

RETAIN VINTAGE MARKETPLACE OR MOVE TO A MALL?

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CASE DESCRIPTION

The primary subject matter of this case concerns marketing. Secondary issues examined include flea marketplace, its stakeholders and their interactions. The case study involves ethnographic market research. The case has a difficulty level of one. The case is designed to be taught in two class sessions of one hour each and will require 3-4 hours of outside preparation by students. In the first class session, the instructor could discuss the case. The students could be given a team assignment of research on local marketplaces using ethnography method. In the second session, students could make team presentations about their learnings from the visits.

CASE SYNOPSIS

Rahim Miya is facing a difficult situation at Hippie India Bazaar-city's iconic flea market. As a president of Hippie India Bazaar Shop Owners Association, he has to take a decision on signing the relocation agreement. The 150 years old market has more than 100 shops. The shop owners are offered a space in upcoming shopping mall by the redeveloper. The shopkeepers are divided in their preference for retaining the vintage and moving to mainstream market space. To sign or not to sign is Rahim Miya's dilemma.

CASE BODY

"I have never been to an antique flea market in India," Ashok said.

"Me neither! I am so excited," Poonam exclaimed.

"I haven't been either, but what's the big deal about it? I don't get it!" Hrithik said in an irritated tone.

Poonam, Ashok and Hrithik, the young marketing interns, were having coconut water from a street vendor at *Hippie India Bazaar*-the city's iconic flea market.

Although it was 11 o'clock in the morning, most shops on the main street were shut. Only the shops on the by-lanes were open. The interns had decided to wait for more shops to open. Ashok wanted to chat, but he was sandwiched between his two teammates. Poonam was overexcited. Any conversation with her would mean listening to every detail of the curios and antiques sold at a flea market. Conversing with Hrithik was likely to be equally excruciating today, as he had been feeling irritated since morning. Hrithik was only here because the manager had insisted on a personal site visit. All three interns were doing summer internships at a start-up e-commerce company. The company was considering adding antique items to its product

portfolio. The manager wanted the interns to gather information about the bazaar first-hand. The 150-year-old *Hippie India Bazaar* is made up of more than 100 shops and most shops sell antique products. A day earlier, the manager instructed them to,

“Observe the surroundings, including every movement and transaction. Talk to the people around you. Just jot it all down. We will evaluate later.”

“Why are these shops not open?”

Ashok asked the coconut vendor, pointing in the direction of *Hippie India Bazaar*'s main street. Given his teammate's extreme moods, Ashok had figured that he was better off chatting to the coconut vendor until more shops opened.

“Don't worry. The delay could be due to the shop owners having chai at Rahim Miya's house. They will open soon,”

The vendor assured him. Ashok noticed that the vendor had suddenly turned sullen.

“Who is Rahim Miya?” he asked.

“He is the president of the Hippie India Bazaar Shop Owners Association.”

“And every morning he offers tea to all the shop owners at his house?” Poonam asked with wide eyes.

The vendor laughed momentarily before turning sullen again.

“No. This has only been happening for the past few days. They have been in discussion day and night. They are worried.”

“About what?” Hrithik asked. *Maybe the market will remain shut today, Hrithik thought. Then we could spend rest of the day at a mall, watching movies, eating, gaming and shopping- there is so much one can do at a mall! And in clean, air-conditioned space.*

A day earlier, he had proposed to work on this assignment at a food-court in a mall, but Poonam had immediately rejected this idea based on the net resources. *“It is unethical. Besides, you cannot discover a market space of a bygone era in a virtual space of the 21st century,”* she had countered.

“The time has come to let bygones be bygones,” the vendor said dramatically. *“Hippie India Bazaar is going into redevelopment. The shop owners have been offered a space in an upcoming shopping mall. The association has to sign an agreement with the developer this Friday. They are worried about their future.”*

“Oh no! You mean to say that there will not be an antique flea market anymore?”

Poonam's tone changed from overexcitement to shock.

“It is still to be decided. The association members are divided. That is why the shops in the by-lanes are open. The owners of those shops support the redevelopment while the owners of

the main street shops oppose it. Those shop owners are probably with Rahim Miya right now, discussing their options.”

“*Why are they divided?*” Hrithik asked curiously.

“*Why don't you ask them?*”

The vendor was losing patience. The interns decided to visit the shops in the by-lanes. Ashok took out his diary.

The Walk to the 3rd by-Lane

Hippie India Bazaar has its own charm. The narrow street is made even narrower by customers, tourists, laborers, passers-by, scooters, cyclists, mini-trucks, hand-carts, goats, hens, rats and cockroaches. The vibrant display of hundreds of antique items takes one's attention away from the scattered garbage and dusty air. Each item is different in terms of color, texture, size, function, quality, vintage value and price. The laidback shopkeepers, passionate carpenters, bargain-hunting shoppers and photo-taking tourists all seem to play a part in making the by-gone era feel alive. This is a market where you will not know who will be sharing the space next to you—a perfumed tourist, a sweaty delivery man or a white goat!

Shop Number 27 on the 3rd by-Lane

“*You are not the first person to ask questions about the redevelopment. A journalist interviewed me yesterday about the same issue.”*

“*Why do you support it?*”

“*I want to move on. Do you see that tourist taking pictures? He spent half an hour inside my shop and left without buying anything. Nowadays, visitors treat our shop as a museum. No, I am not angry. It is indeed a museum. Can you tell me where else you could find such a unique collection of items on one single lane?*”

“*Then why do you want to move to a mall?*”

“*I need customers, not tourists! The imitation culture in China has affected our business. Fake antiques are available everywhere. Your generation cannot even tell the difference between an original and a fake vintage antique. How can I attract your generation? Tell me, how often do you go to a mall and how often do you come here? I hope Rahim Miya signs the agreement.”*

At the Furniture shop

The shops on the main street were now open. Poonam's eyes caught sight of a beautifully carved wooden chair that was outside a furniture shop. She asked the boys to visit the furniture shop first. The shops on the main street had a lot more items on display. *There is so much to jot down*, Ashok thought while checking out his surroundings. Hrithik, on the other hand, was becoming more interested in the redevelopment. He decided to strike up a conversation with an elderly shop owner who had come out of his shop to instruct his carpenter working on the roadside.

“Chachaji, we will miss this place if you all move to a mall,” Hrithik said, touching on the issue gently.

“Will you? Then please say the same to that shop owner.” Chachaji pointed angrily at one of the shops on the by-lane.

“We just spoke to the neighboring shop owner,” said Hrithik. He then added slyly,

“He prefers the option of relocating to a mall. He thinks it will be good for the future.” Hrithik thought this would trigger a strong response. He was right.

“Does that young lad care for his future? He doesn’t even seem to care about his past! He doesn’t share his father’s and grandfather’s passion,” Chachaji continued emotionally.

“We used to be a close-knit community. We fought foreigners to save this market and now we are selling our souls! This is not a shop, it is my soul!”

“Chachaji, will you sell this furniture at the mall?” asked Poonam, who had just stepped out of the shop and was unaware of the current conversation.

“Why should I move to a mall? It would be a bad move.”

“Why do you think so?” Poonam asked.

“Look, I have visitors here because my shop is front-facing on the main street. What if the developer offers me a space that is deep inside the mall or on the third floor? Will shoppers visit the third floor? Here, we are all in the antique business. In a mall, there will be all kinds of shops. Will my antique furniture stand out among the other products in the mall?”

“What will happen to me? Will I be allowed to work outside in the mall’s parking lot?” asked the carpenter who had been listening to the conversation.

“Do not worry. We are not going anywhere,” Chachaji said warmly to his long-standing employee.

The group was deep in conversation when a foreign tourist asked for directions to the washroom.

“You are not likely to find one nearby. This is not a mall. If you had visited a mall, you would have access to washrooms, escalators, lifts, benches, wheelchairs” Hrithik’s contempt-laden sentence was interrupted by Chachaji. *“You may go to the restaurant at the end of the street.”*

“Thank you. Your shop has a lovely collection of items,” the tourist said politely, looking around with interest.

“Did you buy anything from any of the shops here?” asked Hrithik, who was still in an inquisitive mood.

“Did you enjoy shopping here?” Poonam asked immediately in a cheerful voice, hoping to distract the foreign tourist from Hrithik’s negative tone.

“Yes! Shopping for curios here was like a treasure hunt. You never know what you’re going to get. The bargaining was fun too,” the tourist added smilingly. “I am glad my travel agent recommended this site to me. Is it a heritage site?”

“That could be an option! Why can’t the government declare this as a heritage site?” Ashok asked, looking up from his diary. “Then nobody will ask you to relocate.”

“The developer has started threatening us. I am sure he is confidently doing it because he has political connections. The government is not doing anything to save us,” Chachaji said sarcastically.

“The government is, in fact, trying to save us,” sneered an elderly lady who was stepping out of the shop.

“I am his wife. We live upstairs,” the lady explained to the interns, who were surprised by her sudden appearance and interruption. “The staircase that connects the shop to the house could collapse any day. Most of the buildings here are in a dilapidated condition. The government is right in thinking about redeveloping this area.”

She turned to her husband and asked, “What did Rahim Miya say in today’s meeting?”

“Rahim Miya is yet to decide,” he replied.

The Scene at the Flea Market

Every now and then you hear the shouts of “*hatohato*” (the Hindi word for move). The crinkly-faced, bearded cart-puller is sweaty and in a hurry. He is carrying an antique cupboard on his pushcart and struggling to maintain his balance on the narrow lane. The bare-chested, barefoot cart-puller in the scorching sun is in contrast with us—all of us are dressed in cotton clothes, sandals, caps and sunglasses. In that one spot, just for a moment, the scene represented urban India in a nutshell. It reminded me of the lyrics from “*Positively 4th Street*” by Bob Dylan:

I wish that for just one time you could stand inside my shoes

And just for that one moment I could be you

Yes, I wish that for just one time you could stand inside my shoes

You'd know what a drag it is to see you!

The dilemma question: Should Rahim Miya sign the relocation agreement or not?

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

The main teaching objective is to expose students to ethnographic market research method. The ethnographic market research is an emerging market research method. It is gaining increasing popularity over the traditional survey and focus group methods elements. An ethnographic approach is used in this case gives insights into how the flea market looks, why shopkeepers have different preferences and what other stakeholders like an employee, family member and tourist think. The students will understand the value of observing people and their actions and having empathic conversations, rather than asking them to self-report as done in traditional methods.

TEACHING METHOD

The instructors are recommended to use experiential teaching methods to meet the above teaching objectives. The idea is to provide a platform for students to develop

1. observation and empathy skills through field-visit
2. collaboration and communication skills through team assignment
3. communication and critical thinking skills through dilemma discussion

The role-play teaching method could be used in the first session to make the case-study learning livelier. The team assignment could be a short presentation on learning from field-visit to a local market. Each team could be assigned a different marketplace such as flea market, grocery store and shopping mall. Alternately, each team could be asked to cover a specific stakeholder such as a shopkeeper, street hawker, casual shopper, serious shopper and so on. The students must be asked to focus on cultural trends, lifestyle, attitudes and practices to ensure their learning about the influence of social factors on product selection and usage. In the second session, team presentations and group discussion could be conducted with the instructor playing the role of facilitator. The following timeline is recommended for 2 sessions:

Session 1:

- Reading the case by the students: 15 min.
- Discussion of answers to questions: 30 min.
- Explaining requirements for team assignment: 15 min

Session 2:

- Team presentations: 40 min.
- Summarizing and review: 20 min.

The following supporting material might be useful in post-presentation discussions: (McGrath et al., 1993; Petrescu et al., 2013; De-Bruin et al., 2000; Renard et al., 2008; Nejati et al, 2011; Kolabi et al., 2011; Soodan et al., 2016. Video: A Flea Market Documentary, 2001)

Research Assignment (For Bonus-Marks/Further Interest)

1. Refer to academic papers (above or any relevant one of your choice). Compare findings in the present case-study with those of the other(s).
2. Mention the research limitations as well as some directions for future research for the present case-study.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND MODEL ANSWERS

1. Why do you think the young interns have never visited the flea market in their own city?

Suggested answer:

The market location and product assortment significantly influence market experience and purchase influence of millennial consumers (Venter-de-Villiers et. al, 2018). A gap between rich and poor in urban India has created spatial inequality. There are many formal and informal spaces for shopping such as malls, departmental stores, corner shops, flea markets, street vendors and mobile vendors. Each shopping area is typically frequented by visitors belonging to a specific income category. For instance, the shopping malls usually have visitors from higher and middle-income groups while flea markets usually have visitors from lower income groups. It is likely that the three interns belong to families of higher income group and hence never had a need or a desire to visit a flea market.

Another reason could be that as young interns are from millennial generation; their priorities might be different from previous generations. There may not be an attraction for antique products in their digital, disposable and decluttered lifestyle¹.

2. Discuss how modern malls have changed the concept of shopping experiences in urban India.

Suggested answer: (begin from the text in the case):

“Then we can spend rest of the day at a mall. Watching movie, eating, gaming and shopping-there is so much one can do at a mall! And that too in clean, air-conditioned space.”

(Further, discuss): Research shows that both the utilitarian and hedonic shopping values have positive significant influences on Indian mall customer’s satisfaction (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). In last few decades, the malls in India are evolving from mere retail space to an indulgence space for customers. The state-of-the-art malls are built with the latest architectural innovations. From interactive kiosks to disabled friendly washrooms and wheelchairs-the amenities at the malls offer a comfortable experience to visitors from all walks of life. The mall owners are going all out to cater to the evolving lifestyle preferences of middle-class which has witnessed higher disposable income in recent years. Most malls have expanded beyond being product shopping space as visitors perceive mall also as a space for social conversations and entertainment. The shops change their merchandise regularly to keep in-line with market trends. Food courts adhere to a variety of local and international cuisine. The promotion activities and events keep in touch with trends to attract more visitors. Sometimes, events also include another market space within the mall market space such as pop-up X-mas market and special farmer’s market. The organized events range from cultural experiences such as *“Cool Japan festival”* to culinary experiences such as *“Food Festival”*. Unlike flea markets that look frozen in time, the malls are constantly upgraded in novel ways to increase footfall.

3. Why does Chachaji doubt if shoppers will visit the third floor?

Suggested answer:

Chachaji probably is apprehensive as he is currently able to attract potential and leisure shoppers to his shop which has an entrance located at the street level. Shopping malls follow a lot of different psychological rules to increase footfall. Research by Yiu et al. (2008) revealed that malls allocate bigger shops and non-impulse trade tenants at upper floors. Chachaji is in the vintage furniture business. As this is not an essential lifestyle product, he could also be worried about losing shoppers who may not visit higher floors for retail experience.

4. Why does Ashok think that declaring *Hippie India Bazaar* as a heritage site can be an option?

Suggested answer:

The conversation has taken place at Chachaji's shop. Chachaji does not support relocation. The heritage sites are usually protected by law. Any redevelopment, renovation or restoration need special attention as the idea is to conserve the heritage as much as possible. Ashok probably feels that if *Hippie India Bazaar* is declared as a heritage site then it may not go for redevelopment and then Chachaji need not relocate. The Saint-Ouen Flea Market, the largest antique market and second-hand shop in the world, was recognized as a "Zone for the Protection of Architectural, Urban and Landscape Heritage (ZPPAUP)" in 2001 for its unusual ambiance and atmosphere².

5. Why do you think the scene reminded Ashok of the lyrics "*Positively 4th Street*" by Bob Dylan?

Suggested answer:

Refer to the following text in the case:

"The crinkled face, long beard cart-puller is sweaty and in a hurry. He is carrying an antique cupboard on his pushcart and struggling to maintain balance in the narrow lane. The bare-chested, barefoot cart-puller in scorching sun is in contrast with us-all of are dressed in cotton cloths, sandals, caps and sun-glasses. In that one spot, for a moment, the scene represented urban India in a nutshell."

It shows a stark contrast in socioeconomic status. The lyrics mention

"I wish that for just one time you could stand inside my shoes. You'd know what a drag it is to see you."

The cart-puller's wish for a better life is clear. His request for empathic concern offers a hint on how to find a solution for the dilemma posed in this case. Empathy is a key to successful management. In the research paper titled "*Ethnographic stories for market learning*", Cayla & Arnould (2013) mentioned that by working through the rich details of ethnographic stories infused with the tensions, contradictions and emotions of people's everyday lives, executives are better able to grasp the complexity of consumer cultures.

6. The dilemma question: Should Rahim Miya sign the relocation agreement or not?

Suggested approach:

There is usually no single correct answer to dilemma situations so one approach may be to divide the students into two groups and conduct a debate. The student's perspectives may change after the field-visit. So it is recommended to discuss the dilemma question in both sessions.

ENDNOTE

1. Retrieved from <https://www.fleamarketinsiders.com/millennials-collecting-antiques/> on April 1, 2019.
2. Retrieved from <http://www.marcheauxpuces-saintouen.com/3en.aspx> on April 1, 2019.

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