



Cooperative Education Report

Title: Developing a stale category in an e-commerce company in Nepal

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Title: Developing a state category in an e-commerce website in Nepal

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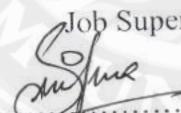
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Abstract

Sastodeal (P) Ltd. is one of the leading e-commerce companies in Nepal bagging in the ICT startup of the year award in 2016. Currently, it has over 140,000 active users and about 0.5 million active Facebook users. One of the major lacking sections of the company was that of Fashion category with low sales and GMV contribution. Fashion, being the biggest GMV and profit driving category in any e-commerce website, this was a concerning factor for the company. To look after this issue and work towards developing the category, I was assigned with the new category head.

During the internship period, the category was able to increase the GMV from NRs. 800,000 to NRs. 1,250,000. To grow the GMV from that to that, lot of hard work and determination was required. During this time, the major lessons learnt were the importance of planning and promotion, past sales study, understanding the market trends and customer needs, competitor analysis and better relationship with vendors and customers. As per the experience at the company, all those factors are required to develop a stale category in an e-commerce website in Nepal.

Nishad Man Sing Basnet

Keywords: *E-commerce/ category growth/ startup/ profit driver/ research*

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Also, I would like to thank Siam University and Kathmandu College of Management as they have developed such course where I was able to grow my theoretical and practical knowledge side by side and prepare myself for the corporate world.

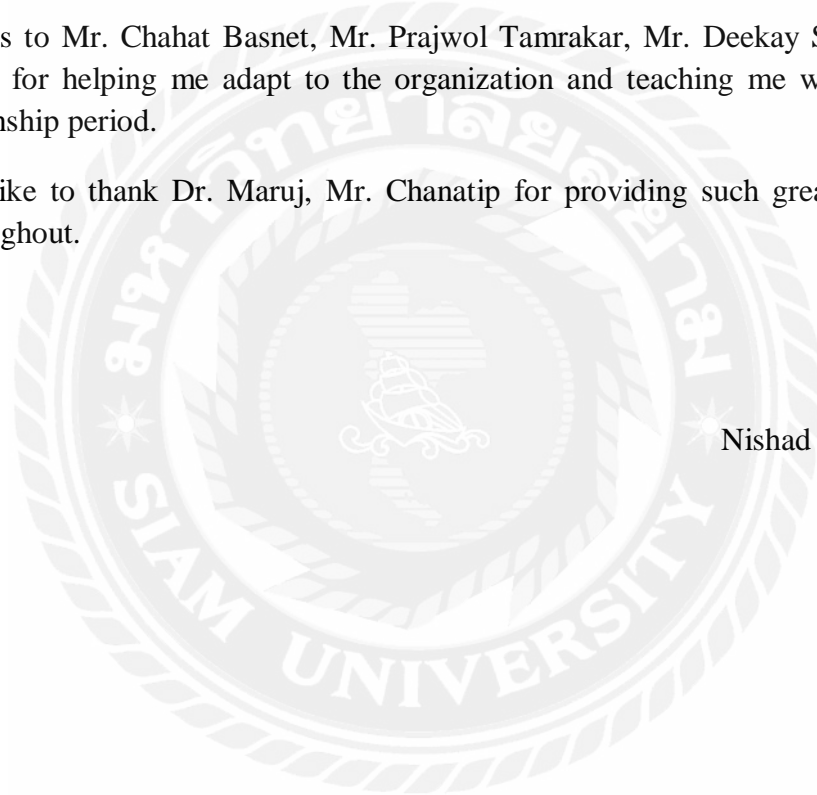
A sincere thanks to Mr. Chahat Basnet, Mr. Prajwol Tamrakar, Mr. Deekay Shrestha and Mr. Akshov Shakya for helping me adapt to the organization and teaching me with no hesitation during my internship period.

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Nishad Man Sing Basnet

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Company Profile

With the growing internet user base in Nepal, Sastodeal was founded in the year 2011 by Mr. Amun Thapa, Mr. Sodhan Manandhar and Mr. Subal Chitrakar.

Sastodeal is an online e-commerce website started with an aim of making it easy for customers to shop for the goods that they want within few clicks. Since its foundation, it has grown to become one of the leading e-commerce companies in Nepal, sitting in the position of number one e-commerce website for few years. Currently, sastodeal falls behind another international e-commerce player Daraz.com but is still the number one Nepali e-commerce website.

Since its establishment, SD has reached many milestones, with at least 140,000 active users and about 0.5 million active Facebook users. With the main aim of being a genuine brand selling only genuine products unlike other online stores, Sastodeal was also able to bag the ICT startup award in the year 2016.

Sastodeal provides a huge platform for its users as well as its working partners, also labeled as Vendors, by providing a platform for buying and selling goods and services. They have a huge category options with hundreds of products available for its customers. From fashion category to electronics to home and living category, they have a huge array of products lined up at the best rates in the country. The main aim of the company is to provide genuine products at the best rates for the customers.

Sastodeal currently caters to customers all over Nepal, delivering mostly for free inside the capital city Kathmandu and for a minimum charge outside the capital city. They have partnership with different courier companies that help the company to provide goods between 3 hours after order to 2 days.

Currently, the main board of directors and investors for the company is a renowned organization in Nepal; Teletalk (P) Ltd. There are about 25-30 employees and 5-10 college interns selflessly working for the betterment of the organization and working together to make the company the leading website in the country.

1.2 Organizational Structure

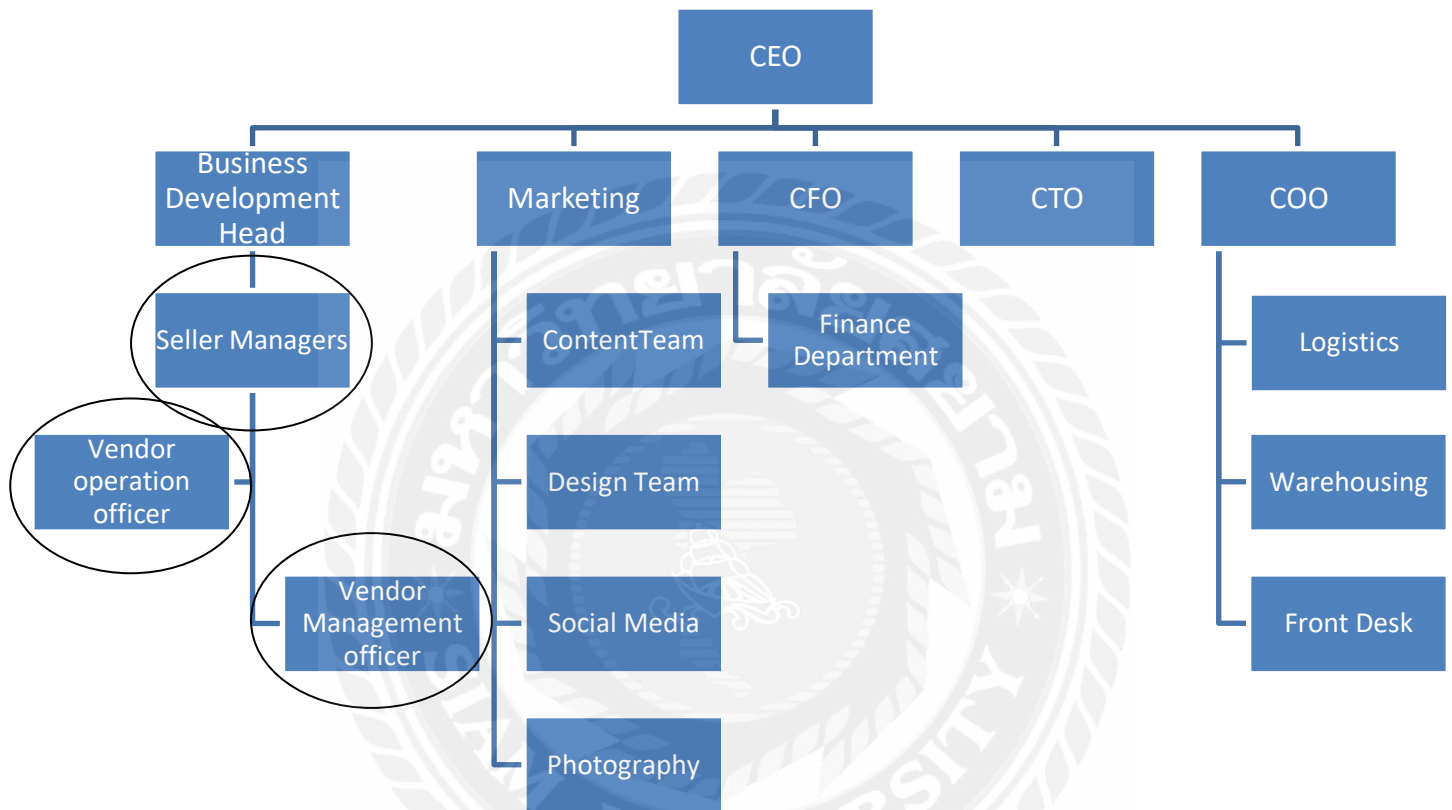


Figure 1: Organizational Structure

(The circled designations are the positions under which I had to work during the internship period.)

The organizational structure at sastodeal is generally as showed above. Even though the structure is as above, the company does not strictly follow the senior-subordinate relation. The layout of the organization is such that all the employees and the managers and heads work together in a room. People can easily go and talk to anyone, be it managers or organization heads.

In terms of structure, the overall company is looked after by the CEO. Under the CEO, different heads work together. COO, CFO, CTO, Marketing Manager and Business Development Manager work under the CEO. Each designation has different departments they look after.

Business Development manager looks after the Seller Managers, who are also labeled as the product team. There are different seller managers; electronics seller manager, fashion seller manager, home and living seller manager and so on. Each manager and its team members look after various vendors, vendor management and vendor relationship management along with bringing in new products and vendors.

The Marketing department looks after the content, designing, social media and photography along with marketing of the brand. They ensure timely promotion, content upload of different products, designing of posts for promotion, product photography and so on.

The Finance department is headed by the CFO. They look after all the finance related activities. The CTO looks after all the technical aspects of the website like coordination with the main software company, website ease and convenience and website management. The COO looks after the logistical aspects and customer call centre. Under the COO, logistics team operates; looking after timely bringing in and dispatching the products to the customers, the front desk operates; looking after the customer call centre. Warehousing is also looked after by the COO if some orders are pending and shifted for delivery for the next days.

1.3 Statement of the report

"Developing a stale category in an e-commerce company in Nepal"

The main statement of the report is how to develop a stale or non-growing category in an e-commerce website in Nepal. It highlights the ways used to tackle

the problem of growing sales of a particular category of an e-commerce website in Nepal.

1.4 Objectives of study

The main objectives of the study are to:

- Know how to develop and grow a non-developing e-commerce website category;
- Developing plans and actions for growing sales according to the customer wants.

1.5 Expected Outcomes

After the completion of the report, the main outcome that is expected is the ability to know how to develop and grow an e-commerce website category; be it growing or non-growing. Along with that, the ability to know when and how to make correct decision related to product introduction and promotion.

Apart from the outcomes based on the organization, other outcomes that are expected from the internship are to develop personal communication skill, the ability to work under pressure and effectively manage time and resources. Similarly, the knowledge about the industry, key players and competition in the market knowledge are also expected to develop. Properly understanding the industry practices are also expected as personal growth.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The major limitation of the study was the lack of time to decisively conclude on a solid strategy to be used to develop any category. The time period was not sufficient so as to say one solid outcome. The report does not give one final outcome that can be used for development, but talks generally about the steps that were taken for development which showed gradual improvement. One of the setbacks due to time limitation was that, the introductory time and orientation time to get along with the organization and its existing staff was a little bit high.

Thus, much time was utilized to get familiar with all. Hence, less time could be spent actually doing the given tasks.



Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review part basically outlines the different theories and practices that are taught or stated and are believed by many. This chapter looks after couple of theories and whether the stated facts are actually used practically. Initially, different theories that are believed will be stated and the next part would include how true that is and whether it is practiced.

E-commerce in Nepal is a growing trend. With the increase in internet users and rise of digitalization, more and more companies are registering under e-commerce category.

Traditionally, the people in Nepal are still said to be very traditional and still prefer traditional shopping; going to different stores and trying and purchasing. People are still hesitant to purchase any items online as there are high copies and knock-off products flooding the market.

Working in an e-commerce company, theoretically, many things were stated.

Promotional Prices attract customers and increase sales

As per a research by Islamia University in Pakistan (Islamia University, 2015), it stated that the majority of the people in Pakistan were attracted towards promotions and offers and lured them into buying from any e-commerce sites. It showed that, promotional pricing; the act of offering a lower price temporarily in order to enhance the effectiveness of product sales efforts to cost sensitive consumers (Business Dictionary; promotional pricing) can increase sales for a short period of time.

As per the research, it showed that, for an e-commerce website to increase sales and bring in more traffic, it can have short time offers like sales promotion to increase sales and GMV. Similarly, as per Mahsa (Familmaleki, 2015), the consumer behavior is greatly affected by sales promotion. The buying decision process along with the consumers buying behavior changes with the help of sales promotion positively.

The theory that promotional prices attract did hold true in Sastodeal as well. Till date of internship, one of the most prominent things that were easily observed was

the fact that, with promotional offers and reduced price, the number of queries and sales shot up till the campaign period and again shot down. People reacted to reduced prices and showed more interest in purchasing and with the help of good salesmanship, behavior can be easily provoked.

Short term sales can be increased through marketing

Ataman (Ataman, 2010), in his research stated that, the impact of marketing on sales is higher in short term. This means that the level of marketing inputs is positively correlated to the sales in short term. As per the authors research conducted in France, the result came that the sales can be increased if marketing is done properly.

Marketing may include pricing offers or creative promotion in various media sources. A simple promotion on social media can trigger sales and buying behavior. The fact that the customers purchase what they want can also be proved wrong. The items on promotion can greatly increase the customer's impulse buying behavior, resulting in them purchasing the products.

In Sastodeal as well, marketing efforts could be measured in terms of reach and conversion as well as cost to conversion rates. With the help of this, we could measure how effective the marketing effort was. For instance, shoes promotion was done highly in social media like Facebook. During the period of promotion, the number of orders would reach up to 35+ pairs (which is a high number for an e-commerce company in Nepal). When the promotion stopped, the number of orders would fall down to 20-25 pairs each day, regardless of the popularity and brand awareness.

Understanding consumer behavior can allow one to increase purchases

Understanding the consumer behavior can allow a company to know what to provide to the customers, at what price, at what place and how. All of the following understanding can thus increase the sales of the company as the customers get what they want at the best possible rates. In an article at ecommerce insiders, it stated that the consumer behavior of online customers is different than that of the offline customers as they behave in a different manner. (GRABOWSKI) As per a new behavior study approach by Ujwala Dange and Vinay Kimar; the FFF model, it states that the customers purchase any products

online after looking at various internal and external factors. After considering these factors, they then look at the filtering elements like trust, privacy to decide on whether or not to purchase. Post this step, they then look at the filtered buying motives and then make the purchase decision. (Vinay Kimar, 2012)



Chapter 3: Methodology

During the internship period, the department assigned was the product department, especially looking after the fashion team. The position offered was directly under the seller manager, working side by side the seller manager.

3.1 Roles and responsibilities assigned

- ***Seller Support:*** The main work to be done was working closely with the seller managers and developing various campaigns and activities and future plans to increase the sales of the department and increase the category GMV.
- ***Vendor Management:*** The responsibility of vendor manager was to identify and bring in more new vendors who can supply new products to the company at good rates. Along with bringing in new vendors, the vendor manager was also responsible for updating the current vendors and revising all the terms and agreements and updating the prices and products. The entire responsibility of growing the category or sub category is given to vendor managers.
- ***Vendor relationship manager:*** The responsibility of vendor relationship manager is to develop vendor-company relationship and develop good terms with them to secure good vendors.
- Responsible for timely product photo shoot of products under the fashion category. Coordinating with the photographer for timely, company standard photos.
- Developing various campaigns of fashion category for increasing the GMV of the category and also working closely with the marketing team to properly look after the promotion of different fashion products; knowing the reach and conversion and thus developing future marketing plans.

- Conducting a county-wide digital research to understand the customer behavior; their purchase behavior, needs and wants, top of mind brand recall and also their preferred online store.

One of the most crucial parts of working under the seller manager looking after the vendor management and vendor relationship management is that of bringing in new vendors and featuring their products. Timely and effective procedure is a must do in this department. The main process of identifying and bringing in new vendors were; vendor identification, personal meeting with the vendors, vendor screening, contract period, product photo-shoot (if needed), product upload and product promotion. Amongst these tasks, apart from that of product upload, all the responsibilities of doing those tasks were given to me. With proper coordination with the marketing team, all of the tasks were to be done.

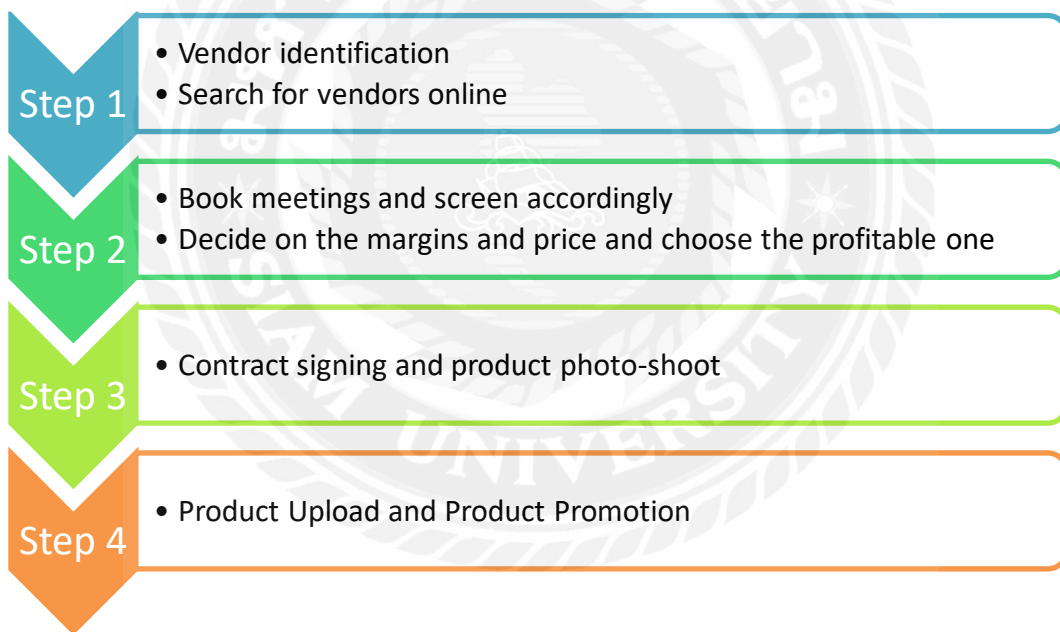
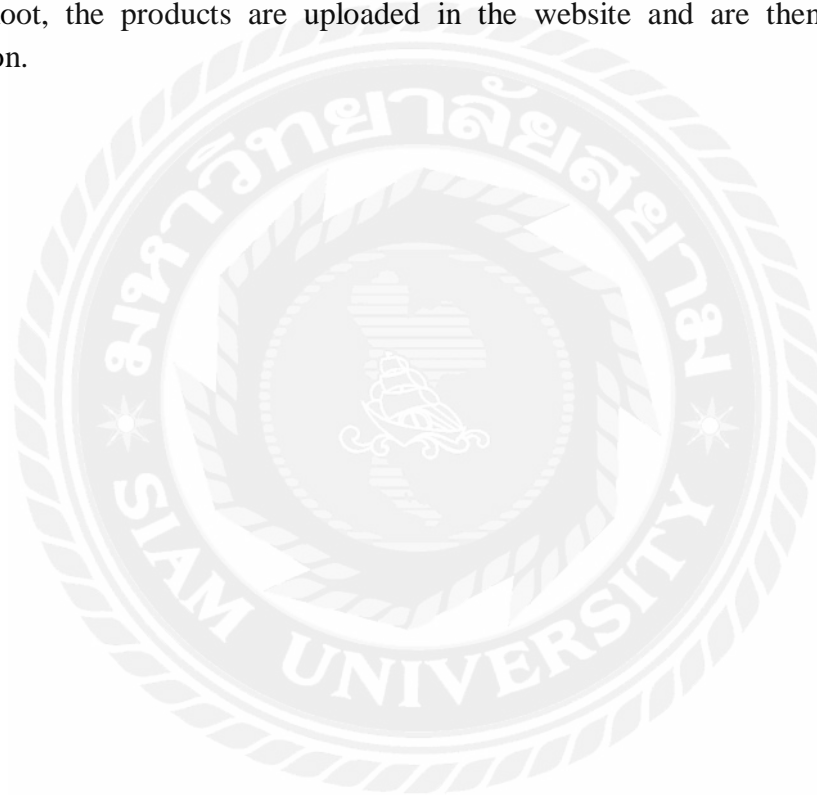


Figure 1 Vendor selection process

The first step was to identify the vendor's online selling similar product and contacting them initially to fix the meeting. Post this step, personal meeting was to be set up to discuss the terms and conditions and the pricing and commission margin. After that, the vendors giving the best deals were shortlisted and selected who sell the genuine products. The next step is signing the contracts and conducting the photo-shoot of their products to be featured in the website as well as for promotion in social media and Google ad words. After completion of the photo-shoot, the products are uploaded in the website and are then sent for promotion.



Chapter 4: Results and Findings

4.1 Contributions of student made during the internship

As per the work given by the supervisor, I was fully engaged doing those tasks. The major work given were handling the company's existing vendor base, finding new vendors and products, dealing with these vendors for the best prices and coordinating with the marketing team for designing various campaigns and plans. In order to do so, I had to travel to different parts of the valley and visit store to store or pre book an appointment with the owners of the brands and store. A formal meeting included mainly influencing and persuading the owners to feature their products. One of the major issues during this process was the fact that the country was still not digitalized for the people to understand the importance of e-commerce for increasing sales and overall profit.

Apart from these, I was also involved in one of the on-going project of company research. The research is basically to understand the consumer behavior along with their preferences, need and wants, top of mind analysis and brand recall analysis. In the research case, all the tasks; research design. Sample collection, outcome analysis, questionnaire design and recommendation were all done by me and my fellow classmate as well as colleague at the office Mr. Ajar Singh Basnet. All the tasks from developing the research design; finding the main research objectives and the required outcomes by consultation with the company heads and writing and scrutinizing the questions of the questionnaire. Since the project is still going on, the survey is yet to be done Nepal-wide and will be completed upon return to Nepal.

Along with these tasks, another major work that needed to be done during my internship period was designing various campaigns. For this purpose, I was responsible for designing all the plans and product and price listing with consultation with the respective vendors.

For campaign development, the first thing that needed to be done was identify the products that are to be featured in the campaign. This was decided based on whether the product listings were a strong category with SD, or attacking the competitor with a product that they do not have or have not featured in any campaigns, special occasion or festivals like World Cup, New Year etc. Each plan had a subsequent back up plan developed as well. While developing such

campaigns, the first thing after deciding on the products were listing it along with its new attractive offers and prices. Offers could be anything from mega discounts to free goodies or even a free trip to near destinations for two. Post listing the offers and prices, a business case was to be developed where past sales information along with its SM reach, conversion rate and set targets were stated. With the approval from the business development head, the campaign was launched.



Some Major Campaigns Done

Figure 1 Major campaigns conducted by me during the internship period

Furthermore, another thing that needed to be done during the internship was to constantly monitor the social media posts related to the fashion department. The responsibilities included would be to look after the customer comments and their feedbacks and their queries regarding the promoted products. This also included monitoring what they want and what they have to say about the product.

Similarly, another major contribution that I was able to make for the company was the introduction of various new vendors.

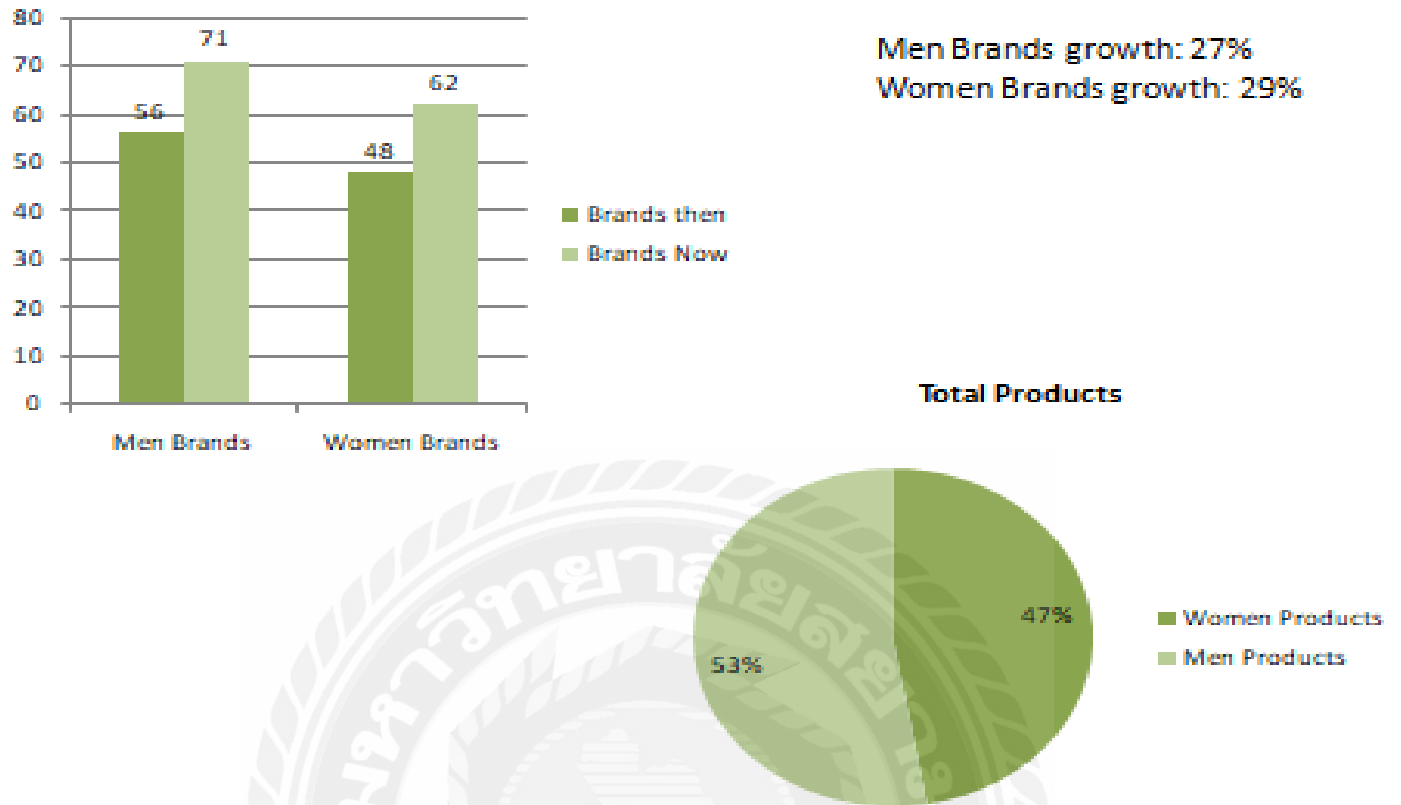


Figure 2: Before and after presentation of new vendors introduced

A total of 29 new vendors were introduced in the company by me and my supervisor in one month period out of which, 20 vendors were brought under my name.

All of the following were the major tasks that needed to be done during the internship period and all the hard work, time and dedication were given to under do all the mentioned tasks and contribute my best to the organization. While performing all the given tasks, the major contribution and the major benefit that I could be to the company was that, all the hard work had paid off with an increase in the monthly GMV from NRs 800,000 to NRs 1,250,000, which thus shows that the findings that are discussed to grow a stale category holds true.

4.2 How to develop a stale category in an e-commerce?

Objective	Methodology	Outcomes and Learning's
To develop a stale category of an e-commerce website	* Get deeper insights on the work process and know how things work; - <i>Seller Support</i> - <i>Vendor Management</i> - <i>Vendor Relationship Management</i> - <i>Nation-wide digital research</i>	1) Necessary things for development are; - <i>Promotion</i> - <i>Competitor Analysis</i> - <i>Past sales study</i> - <i>Understanding the current trends and needs</i> - <i>planning</i>
Design and develop plans and actions to grow the category	-Coordinate with marketing and operations department to check the feasibility -Develop business case to understand the product desirability and predict future sales potent.	- Team work is the key to success - Inter departmental coordination gives the best knowledge and feedback.

For an e-commerce to be successful, it needs to have proper plans and actions. Similarly, for an individual to complete its work properly, the must to do thing is plan and compare the outcomes. The major objective of the study was to know how to develop a stale e-commerce category and then to develop plans and actions as to how to grow and increase GMV. The first objective, to be fulfilled, one must know the deeper insights on how the things work in the company. Hence, the tasks assigned to me were perfect to know the insider information's and the back end side of the company. Similarly, in order to develop plans and actions, one of the most important factors were coordination with the other departments like marketing and operations. With coordination from them, perfect plans can be made as one can know the flaws and limitations of each plans and the feasibility as well. Also, with coordination from the marketing team, the business case developed allows one to know the past information regarding sales and accurate sales projections can be made.

In my three months (ongoing) internship at Sastodeal, many things were learnt and much new knowledge was gained. A different approach of looking at problems and competition was known and the ability to develop plans and actions was also known.

One of the main reasons for deciding on the title "Developing a stale category in an e-commerce company in Nepal" was because of the slow sales and product availability of the category I was looking after. The Fashion category, the most profitable and sellable in the world, was one of the least contributing category in terms of profit and GMV for the company. It was growing at a turtle's pace.

The major benefit that I gained from my internship period at Sastodeal was the responsibility to look after the fashion category along with a newly hired category head.

The major learning during my internship was on how to develop a slow and weak performing category. For such category, special attention is crucial. Every aspects and steps should be clearly and closely monitored as new things can be learnt every time. One of the major things that is required is the study of its past.

To know what should be done in the future, one must know how it was doing and performing in the past. A **quick study of its sales trend in the past few months**, the response rate and sales amount and units should be done. This allows one to know how the product was received by the customers before. We also get to know whether it is desired or not. For a category to grow, one thing that was learnt is that, what you feature should be acceptable by the market and should be desired. If non-desirable products are featured, the customers will never bother to even check the website, resulting in declined sales for other category as well.

Along with a quick study of the past trends, another thing to ensure growing sales is **identifying different products that are trending in the market**. It is crucial to know what is going in the market. Featuring trendy products will not only catch eyes, but also improves on the brand image, showing how the brand is working hard to know the needs and wants of customers and deliver it to them. Similarly, timing is another aspect that should be looked after in such category. A slow sale does not mean one brings different types of product and features it. One should know what to bring, when to feature it and how to promote it. Varied options for

customers to choose from means more website traffic, thus resulting to more sales.

Apart from these, another crucial aspect to look after for developing such category that I learnt from my internship was the importance of **planning and promotion**. A properly planned task prospers. One should always plan ahead on what they have to do and what they will do. A proper target for each step should be given along with the timeline. The expected outcomes should also be set ahead and should be monitored post event to know how successful it was. It is not only when you under achieve the target that you start looking for reasons of failure, even if the outcome was way higher than the set target, one should question itself on what went wrong with the plans.

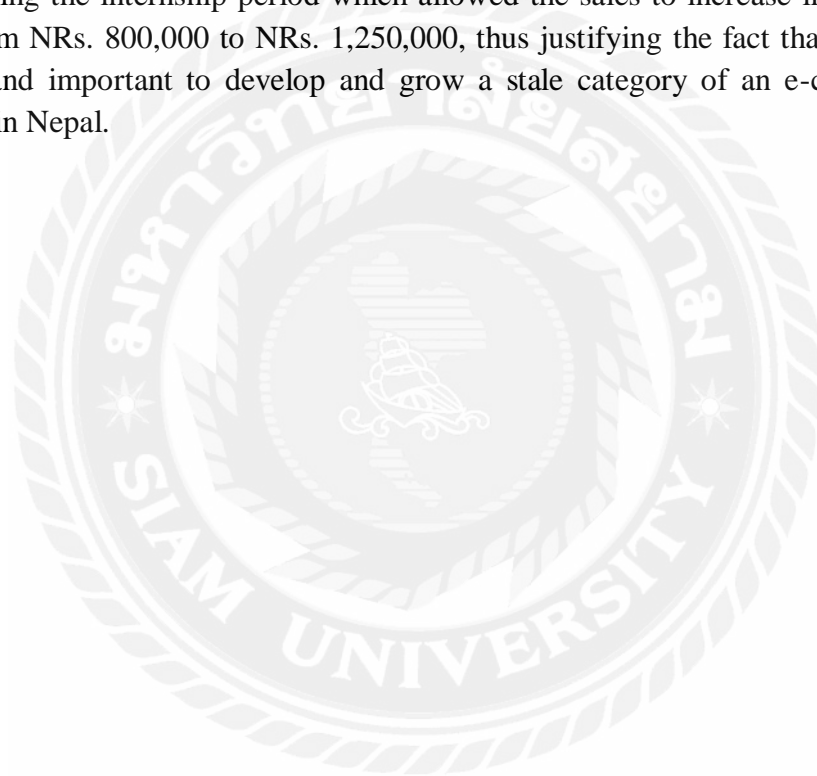
Promotion plays another crucial role. For an e-commerce website, promotion is the key to success. Correct promotion ensures higher sales. A haywire promotion will only deliver the offers to invalid and wrong customers. An effective targeting and selection criteria should be done to promote the products online. One should know the reach and conversion rate of the promotional tools and should allocate budget accordingly. Social Media, Google Ad-Words are key places for promotion and ensures effective reach which can increase the total sales or GMV.

Competitor analysis should always be done and for an employee who works for an e-commerce website, it is important that there should always be one tab with competitions website to know what they are doing. One of the most interesting and exciting thing in the office was while developing a particular campaign. The campaign was decided on various basis; customer needs, existing offer and varieties, competitors weak points. Looking after this, a business case was presented with all the facts and expectations and thus the campaign was launched. This allowed us to know the actual numbers and know what to expect. Learning to be one step ahead was crucial. There were always two-three backup plans ready to be implemented if something was to fail. This taught us that one should always be prepared for the unexpected as the digital world is a quickly changing place.

Another major influencing factor for developing a stale category is having a better **relationship with the customers and vendors**. A good company-customer relationship ensures that the customer retention ratio is good and word of mouth promotion is high. A good relationship with the vendors ensures that the trust

level between each other is high, thus the vendors tends to give better offers than to others. Better offers result in higher customer interest and that results to increased GMV.

In a glance, the major learning's that was learnt during the internship that can help boost sales of a dying company are; time and patience, effective planning and efficient promotion, past sales analysis, competitor analysis, being updated with the market and the customers, good relationship with customers and vendors. All of these steps can ensure the development of a stale category. All of these were used during the internship period which allowed the sales to increase in a month span from NRs. 800,000 to NRs. 1,250,000, thus justifying the fact that they are crucial and important to develop and grow a stale category of an e-commerce website in Nepal.



Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Self assessment as future professional

The internship at SD helped me grow as an individual. The ability to work under pressure and handle multiple clients was developed during my work period. All the assigned tasks and responsibilities have allowed me to do better task in the future date at any other corporate office. The work period has taught me many valuable lessons and tricks and techniques on doing different tasks and has also taught me to do any work better. Various information regarding different companies in the Nepalese market, their main contact person, different companies and their working mechanisms were also understood during my time at the organization. All of these contacts and connections allow me to do future things easily in terms of corporate tasks. Even if entrepreneurship is adopted or I have to work at some other office, these contacts can help me do work quicker and easily.

After working for 3 months, I was able to gain knowledge on different ways of handling clients, on performing planning, deciding on promotions and activities and developing new offers. The internship time has allowed me to develop my theoretical skills in terms of marketing and organizing. The heads of the organization have years of experience in their respective fields. They have developed themselves to be one of the best industry personnel and have come up with their own ideologies and work mechanisms. All those ideologies and advices as well as techniques of doing work were taught to us as well. This knowledge is a huge boost for my upcoming work tasks as it allows me do contribute something new and different as these practices are not known to everyone.

With the experience in terms of marketing and as a seller manager, it can really give a huge boost in my work experience in future. Apart from these, the ongoing research has also helped me groom myself into conducting a proper and systematic research. The contact of Mr. Nripendra, a top researcher in Nepal, can also serve me a great help in future needs. The knowledge passed down by him allowed me to learn and conduct a Nepal-wide research for such a big company. The research project has helped me know how to develop proper objectives, develop the correct set of questionnaires and its structure, when and where to place the questions and all. With the theoretical knowledge I have gained from the classroom courses of marketing and business research with the addition of the

practical experience, I can now apply and enter the research field and can develop my career as well.

5.2 Comparison of practical learning VS theory

The things studied in the classroom and what happens in the corporate world is very different. Some things might be same, but the techniques of doing things, the smallest of details that is required for grooming oneself, the experience and connections can all be developed only after working in an actual corporate office. What one studies in the classroom can all be learnt within a day in an office and more can be learnt with additional effort.

For an example, the business research was a subject that took almost 4 months to complete in a classroom. I was able to learn about all the steps required to conduct effective and efficient research from designing research design to questionnaire development and post result analysis. All of these things were used by me and my friend during the internship period. These things that took 4 months to learn were all taught and told to us within 15 minutes by one of the top research professional in Nepal. During the 1.5 hours of consultation with the professional on how to conduct the research, we were taught on how to funnel down the questions and expected outcomes along with developing research objectives.

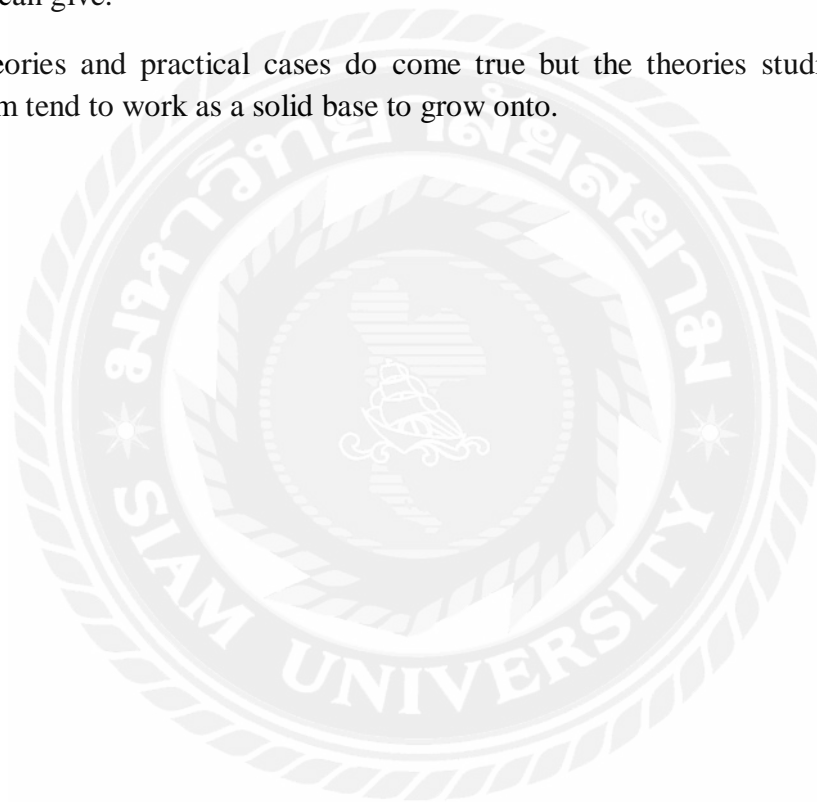
The lesson learned during the classroom tends to serve as a base stone for any individual. It allows one to know what something actually means, thus saving time to understand and take action. The classroom text allows one to understand the basics and understand quicker.

However, the things that one learns practically are way more effective and efficient. The books teaches us on how it is generally done and how it was done, but the practical experience teaches us on how things are done at the office and also teaches us to effectively and efficiently do tasks with minimal usage of existing resources. They teach us the updated corporate sector practices and information as well. All of this allows us to grow our knowledge and skills that cannot be learnt from theories. But the knowledge of theoretical learning is equally important to grow out knowledge from practical learning.

Some of the theoretical knowledge studied at the classroom also held very true while working at an actual office. Various theories studied like the fact that promotion ensures higher sales held true in practical case as well. While working

at the office, one of the most important and unforgettable fact was promotion of products as it ensured product visibility and customer reach. Another theory studied that held true was that the inter-department communication and good inter-department relation was important for company success. This held very true in practical case as well. This is so because; each department has their strengths and weaknesses and while developing any promotional offers and campaigns, each department can give their inputs regarding what all can they do and don't. This gives broader insights on the feasibility of any campaigns and extra benefits that one can give.

Such theories and practical cases do come true but the theories studied at the classroom tend to work as a solid base to grow onto.



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