the times, it is careful and refined¹⁵. The quality claim (*Premium Chocolate* for Heidi or *Fine and Refined* for some of the sorts of Poiana Sensations) and *chocolate* or *chocolat* in the descriptors are all in the right places. Anidor alone chooses more subtlety, preferring a French slogan *Tendresse du chocolat* instead of an explicit reference to quality. The premium brands invariably tell their little brand stories on the back side of the wrapper, using Romanian only (Poiana Sensations¹⁶), a combination of English and Romanian (Heidi), or English and French (Anidor). The color schemes are classier (read ‘less vivid’) and invariably resort to gold stripes, while the design places the tablets vertically. At the same time, tinfoil primary wrapping and nicely embossed cardboard boxes replace the modest paper packaging of the lower two segments.

The premium product names are best at revealing the respective brand architectures. The sub-brand names are graphically well emphasized: they are the main typographic element for Poiana Sensations or come a close second to the ingredient descriptor, as is the case with Heidi’s *cremis*, *delight*, *grand’or* and *INTENSE*. Premium also means more imagination in terms of descriptors that now imaginatively combine the ingredients’ names with emotional or sensory associations. Thus, the Anidor varieties get to be called *Seduction Moccacino* or *Saveur Amaretto*,

while Poiana Sensations tempts us with *Irresistible Orange* or *Refreshing Mint*¹⁷.

The cheerful, violet exception to most of the rules of the premium segment is the German Milka, the market’s only imported brand¹⁸. A Kraft stablemate to the native Poiana and Africana, Milka is the only premium brand with features typical for inferior segments such as the lack of *chocolate* from some of its varieties, a simple, vivid color scheme, a horizontal orientation of a tablet that uses two-layer paper wrapping and has no trace of gold in its color scheme. However, the product quality, its reputation and distinct visual identity (the homonymous cow, the only and very memorable mascot on the whole market) successfully position Milka as a premium brand.

Sweet talk helps

Beyond acknowledging the major market segments, the big competitors’ strategies are different when it comes to structuring the respective brand portfolios.

Kandia-Excelent successfully kills two birds with one stone. The Kandia brand takes on a typically budget value proposition, yet it does not combine a modest identity and product with a rock-bottom price (as the classic proponents of ‘cheap but good’ do), coming up instead with superior identity and quality at a medium price and thereby securing the resources it needs to build a strong and expressive presence. Kandia-Excelent (the company) thus pursues maximum efficiency, simultaneously targeting two consumer segments (high-end and middle) with a single, revered brand they have recently redefined through new and carefully studied brand associations. The company doesn’t ignore the budget segment, but there doesn’t seem to be very much room there for innovation or originality,

¹⁵ Refined in terms of communication and design. The minimum cocoa content is similar to that of the mainstream segment. However, it should be noted that the highest cocoa content is 73% (Anidor Charme Noir).

¹⁶ The only premium brand that stubbornly limits itself to speaking Romanian.

¹⁷ But it doesn’t do it all the way, also using common descriptors such as Milk and Glazed Whole Nuts Chocolate.

¹⁸ Milka is currently manufactured outside the country. It sports slightly different product ranges and packaging for each of the national markets where it is present. The Romanian range seems identical to that of Poland, according to the Polish version of the Milka web site.

as Laura does nothing to stand out in a very homogenous pack of competitors.

Kraft Foods¹⁹ is, by definition, the global player²⁰. Selling in all the major market segments, Kraft develops wide product ranges, does not hesitate to use sub-brands any time it introduces innovative product features²¹, and always has some brand stories to tell, regardless of the listener's depth of pocket. The company patiently cultivates its brands on the respective markets of origin, preserving their individuality when it decides to export them or put them next to imported brands from its portfolio. Milka thus shares the upper segment with Poiana Sensations, a sub-brand of the mainstream Poiana that sports a more classical, premium-looking identity. The duo seems to perfectly suit Kraft.

Supreme Chocolats dares to be original when they enter a new segment. With ambitions that go beyond the country borders, Supreme wants to establish a strong brand in each of the three major segments. While Novatini and Primola have identities typical to their segments, Anidor is a brand whose verbal identity works hard to differentiate through its name and descriptors that use French as a main language with English coming second. It probably does so in order to compensate for its young age²² and to

faster gain much-needed brand equity. Anidor thus appears cosmopolitan—it could be easily introduced at any time on any of the markets Supreme Group chooses, at least from the brand identity point of view.

Unlike all the other competitors, Heidi Chocolats Suisse goes with a single brand that focuses on the premium segment and its portfolio is structured around sub-brands that never cross segment borders (as Poiana Sensations does). Heidi appears to take its Swiss chocolatier role seriously, avoiding any trade-off that would see it enter inferior market segments for the sake of a larger market share. Along with the opening of branded *chocolateries* in Bucharest, the dedication to superior quality (and the implicit limitation to the premium segment) gives Heidi's Passion pour chocolat slogan serious credibility and offers this mass manufacturer the aura of a niche player.

To conclude, it is rather obvious that the four big competitors above use highly distinct brand strategies to reinforce or increase their respective market shares. But an old saying fits them all like a glove: if a brand is a sweet-talker, it's a sign that it doesn't come cheap – the smoother its words (and looks), the more expensive it is to come by.

¹⁹ Part of the Altria Group.

²⁰ Nestlé is another global chocolate producer with a strong presence in Romania, but it doesn't yet sell chocolate tablets here.

²¹ Such as chocolate "aeration" (i.e. injecting air bubbles into the chocolate mass while tempering it).

²² Less than a year – the brand was launched at the end of 2004.

About Grapefruit

Grapefruit is a branding and interactive consultancy based in Iasi, Romania. Its client roster includes companies like Connex, HP, Eli Lilly, DDB San Francisco, and the International Corporate and Brand Identity Centre.

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