MAMA SHOPS
A SINGAPOREAN HERITAGE

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BACKGROUND
What are mama shops anyway?
HDB New Town construction
1975-1998
Mama Shops

Convenience stores providing daily amenities

Source of household necessities for families living in HDB flats before the coming of large stores.

Located at HDB void decks
Mama Shops

Provision shops located at the void decks of HDB flats
THE PROBLEM
What is happening to these Mama Shops?
Problem statement

Mama shops are facing increasingly stiff competition from various parties with more resources and popular support such as supermarkets and wet markets.

- Competition from rivals
- Negative social mindset
- Lack of resources
Competition from rivals

With an increasing number of supermarkets and convenience stores, customers are drawn away from mama shops.
Negative social mindset

The younger generation see Mama Shops as dirty and less classy, hence they are reluctant to shop there.
Lack of resources

Mama shops lack the necessary resources, manpower and capital to keep up with the range offered by their competitors.
Case study 1
Mr Gupta: Guptas Dhaba
Well, last time it was different because there were less big supermarts. Now SO many, hundreds of them.
And the customers are living all in different areas, near to the them (supermarts). They buy from supermarts near where they stay, and they have a variety of choices.
“So it was most profitable last time right, based on what you said?”

“Ya, before, few years back. Now no more, because so much competition. Very very keen competition. **Fighting for survival!**”
Case study 2
Mr Patraj: Amofa Pte Ltd
“So are you usually very busy?”
“Haha, yes I am. A lot of people living around this area come to my shop.”
“Wow, why do you think you have so many customers?”
“Oh I think it’s mainly because there aren’t any supermarkets here so it’s more convenient.”
FINDINGS

Our investigation?
Social Survey

- Conducted in our school (Raffles Institution)
- An accurate representation since students from our school generally live in almost all parts of Singapore – an accurate proportion of students to represent society.
- 63 anonymous respondents
Q1: A Mama Shop is generally a provision shop at a HDB void deck. Did you know what a Mama Shop is before this survey?

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<td>Yes</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
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Which amenity would you prefer to go to to get your household items and food?

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<th>Which amenity would you prefer to go to to get your household items and food?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mama shops</td>
<td>9 (14%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supermarkets</td>
<td>50 (79%)</td>
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<td>Other provision shops</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
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<td>Wet markets</td>
<td>3 (5%)</td>
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Which amenity would you not prefer to go to to get your household items and food?

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<th>Amenity</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mama shops</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supermarkets</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other provision shops</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wet markets</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>57%</td>
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Do you think that we should preserve Mama Shops as part of our heritage?

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<th>Do you think that we should preserve Mama Shops as part of our heritage?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48  (75%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16   (25%)</td>
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“They give HDB estates their unique character. Even though I don't usually visit them they make a HDB estate unique.”
“They have been around since Singapore's inception. Our parents and grandparents grew up patronizing these Mama shops. And to think they still exist till this very day, selling everything from Pocky sticks to Pokemon cards. Surely this deems it worthy of being called "an important part of our heritage".”
“They constitute our childhood memories, those times we bought candy together, or saved up $1 to get a toy at the capsule machine beside it”
Would you advise people to set up new Mama Shops as a business?

- Yes: 3 (5%)
- Yes, but preferably not: 29 (46%)
- No: 28 (44%)
- Other: 3 (5%)
“The days where the Mama Shop industry flourished are long gone. With the rise of supermarkets and big shopping malls, a Mama Shop owner would have a very hard time maintaining his or her business.”
“I will not actively encourage people to set up new Mama shops as too many of these are not likely to survive with fierce competition from supermarkets. I will however also not discourage as Mama shops are heritage that ought to be preserved. Young people who are able to re-invent Mama shop while still preserving its precious characteristic of warmhearted, personalized service should be encouraged to give it a try.”
Respondents are also aware of many of the challenges these shopowners face: All of them gave answers falling into the categories of finance and a work-life tradeoff.
CURRENT SOLUTIONS

What are the owners doing?
Putting in more effort

- Shopkeepers constantly put in long hours to allow customers to come at any time they want.
- One shopkeeper even goes around distributing thousands of leaflets per week to the surrounding flats.

Interviewer: “So will you be encouraging any other people to actually run this mama shop in future?”
Gupta: “Whoever wants to run they can (go ahead). But you see this is long hours, fourteen hours fifteen hours a day, so hard to run the business.”
Shopkeepers try to maintain good relations with their customers so they will constantly patronize the store. Discounts are also an incentive given to old customers, similar to wet markets.
PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

What will we do?
Mama shops can adopt a special role that supermarkets cannot play. This can come in the form of specialized or extremely discounted goods, or specializing on the sale of a single type of item.
A deal with other Mama Shops, or even collaborations with supermarket chains can give these Mama Shops the capital and support they need to continue thriving.
• Similar to what is shown in the pictures, Mama Shops can take the initiative to provide different services like photocopying and home delivery.
DISCUSSION
What can we take note of?
Issue of heritage vs economy
Do we sacrifice identity for progress?
CONCLUSION
The final word
If you can’t beat them, join them.

Mama shops have been outclassed and overpowered by newer supermarket chains. They need to adapt to the times with new methods and means to remain relevant, or risk disappearing altogether. Society should nevertheless support them as they represent apart of Singapore’s unique heritage.
REFERENCES

Our sources?
Picture Credits

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  • Mrs Chee Mei Ling

• Our 63 survey respondents
The End!
Any questions?