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CALCUTTA 64: AN ENTREPRENEUR'S JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

At the end of August 2019, the twilight attracted Debojit Paul (Paul) as he watched from the window of Calcutta 64, a standalone café-cum-restaurant that he owned in Kolkata's tony neighbourhood, Salt Lake. Paul reminisced how it all started. Three years back, on his wife's birthday, when he was looking to have a quiet evening with her, he couldn't think of a single food joint in the vicinity that offered hygienic food and a good brew of specialty coffee at a reasonable price to take her to. That's when he thought of converting the front porch of his house into a café? The area certainly needed it. And to Paul, it seemed a brilliant idea. It had everything he was looking for – a space that was quiet, that he could make affordable and popular. As the idea grew, his conviction grew too. The seeds of entrepreneurship were, thus, sown. However, there was one small issue that nagged him. He first needed the buy-in from his wife and brother to start this venture. Next, the area in front of his house was open and needed to be closed for air-conditioning and it would cost him INR 12 lakhs. After mulling for a while and deciding not to procrastinate much, Paul and his brother pooled in funds to install the air-conditioner. Once the work started and the idea completely germinated, there was no looking back. In the two years that it took for the café to open, Paul had visited other cafes to get ideas, looked at resourcing minutely, had write-ups and interiors done, evaluated ideal social media platforms for promotions, and worked 24X7 to get the café off the ground. His happiness knew no bounds

Prof. Ramendra Singh of the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta and Menaka Rao, developed this case study as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate the effective or ineffective running of an organization.

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when his brother joined him as a partner and so did his wife, Sneha. On the very first day the trio entertained their first customer with a billing of INR 5,000! Paul was suddenly jolted out of his reverie with the smell of hookah smoke drifting in from the neighbouring cafe combined with the loud music emanating from the café coffee day (CCD) close by.

In 2014, when Paul had just started thinking about opening a café, the neighborhood was pretty quiet in Salt Lake and there were hardly any cafés around. However, by the time the idea fructified there were four CCDs, one Starbucks and three owner-operated cafés. It was a dampener no doubt, but Paul was confident about Calcutta 64 as his was the only traditional café in the area, as seen in **Exhibit 1**. The other cafes had hookah and liquor, while CCD and Starbucks had their brand name to bank on. However, Paul wanted to retain the position of being a traditional café with a wide spread of dishes and most importantly cater to a cross-section of customers across age groups and with varying tastes. However, he often wondered if he should be like his peers. Paul's eyes swept across the vast 2,000 sq ft expanse of his café and thought of his earlier snug small café of 200 sq ft. With a seating capacity of 90, it was a tremendous jump from the 16 of old times. Paul was especially focusing on the millennial customer and, therefore, offered a variety of continental dishes at reasonable prices through the week. Footfalls was never a problem for the café, but Paul wanted to do something more. But what? Was it time to pivot and expand? How? Organically or venture into opening new cafés? Finally, he took these questions to his wife and brother.

Calcutta 64 reached breakeven in just two years with monthly sales of INR 1.5 million on an investment of INR 3.5 million. It was rated one of the top 5 cafés in Kolkata, with 70% sales coming from retail customers who visited the café and the remaining 30% sales coming from food aggregators such as Swiggy and Uber Eats as seen in **Exhibit 2**. Yet he needed to do better, to strengthen their unique positioning and fine-tune their customer proposition to build market share. But the question was: How?