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FROM NOSTALGIA TO MARKET LEADERSHIP A DILEMMA-BASED CASE STUDY ON THE REVIVAL AND GROWTH STRATEGY OF CAMPA COLA BY RELIANCE CONSUMER PRODUCTS LIMITED

Dr. Mrunal Mehta

ABSTRACT

This case study examines the strategic revitalization of Campa Cola following its acquisition by Reliance Consumer Products Limited (RCPL) in 2022, and is organized around four sequential strategic dilemmas that RCPL had to resolve in order to convert a dormant heritage brand into India's fourth-largest carbonated soft drink (CSD) label. For over three decades, India's CSD market was defined by an entrenched duopoly between Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, sustained by deep capital investment, exclusive bottling arrangements, and multi-decade relationships with general-trade distributors. By combining a historic homegrown brand name carrying genuine emotional resonance with the structural scale, balance-sheet depth, and vertically integrated retail architecture of Reliance Industries, RCPL disrupted this equilibrium, achieving over ₹4,700 crore in gross sales by the end of FY26 and securing double-digit market share across several competitive urban regions.

The four dilemmas addressed in this study are: (1) reconciling nostalgic brand equity with the need for relevance among Generation Z consumers, who represent the majority of incremental liquid-consumption volume in India; (2) financing an aggressive pricing war without triggering the margin collapse that has historically accompanied discount-led FMCG entry strategies; (3) balancing owned-retail and quick-commerce expansion against the risk of alienating the traditional kirana channel that still accounts for the overwhelming majority of beverage transactions in India; and (4) deciding how far to press competitive disruption before inviting large-scale retaliation from incumbents and new entrants alike.

Each dilemma is presented with its underlying tension, the strategic options genuinely available to RCPL at the time, the resolution actually adopted, and the resulting outcome, in a format intended to support classroom discussion, case-based teaching, and applied strategic analysis. Beyond the narrative account, this extended edition incorporates supporting analytical frameworks — including an industry structure analysis, a brand SWOT, a comparative financial and unit-economics review, and a set of teaching notes — intended to help instructors and students situate the Campa Cola narrative within broader theories of competitive strategy, brand equity, and channel management. The findings offer broader insight into how legacy domestic assets can be scaled through integrated distribution, cost re-engineering, and disciplined channel sequencing to achieve rapid market leadership, while also illustrating the risks and open questions that accompany an aggressive, conglomerate-backed disruption strategy.

KEYWORDS: Campa Cola, Reliance Consumer Products Limited, Strategic Dilemma, FMCG Disruption, Brand Revival, Channel Strategy, Case Study

1. INTRODUCTION

The competitive structure of emerging FMCG markets frequently favors capital-intensive multinational corporations (MNCs) capable of deploying multi-decade asset investments to secure control over critical distribution vectors. For more than thirty years, the Indian carbonated soft drink (CSD) market stood as a textbook manifestation of a structural duopoly. Following the liberalization of the early 1990s, the market consolidated around the Atlanta-headquartered Coca-Cola Company and New York's PepsiCo Inc., both of which erected substantial barriers to entry through capital expenditure, deep general-trade distribution, and sustained brand investment.

The theoretical structures governing corporate scale are, however, undergoing transformation. Classic barriers to entry identified in Porter's industry-forces framework — particularly distribution access and capital intensity — are being reshaped by the rise of vertically integrated conglomerate ecosystems that combine retail, telecom, logistics, and digital commerce infrastructure under a single corporate umbrella. This case study examines the strategic architecture used by Reliance Consumer Products Limited (RCPL), the FMCG subsidiary of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), to acquire, restructure, and rapidly scale Campa Cola.

Rather than presenting RCPL's strategy as a single linear playbook, this paper is organized around four sequential strategic dilemmas the company had to resolve, each corresponding to a distinct phase of the brand's revival: a brand-positioning dilemma in initial repositioning, a margin dilemma in pricing strategy, a channel-conflict dilemma in distribution design, and a retaliation dilemma in ongoing competitive response. Presenting the case in this dilemma-based format is intended to make the strategic trade-offs explicit, rather than presenting RCPL's eventual choices as though they were the only options ever on the table, and to support use of the case in strategic management, marketing strategy, and general management teaching.

1.1 Objectives of the Case Study

This case study is designed to serve several complementary purposes within a strategic

management or marketing strategy curriculum. First, it provides a contemporary, India-specific illustration of how an incumbent conglomerate can use internal capital markets and existing infrastructure to re-enter a category from which its parent group had previously been absent. Second, it demonstrates how legacy brand equity — even brand equity that has lain dormant for two decades — can be reactivated as a strategic asset rather than treated as a purely nostalgic curiosity. Third, it offers a structured framework, through the four dilemmas, for analyzing how a challenger brand sequences its competitive moves across positioning, pricing, distribution, and competitive response. Finally, because the fourth dilemma remains genuinely unresolved at the time of writing, the case offers students a live, ongoing strategic question rather than a closed, retrospective narrative.

1.2 Scope and Limitations

This case draws on publicly disclosed corporate communications, earnings statements, and industry syndication data current through mid-2026. As with any case study built around a live, unfolding corporate strategy, the analysis necessarily reflects a snapshot in time; the final dilemma discussed in Section 6 is explicitly presented as unresolved, and instructors using this case in subsequent years may wish to update the discussion with more recent market-share and financial data as it becomes available. The case is also limited to the carbonated soft drink category and does not attempt a full account of RCPL's broader FMCG portfolio, though brief reference is made to adjacent categories such as packaged drinking water in the concluding discussion.

2. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION: THE RISE, FALL, AND ACQUISITION OF CAMPA COLA

To properly evaluate the strategic revival of Campa Cola, it is necessary to first understand the cultural and regulatory conditions that formed its original brand equity, the structural weaknesses that led to its near-total disappearance from the market, and the strategic logic that made it an attractive acquisition target three decades later.

2.1 Founding and the Golden Era (Late 1970s–1991)

The brand was established by the Pure Drinks Group

in the late 1970s under nationalistic industrial mandates. Following the enforcement of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) in 1977, the Indian government compelled Coca-Cola's exit from the Indian market on the grounds that the company had refused to dilute its equity stake and disclose its formula to local partners, as required under the Act. This regulatory action created a structural vacuum in the urban consumer market for cola-flavored carbonated beverages.

Pure Drinks, previously Coca-Cola's primary bottling partner across Northern India, converted this displacement into opportunity by engineering an independent domestic alternative. Marketed under the tagline 'The Great Indian Taste,' Campa Cola achieved rapid dominance in urban micro-markets and became embedded in post-independence urban middle-class identity. During this period, the brand benefited from an absence of multinational competition, government-supported import substitution sentiment, and a first-mover advantage in a fast-urbanizing consumer base.

2.2 Liberalization and Decline (1991–2000)

The brand's strategic vulnerability, however, lay in its asset-light, localized operating model. When the Indian economy liberalized in 1991, both Coca-Cola and PepsiCo re-entered the domestic market with vast capital reserves, multi-tier distribution frameworks, and advanced route-to-market systems. Unable to match the scale of investment required for modern bottling infrastructure or retailer refrigeration, Campa Cola experienced systematic share erosion, with production ceasing across major metropolitan centers by 2000–2001 and the brand reduced to a nostalgic memory for consumers born before 1985.

This decline illustrates a recurring pattern in emerging-market FMCG: a first-mover domestic brand can achieve rapid category dominance in a protected regulatory environment, but that dominance rarely survives the re-entry of well-capitalized multinational incumbents unless the domestic brand has, in the interim, built distribution assets and cost structures capable of matching the newcomers' scale economics.

2.3 Acquisition Rationale (2022)

In August 2022, Reliance Retail Ventures Limited (RRVL) recognized that building an entirely new cola brand from scratch would require substantial time and marketing capital to establish consumer trust and category-level recall in a market already saturated with two dominant, globally recognized names. Instead, RCPL acquired the intellectual property and historical asset rights of Campa Cola, allowing it to capture long-dormant emotional brand equity while preparing to deploy RIL's capital infrastructure to reshape the category's competitive structure.

The acquisition rationale rested on three pillars. First, the Campa Cola name carried authentic, pre-existing emotional recall among a large cohort of Indian consumers, something that could not be manufactured through advertising spend alone within a comparable time frame. Second, the brand carried no significant financial liabilities or legacy operational infrastructure, giving RCPL a clean asset onto which it could build an entirely new, vertically integrated production and distribution model. Third, RCPL's parent group already possessed the retail footprint, digital commerce infrastructure, and balance-sheet capacity required to scale a beverage brand nationally within a compressed time frame, something that would have been substantially harder for a stand-alone beverage company to replicate.

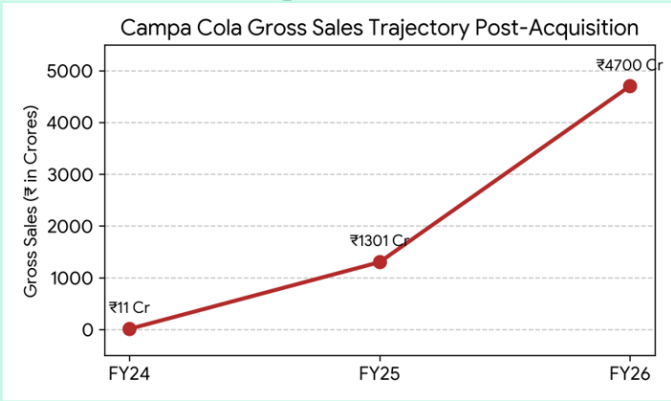
2.4 Performance Since Acquisition

Table 1 summarizes the scale of the transformation across the three fiscal years following the relaunch, drawing on compiled disclosures from Reliance Industries Limited's earnings statements and industry syndication data.

Table 1: Financial & Performance Matrix of Campa Cola (FY24–FY26). Source: Compiled from Reliance Industries Limited Earnings Statements (2026) and industry syndication data.

Strategic Metrics	FY 2023–24	FY 2025–26
Gross Sales Revenue	₹11 Crores	Over ₹4,700 Crores
Estimated National Market Share	< 0.5%	14% (Key Urban Pockets)
Operational Bottling Facilities	2 Localized Hubs	12 Greenfield Mega-Plants
Active General Trade Distributors	Under 200 Partners	5,000+ Authorized Distributors
FMCG Corporate Parent Revenue	₹7,500 Crores approx.	₹22,000 Crores Gross Sales

Fig. 1: Gross Sales Trajectory of Campa Cola Post-Reliance Acquisition (FY24–FY26). Source: Reliance Consumer Products Ltd Earnings Review (April 2026).



The magnitude of this shift — from a near-invisible regional player to a nationally distributed brand with double-digit share in several urban markets within roughly three years — is unusual even by the standards of conglomerate-backed FMCG launches, and it is this compressed timeline that makes the case pedagogically useful: each of the four dilemmas below had to be resolved not over a multi-decade horizon, as was available to the original Coca-Cola/PepsiCo duopoly formation, but within a small number of fiscal years.

3. INDUSTRY AND COMPETITIVE CONTEXT
Before turning to the four dilemmas, it is useful to situate Campa Cola’s re-entry within the broader structure of the Indian CSD industry, using two standard strategic frameworks: an industry structure (five forces) analysis and a brand-level SWOT analysis. These frameworks are not drawn from RCPL’s own disclosures but are provided here as an analytical scaffold for classroom discussion.

3.1 Industry Structure Analysis

Porter’s five-forces framework offers a useful lens on why the Indian CSD category had, prior to Campa Cola’s re-entry, settled into a stable duopoly, and why that stability proved more fragile than it appeared.

Table 2: Illustrative Five-Forces Analysis of the Indian CSD Category, Before and After Campa Cola’s Re-Entry.

Force	Pre-2022 Condition	Effect of Campa Cola Re-Entry
Threat of new entrants	Low — high capital intensity of bottling and cold-chain infrastructure deterred entry	Substantially raised — a conglomerate-backed entrant can fund infrastructure without needing category profits to self-finance growth
Bargaining power of buyers (retailers)	Low-to-moderate — kirana stores had limited leverage against two dominant suppliers	Increased — retailers gained a credible third supplier, improving their negotiating position on trade margins
Bargaining power of suppliers (concentrate, packaging)	Moderate — concentrate and PET packaging inputs were commoditized but scale-dependent	Reduced for the entrant — backward integration into owned bottling reduces reliance on third-party supply agreements
Threat of substitutes	Rising — juices, energy drinks, and functional beverages competing for share of throat	Largely unchanged in the near term, though relevant to RCPL’s stated wellness-beverage ambitions
Rivalry among existing competitors	Stable, non-price-based rivalry between two incumbents for over two decades	Sharply intensified — price-based competition re-emerged for the first time since the 1990s

3.2 Brand SWOT: Campa Cola at Relaunch (2022–23)

At the point of relaunch, Campa Cola’s position could be summarized through a conventional strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats analysis, reproduced below to frame the four dilemmas that follow.

Table 3: SWOT Analysis of Campa Cola at Relaunch.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Authentic, pre-existing brand recall among older consumers; clean IP asset with no legacy liabilities; access to RIL’s capital and retail infrastructure	Zero brand recall among Gen Z and Millennial cohorts; no existing bottling or distribution network; unproven ability to compete on quality perception against global incumbents
Opportunities	Threats
Rising price sensitivity among value-conscious consumers; underpenetrated tier-2/tier-3 markets; growth of quick-commerce as a new distribution vector; cricket sponsorship inventory opening up	Retaliatory pricing and promotional response from Coca-Cola and PepsiCo; risk of new entrants (e.g., ITC) exploiting the same disruption logic; margin pressure across the category if price war escalates

4. DILEMMA ONE: MONETIZING NOSTALGIA VS. WINNING GEN Z
THE DILEMMA

For consumers over the age of forty, Campa Cola

represented an authentic, emotional connection to their youth. For Generation Z and Millennial cohorts — who represent over 60% of liquid consumption volumes in India — the brand had zero market recall. RCPL had to decide whether to position Campa Cola primarily as a nostalgic revival for older consumers, as an entirely new brand detached from its heritage, or as a bridge between the two — with each option carrying a distinct risk of failing to win one generation while chasing the other.

Strategic Options Considered

A pure nostalgia play risked confining the brand to a shrinking, ageing consumer base with limited long-term volume potential, since older consumers alone could not sustain the scale RCPL was targeting. Marketing built entirely around retro imagery, 1980s-era packaging cues, and appeals to childhood memory might have generated short-term goodwill but would have struggled to convert into repeat purchase among the demographic that actually drives incremental category growth.

Conversely, discarding the heritage identity entirely would have surrendered the primary asset RCPL had paid for — the brand's emotional recall — and forced it to compete with Coca-Cola and PepsiCo purely on the strength of a new, unproven identity. This option effectively would have meant launching a fourth cola brand from a standing start, which is precisely the slow, capital-intensive path RCPL's acquisition of the Campa IP was designed to avoid in the first place.

A third option, explored internally, was regional sequencing — activating nostalgia-led marketing only in cities with a strong pre-1991 legacy footprint (such as Delhi and parts of Northern India) while running a fully contemporary campaign elsewhere. This risked brand fragmentation and inconsistent positioning across markets, complicating the national media buy RCPL wished to run around cricket properties.

Resolution

RCPL avoided both extremes, systematically repositioning Campa Cola from a retro beverage into a 'New Age Indian Cola' built for contemporary cultural pride. The company secured multi-year cricket partnerships, including domestic BCCI

ecosystem matches and pouring rights during the Indian Premier League (IPL), and prioritized localized cultural events such as Durga Puja in West Bengal and Lalbaugcha Raja celebrations in Mumbai over global celebrity endorsements.

This approach allowed the brand's communications to lean on an implicit, rather than explicit, heritage cue: the name itself did the work of signaling authenticity and Indian-ness to older audiences, while the tone, media placement, and sponsorship choices were calibrated for a younger, cricket- and festival-engaged audience. Notably, RCPL avoided leading with retro packaging redesigns or explicit references to the brand's 1970s origin story in mainstream advertising, reserving that narrative for occasional public-relations and heritage-anniversary content rather than the core brand campaign.

Outcome

This dual-track positioning created immediate cultural visibility among younger consumers while simultaneously revitalizing emotional loyalty among older consumer bases, allowing RCPL to monetize nostalgia without being constrained by it. For classroom purposes, this dilemma illustrates a broader principle in brand revival strategy: heritage brand equity is most valuable when it operates as a background trust signal rather than a foreground creative theme, since foregrounding heritage risks anchoring the brand too firmly to a single generational cohort.

5. DILEMMA TWO: THE MARGIN DILEMMA — DISRUPTIVE PRICING VS. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

THE DILEMMA

Coca-Cola and PepsiCo had long maintained stable, consistent price-to-volume conventions nationwide. To disrupt this equilibrium, RCPL needed to enter at an aggressive price point — ₹10 for a 200ml SKU and ₹20 for a 500ml bottle, undercutting incumbents by 30% to 50%. In traditional FMCG economics, a sustained price war of this intensity typically leads to margin compression and long-term financial strain. RCPL had to find a way to fund deep, sustained disruption without simply subsidizing losses indefinitely.

Strategic Options Considered

One option was to treat the low pricing as a temporary, loss-led launch promotion, later normalizing prices closer to incumbent levels — a path that risked losing the price-sensitive volumes it had just won, since price-led trial in FMCG rarely converts into loyalty once the discount is withdrawn, and competitors could simply wait out the promotional window.

The alternative was to restructure the underlying cost base so that low prices could be sustained indefinitely without eroding profitability — a structurally harder path requiring up-front capital investment, but one that, if executed, would create a durable rather than temporary price advantage.

A third, hybrid option considered was regional price discrimination — pricing aggressively only in markets where RCPL faced the steepest uphill battle for distribution, while pricing closer to parity in markets where the brand already had traction. This was judged likely to create retailer confusion and grey-market arbitrage between neighboring price zones.

Resolution

RCPL chose the cost-restructuring path, bypassing legacy third-party bottling networks through direct capital investment in internal greenfield production infrastructure — operating 12 highly integrated, automated mega-plants across 12 states by 2026 — which minimized middleman markups and optimized production efficiency. Automation and scale at these plants reduced per-unit conversion costs relative to the fragmented, franchise-bottler model traditionally used by both incumbents in parts of the country.

Simultaneously, RCPL restructured retailer economics, offering kirana stores trade margins of 6% to 8%, compared to the 3% to 5% typically offered by multinational incumbents, alongside additional incentives for dedicated shelf space and refrigeration real estate. This had the dual effect of compensating retailers for stocking a still-unproven brand and of converting the retailer's own economic interest into a driver of shelf visibility and consumer trial.

5.1 Illustrative Unit Economics

Table 4 presents an illustrative, simplified comparison of the cost and margin structure implied by a vertically integrated model versus a traditional third-party bottling model, for discussion purposes. Figures are stylized to illustrate the mechanism rather than reported RCPL unit costs.

Table 4: Illustrative Comparison of Cost Structures — Third-Party Bottling vs. Vertical Integration (stylized, for discussion).

Cost Component	Third-Party Bottling Model	Vertically Integrated Model
Concentrate & packaging	Market rate, limited leverage	Bulk procurement, own packaging lines
Bottler margin / franchise fee	Embedded in unit cost	Eliminated (owned facilities)
Logistics & distribution	Multi-tier, higher handling cost	Integrated with JioMart / Reliance Retail network
Retailer trade margin	3%–5%	6%–8%
Net effect on sustainable retail price	Higher floor price required	Lower floor price achievable at similar margin

Outcome

By re-engineering the cost structure rather than simply discounting price, RCPL converted a potentially unsustainable price war into a durable cost advantage, while transforming independent kirana owners into active brand advocates. The broader lesson for strategic management students is that price-based disruption is sustainable only when it is underwritten by a genuine cost advantage; price cuts unsupported by cost restructuring are promotions, not strategies, and tend to unwind once competitive or shareholder pressure mounts.

6. DILEMMA THREE: THE CHANNEL CONFLICT DILEMMA — OWNED RETAIL AND QUICK COMMERCE VS. KIRANA LOYALTY THE DILEMMA

Having just secured kirana loyalty through improved trade margins, RCPL also needed to capture high-growth, digital-native consumption occurring through quick-commerce platforms and its own owned retail network. Prioritizing owned retail and quick-commerce risked undermining the very kirana relationships RCPL had just built; prioritizing kiranas risked ceding fast-growing digital volumes to

more agile competitors.

Strategic Options Considered

RCPL could have sequenced channels competitively — pushing owned retail and quick-commerce first to maximize margin capture, since these channels typically carry higher realized margins than kirana wholesale, or protecting kirana volumes by limiting quick-commerce availability, ensuring the newly won trade partners did not feel undercut by faster, cheaper digital fulfillment on their own doorstep.

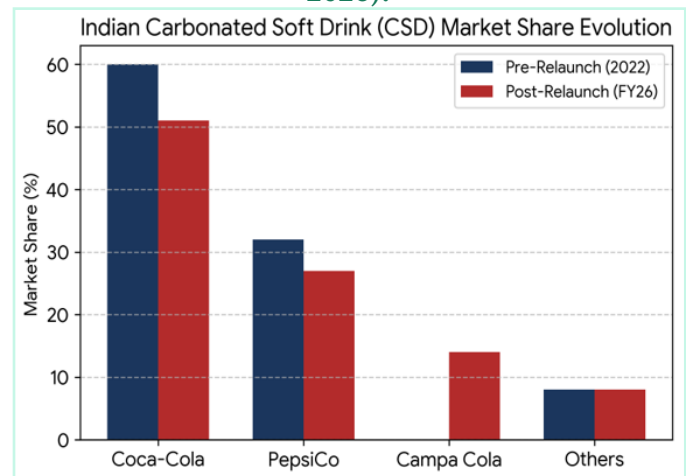
Either approach, however, risked treating the channels as substitutes competing for the same fixed demand, when in practice the consumption occasions served by a fifteen-minute quick-commerce delivery, a large-format retail visit, and a neighborhood kirana purchase are meaningfully different, and a strategy built on choosing between them would likely have under-served at least one of these occasions.

Resolution

Instead, RCPL treated distribution channels as complementary. Campa Cola received immediate placement across more than 18,000 Reliance Retail stores (Reliance Smart, Smart Bazaar, Reliance Fresh), while JioMart extended reach to independent kirana merchants already integrated into Reliance's wholesale digital ordering system, circumventing traditional multi-tier distributor delays. In parallel, RCPL integrated with quick-commerce platforms such as Blinkit, Zepto, and Instamart, optimizing digital placement and bundle promotions for urban, high-velocity consumers.

This sequencing — establishing owned-retail presence and kirana wholesale integration first, and layering quick-commerce distribution on top once the brand had achieved baseline shelf credibility — meant that quick-commerce growth was additive to, rather than substitutive of, kirana volumes. Kirana partners continued to benefit from the elevated trade margins established during the pricing-strategy phase, insulating the relationship from the perception that RCPL was quietly diverting volume toward digital channels at their expense.

Fig. 2: Shift in Market Share within the Indian Carbonated Soft Drink (CSD) Category. Source: Industry Estimates & Corporate Disclosures (June 2026).



6.1 Channel Roles at a Glance

Table 5: Complementary Role of Distribution Channels in RCPL's Sequencing Strategy.

Channel	Primary Consumption Occasion	Strategic Role in Sequencing
Kirana / general trade	Habitual, frequent, small-basket purchase	Foundation channel; margin-led loyalty building
Owned retail (Reliance Smart/Fresh)	Planned, larger-basket grocery run	Scale and shelf-credibility building
Quick commerce (Blinkit, Zepto, Instamart)	Impulse, immediate-need, urban	Layered on top; digital-native volume capture

Outcome

By sequencing owned-retail placement first and layering quick-commerce on top, rather than choosing between channels, RCPL captured digital-native volumes ahead of competitors while preserving the kirana loyalty built during the pricing phase. For classroom discussion, this dilemma illustrates that channel conflict is often a sequencing problem rather than a strict either/or allocation problem, and that firms with sufficiently deep infrastructure can sometimes design around a trade-off that a smaller competitor would be forced to resolve by picking a single channel.

7. DILEMMA FOUR: THE RETALIATION DILEMMA — HOW FAR TO PUSH DISRUPTION THE DILEMMA

By the close of 2026, Campa Cola's double-digit market share expansion had visibly cracked the traditional CSD duopoly, compelling Coca-Cola and PepsiCo to deploy defensive capital through low-cost packaging alternatives and higher promotional spending. RCPL faced an open-ended dilemma: continuing to press its price and distribution advantage could maximize near-term share gains, but risked triggering a prolonged, capital-intensive war of attrition that could compress margins across the entire category — and invite further new entrants, as seen when ITC Limited launched a premium sugar-free 'Coconut Cola' under its B Natural portfolio in mid-2026.

Strategic Options Considered

RCPL could continue maximal disruption, using RIL's balance sheet to outlast incumbents in a sustained war of attrition, betting that its structural cost advantages — established during the margin-dilemma phase — would allow it to remain profitable, or at least sustainable, at price points that would eventually force incumbents to either match margins they could not structurally sustain or cede further share.

Alternatively, RCPL could moderate its pace to consolidate existing gains and avoid triggering an industry-wide price collapse that would also compress its own long-run margins, focusing instead on deepening distribution and brand loyalty in markets already won rather than continuing to expand the price gap with incumbents.

A third possibility, raised implicitly by ITC's entry into the category, is that continued aggressive disruption by RCPL may itself invite further new entrants seeking to exploit the same cracked duopoly, potentially fragmenting the market into distinct price-health-flavor tiers rather than resulting in a clean two-way or three-way share battle.

Resolution

As of mid-2026, RCPL has continued to press its structural cost and distribution advantages rather than moderating them, betting that its integrated infrastructure gives it a durable cost position that incumbents cannot easily replicate. This dilemma

remains open rather than definitively resolved: the long-run outcome will depend on whether incumbents' defensive responses and new entrants such as ITC succeed in fragmenting the market into distinct price-health-flavor tiers, or whether RCPL's scale advantage allows it to keep expanding share without a mutually destructive price war.

Outcome

The case is left deliberately open at this final dilemma, as the resolution is still unfolding — making it a useful point for classroom discussion of how aggressively a well-capitalized challenger should press an advantage once it has destabilized an established duopoly. Instructors may wish to poll students on which path they would recommend RCPL take, and to revisit the question with updated market data in subsequent years as the retaliation dynamic plays out.

8. CROSS-CUTTING DISCUSSION: LESSONS FOR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Read together, the four dilemmas illustrate a consistent pattern in RCPL's approach: at each strategic juncture, the company avoided the two extreme options available to it and instead engineered a structural solution that resolved the apparent trade-off. Nostalgia and relevance were reconciled through dual-track positioning; price disruption and margin protection were reconciled through cost re-engineering rather than discounting; channel reach and channel loyalty were reconciled through sequencing rather than substitution.

This pattern offers several broader takeaways for strategic management, expanded below for classroom discussion.

8.1 Legacy Brand Equity as a Corporate Accelerator

Legacy brand equity, even if dormant for decades, can serve as a valuable corporate accelerator — acquiring historical IP can reduce the time and marketing capital required to build baseline consumer trust from scratch, provided the brand is repositioned rather than left as a static revival. The Campa Cola case suggests that the value of a dormant brand lies less in explicit heritage storytelling and more in the implicit trust signal the name itself carries, which can be redeployed underneath an entirely contemporary marketing execution.

8.2 Integrated Infrastructure as a Trade-Off Resolver

In modern, highly integrated retail landscapes, owning the end-to-end distribution and digital ecosystem can allow an incoming competitor to resolve trade-offs that would otherwise force smaller or less capitalized firms to choose between competing strategic priorities. Where a stand-alone beverage company might have had to choose between funding bottling infrastructure and funding marketing, or between prioritizing kirana and prioritizing quick commerce, RCPL's access to RIL's existing retail, logistics, and digital assets converted several of these trade-offs into sequencing decisions rather than binary choices.

8.3 The Limits of the Conglomerate Playbook

It is worth noting for balanced classroom discussion that this playbook is not costlessly replicable. It depends on the availability of a parent conglomerate's balance sheet, retail footprint, and digital infrastructure — resources that are, by definition, unavailable to independent challengers. Students should be encouraged to consider which elements of RCPL's approach (for example, the dual-track brand positioning, or the sequencing logic used to manage channel conflict) could be adapted by a resource-constrained entrant, and which elements (for example, funding twelve greenfield bottling plants) are effectively conglomerate-only strategies.

8.4 Strategy as Sequencing, Not Just Positioning

A final cross-cutting observation is that each dilemma in this case was resolved not by a single static positioning choice but by a sequencing decision — which audience to speak to first, which cost structure to build before setting price, which channel to establish before layering on the next. This suggests that, particularly for challenger brands entering an established duopoly, the order in which strategic moves are made may matter as much as the moves themselves.

9. EXTENDED FINANCIAL AND MARKET PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

This section expands on the headline figures presented in Table 1, offering additional context for instructors wishing to incorporate quantitative analysis into classroom discussion of the case.

9.1 Revenue Growth Trajectory

Campa Cola's gross sales grew from approximately ₹11 crore in FY 2023–24 to over ₹4,700 crore by the close of FY 2025–26, a compound growth trajectory that is exceptional even by the standards of aggressive FMCG launches. This growth was not linear; industry commentary suggests that the bulk of the acceleration occurred in the second half of the period, coinciding with the completion of the greenfield bottling network and the expansion of quick-commerce integration described in Dilemma Three.

9.2 Contribution to Parent Group Revenue

RCPL's overall gross sales reached approximately ₹22,000 crore in FY26, meaning Campa Cola's beverage revenue, while still a minority of the parent FMCG entity's total sales, represents a rapidly growing share of RCPL's overall growth contribution. This is consistent with RCPL's publicly stated ambition to scale its consumer products division substantially over the remainder of the decade, discussed further in the concluding section.

9.3 Market Share Interpretation

The reported 14% market share figure is best understood as a share of specific, competitively contested urban pockets rather than a uniform national share; the case explicitly notes this figure is concentrated in key urban markets rather than representing Campa Cola's national average share across India's highly heterogeneous state-level markets, where rural and semi-urban penetration remains comparatively lower. Instructors may wish to discuss with students the difference between a nationally reported headline share figure and the underlying market-by-market variation it can obscure.

9.4 Distribution Scale-Up

The distributor network expanded from under 200 partners to more than 5,000 authorized distributors over the period under review, alongside the build-out of 12 greenfield mega-plants across 12 states. This scale of physical and commercial infrastructure build-out within roughly three years underscores the extent to which RCPL's resolution of Dilemma Two (the margin dilemma) was inseparable from a very large, front-loaded capital commitment — a point

worth returning to when discussing the replicability question raised in Section 8.3.

10. RISKS, OPEN QUESTIONS, AND OUTLOOK

No case of this kind would be complete without an honest accounting of the risks and open strategic questions that remain, several of which are directly tied to the still-unresolved fourth dilemma.

10.1 Competitive Retaliation Risk

Coca-Cola and PepsiCo retain vastly larger global balance sheets than RCPL's beverage division in isolation, even if RIL's group-wide resources are substantial. A sustained, multi-year price war could still, in principle, be met with an equally sustained incumbent response, particularly if incumbents choose to treat the Indian market as a strategically important battleground worth funding from global profit pools.

10.2 New Entrant Risk

ITC's mid-2026 entry into the category with a premium, sugar-free 'Coconut Cola' under its B Natural portfolio demonstrates that a cracked duopoly can attract entrants beyond the original disruptor, potentially fragmenting the market into distinct price-health-flavor tiers rather than consolidating around RCPL's low-price positioning.

10.3 Category-Wide Margin Compression

If price-based rivalry continues to intensify, industry-wide margins could compress to a point where even RCPL's structurally lower cost base delivers thinner absolute returns than originally modeled, raising questions about the long-run return on the capital committed to the twelve greenfield plants.

10.4 Health and Regulatory Tailwinds/Headwinds

Rising consumer and regulatory attention to sugar content and health-oriented beverage reformulation represents both a risk (if Campa Cola's core CSD formulation faces reformulation pressure) and an opportunity (consistent with RCPL's own stated interest in wellness-oriented beverages, discussed in the conclusion).

10.5 Execution Risk in Scaling Further

Continued expansion into packaged drinking water (Campa Sure) and other adjacent categories will

test whether the operational playbook developed for CSDs — vertical integration, retailer margin restructuring, and channel sequencing — generalizes to categories with different cost structures, regulatory regimes, and competitive dynamics.

11. CONCLUSION

The revitalization of Campa Cola by Reliance Consumer Products Limited demonstrates how a sequence of difficult strategic trade-offs — around brand positioning, pricing economics, channel design, and competitive posture — can be resolved through structural investment rather than compromise. Looking toward the 2030 corporate horizon, RCPL's stated objective to scale its consumer products division toward a ₹1,000,000 crore revenue target will depend on its ability to expand the beverage portfolio further, including packaged drinking water under Campa Sure and functional, wellness-oriented beverages.

Whether the fourth dilemma — how far to press disruption — resolves in RCPL's favor will likely determine whether Campa Cola's early gains translate into durable market leadership, or whether they instead mark the opening phase of a longer, more contested, multi-player battle for share of the Indian carbonated soft drink category. Either outcome offers valuable material for the continued study of challenger-brand strategy in emerging markets, and instructors are encouraged to revisit this case in future years as the retaliation dynamic described in Section 7 continues to unfold.

12. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. RCPL resolved the brand-positioning dilemma through dual-track marketing rather than choosing exclusively between nostalgia and youth appeal. Under what circumstances might a dual-track strategy fail to satisfy either audience?
2. The margin dilemma was resolved through vertical integration into bottling infrastructure. What capital and organizational prerequisites does this solution assume, and would it be available to a less diversified challenger?
3. How should a firm decide whether two distribution channels are genuinely complementary (as RCPL assumed) versus substitutive, before committing capital to both simultaneously?

4. Given the unresolved retaliation dilemma, what signals would indicate that RCPL should shift from maximal disruption toward a more moderated competitive posture?
5. To what extent is RCPL's dilemma-resolution pattern replicable by firms without access to a parent conglomerate's balance sheet and retail infrastructure?
6. Using the five-forces analysis in Section 3.1, which force do you believe was most fundamentally altered by Campa Cola's re-entry, and why?
7. If you were advising Coca-Cola or PepsiCo in mid-2026, what combination of pricing, distribution, and brand responses would you recommend to defend their position against RCPL?
8. ITC's entry with a premium, sugar-free 'Coconut Cola' suggests the market may fragment into price-health-flavor tiers rather than consolidate into a two- or three-way price battle. How should RCPL's strategy differ depending on which scenario materializes?
9. Consider RCPL's decision to offer kirana retailers higher trade margins than incumbents. What are the risks of this approach if a future competitor responds by matching or exceeding those margins?
10. How generalizable is the four-dilemma framework used in this case (positioning, margin, channel, retaliation) to other categories in which a conglomerate-backed brand seeks to disrupt an established duopoly?

13. TEACHING NOTES

13.1 Target Audience and Positioning

This case is designed for use in postgraduate and executive-education courses in strategic management, marketing strategy, and competitive analysis. It is suitable both as a stand-alone session focused on challenger-brand strategy and as a comparative case alongside classic duopoly-disruption examples from other markets and categories.

13.2 Suggested Learning Objectives

- Understand how legacy brand equity can be reactivated as a strategic asset in a brand revival strategy.
- Apply Porter's five-forces framework to analyze how a new entrant can alter the structural dynamics of a stable duopoly.

- Distinguish between price-led promotion and cost-structure-led disruption, and evaluate the sustainability of each.
- Analyze channel-conflict trade-offs between traditional trade, owned retail, and digital/quick-commerce channels.
- Evaluate the strategic considerations involved in deciding how aggressively to press a competitive advantage once achieved.

13.3 Suggested Session Plan (90 Minutes)

- 0–10 min: Introduce the historical background of Campa Cola and the pre-2022 duopoly structure (Sections 1–2).
- 10–25 min: Small-group discussion of Dilemma One (brand positioning); report-back and instructor synthesis.
- 25–45 min: Discussion of Dilemma Two (pricing/margin) using the illustrative unit-economics table (Section 5.1).
- 45–65 min: Discussion of Dilemma Three (channel conflict), potentially role-playing kirana retailer vs. RCPL perspectives.
- 65–85 min: Open debate on Dilemma Four (retaliation) — students vote on recommended strategic posture and defend their position.
- 85–90 min: Instructor wrap-up connecting the four dilemmas to the cross-cutting lessons in Section 8.

13.4 Suggested Board Plan

Instructors may find it useful to structure the whiteboard around the four dilemmas as four columns, recording under each: the two extreme options, the structural resolution RCPL chose, and the key trade-off it resolved. This reinforces the case's central thesis — that RCPL's success lay not in choosing well between binary options, but in engineering away the binary itself.

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