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BISWATOSH SAHA, SANKALP PRATAP, MOUMITA ROY

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PAPERCUP – THE JOURNEY OF A STARTUP

INTRODUCTION

It was the summer of 2013 and Somrwita Guha was in her bedroom staring out of her window thoughtfully. At 23, the young lady had some important decisions to make. She was the proprietor of a fledgling startup, which she had founded with her college mates a few years ago. While her friends had moved on to more conventional pursuits, such as higher studies and corporate jobs, Somrwita was determined to continue nurturing her young venture. Christened “Papercup”, the venture dealt in handmade greeting cards, bookmarks, and hand-painted kettles, all of which were entirely manufactured by Somrwita and a shifting set of two or three creatively inclined friends and college mates.

Papercup operated from Somrwita’s bedroom in her family’s apartment, where she lived with her parents and older sister. In her bedroom, Papercup jostled for space with her textbooks and clothes. Thus far, all advertising had been through word-of-mouth and her personal Facebook page, and orders were fulfilled through personal labor, thus earning Somrwita some handsome pocket money in the process. However, she wanted to launch her website, employ a few workers, and have store inventory, but space was running out in her bedroom, and she knew instinctively that she could not spread the clutter of her raw materials and wares to other parts of her parents’ tastefully decorated apartment. As she turned her gaze from the large, lush playground that her window overlooked, she could not help but notice the contrast — her room was essentially an overcrowded warehouse!

Another associated challenge was related to her academic future. Every single individual in her extended family held a Master’s degree. Somrwita had just earned a Bachelor’s degree in economics from Jadavpur University (JU), Kolkata. However, she was not keen on enrolling in another course or studying further, though her mother was hopeful that she would pursue higher studies. Her mother was not at all against

Biswatosh Saha, Sankalp Pratap and Moumita Roy of the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta developed this case study as the basis for class discussion. It is not intended to illustrate the effective or ineffective running of an organization.

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her creative pursuits; in fact, she liked the crafts, colorful items and accolades that Papercup had generated, but she was not convinced that the venture ought to play a central role in Somrwita's career.

Summers in Kolkata had always been tough to negotiate but this particular one was going to be particularly problematic, Somrwita thought wrongly. She let out a deep sigh and turned back to the view outside her window, hoping a solution to her problem would present itself.