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MASTERS' UNION × SMOOR

Post-Read

Premium Chocolate & F&B Business Immersion

PGP Bharat C2 Immersions | SMOOR

The SMOOR immersion gave the cohort a complete, ground-to-shelf view of how a premium chocolate brand is built in India, from the cacao bean to the finished product, and from production discipline to brand positioning. Walking through SMOOR's Chocolate Experience Centre in Bengaluru, students moved beyond simply discussing chocolate in a classroom to seeing the full journey unfold: bean processing, roasting, winnowing, grinding, refining, tempering, moulding, enrobing and packaging, alongside a parallel conversation on sourcing, regulation, market forces and brand strategy.

Key Learnings

- "Premium" is a product-level claim, not just a pricing decision. SMOOR's use of true couverture chocolate, which carries a higher cocoa butter content than compound chocolate, directly shapes shine, texture, smoothness and the characteristic "snap" that distinguishes premium chocolate from mass-market alternatives.
- Small variables carry outsized weight in chocolate-making. Temperature control during tempering, refining time, and cocoa butter percentage can each change the final product's look, feel and taste, showing how much precision underlies something consumed casually.
- Sourcing shapes both cost and positioning. SMOOR sources cocoa internationally from origins including Ecuador, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Venezuela and Brazil, alongside a growing Indian-origin line sourced from Andhra Pradesh, reflecting a broader industry move toward diversifying and localising supply.
- Global cocoa markets are highly exposed to climate and geopolitical risk. Cocoa futures rose roughly threefold between late 2023 and mid-2024, driven largely by crop disease, drought and ageing plantations in Ghana and Ivory Coast, two countries that together supply more than 60

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percent of the world's cocoa. This showed the cohort how concentrated a global supply chain can leave even a premium, India-based brand exposed to disruptions on the other side of the world.

- Regulatory compliance, particularly FSSAI standards, is a constant backdrop to production, not a one-time formality, for any F&B business operating at scale.
- Rising disposable income, growing consumer awareness and the expansion of e-commerce are together creating real headroom for premium F&B brands in India, even as input costs rise.

Most Valuable Insights

The most valuable insight for the cohort was SMOOR's positioning strategy: selling a chocolate experience rather than only a chocolate product. Its retail stores, gifting formats and the Experience Centre itself, which combines a working bean-to-bar facility with a cafe and retail floor, are all designed to let customers see and understand the craft behind the product, which in turn justifies its premium pricing. The discussion of Cadbury's "Kuch Meetha Ho Jaaye" campaign added useful historical context here: chocolate in India first had to compete with traditional mithai for festive and celebratory occasions, and only over time carved out a distinct emotional space and craving of its own. Seen together, this reframed premiumisation not as a pricing exercise, but as years of deliberate work on category positioning, experience design and consumer trust.

Practical Applications

- Map a product's full journey, from raw material sourcing to shelf, before evaluating where "premium" is actually being created and where it is only being claimed through pricing.
- When assessing a consumer brand, look beyond the core product to the full range of revenue lines built around it. SMOOR's model spans chocolates, cakes, gifting, cafes, customised and corporate orders, showing how a single production setup can support several distinct customer segments and revenue streams.

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- Treat global commodity exposure as a standing business risk to monitor, not a one-off shock. A brand's ability to manage sourcing diversification and cost pass-through directly affects its long-term resilience.
- Recognise that category creation and premiumisation are built cumulatively, through repeated consumer experience and education, rather than through a single campaign or price point.

Speaker and Session Highlights

The session combined a business-strategy discussion with a hands-on facility walkthrough, giving students both the commercial and operational lenses on the business. On the strategy side, the conversation covered product quality benchmarks, input cost pressures, regulation and market opportunity. The facility walkthrough took the cohort through the Experience Centre's production floor, including the machines, moulds and tempering, cooling and enrobing lines, as well as cake production and packaging, followed by hands-on tasting elements that let students directly experience the difference precision makes to the final product.

Emerging Themes

- Premium positioning as a function of verifiable product quality, not price alone.
- Global commodity risk as a direct, material input into a domestic consumer brand's economics.
- Experience-led retail as a strategy for justifying and sustaining premium pricing.
- Category creation as a long, cumulative process of consumer education, illustrated well by chocolate's shift from a mithai substitute to a craving of its own.
- Diversified revenue lines, built on shared production infrastructure, as a way to strengthen a single-category F&B business.

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Closing Reflection

The SMOOR immersion moved the cohort from simply enjoying chocolate to understanding what actually goes into making it premium: precise production, deliberate sourcing choices, real exposure to global commodity risk, regulatory discipline, and a brand experience designed to make all of that visible to the customer. For a cohort approaching this from an F&B and consumer business lens, it offered a clear, practical case study in how quality, sourcing and positioning come together to build and sustain a premium brand in India.