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Lagom Kitchen + Brewery: A Quest for Survival

Sanjeev Pathak and Rajesh K. Pillania wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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On the evening of September 30, 2016, Debjeet Banerjee was standing in front of his newly opened microbrewery and restaurant on Sohna Road in Gurugram, India: Lagom Kitchen + Brewery (Lagom). The business was a dream come true for him, and Banerjee reflected on the journey he had taken since laying the foundations for Lagom. He had put a great deal of hard work, time, and money into this venture; over the past two years, Lagom had required an investment of US$1 million.[[1]](#footnote-1) Banerjee had not only built a world-class restaurant, but also hired the best possible team to run Lagom. This team comprised a highly experienced general manager, 10 specialty chefs, three front desk managers, and 20 service staff.

Banerjee had selected his restaurant’s name, “Lagom,” from a Swedish dictionary: it meant “just right”—not too much and not too little. True to its name, the quality of craft beer and food served in Lagom were of the highest class, boasting high-quality ingredients, perfect flavours, and innovative presentation (see Exhibits 1 and 2). Lagom had a German-manufactured microbrewery unit capable of producing three types of beer. With seating for 140 customers, the restaurant had a lively ambience with a state-of-the-art music system and a wide collection of albums. Lagom was situated in Gurugram, part of India’s National Capital Region (NCR), along with many business parks and malls. In fact, Lagom was at the centre of an information technology corporate park where more than 10,000 employees worked.

Upon opening Lagom, Banerjee had expected to recover his initial capital investment within three years. However, within only nine months of the restaurant’s opening, he had to revise this estimate to five years. He pondered the business environment changes since he had first started working on this venture. The growth of sales had been slower than he had anticipated. In light of the changing external environment, Banerjee wondered about various strategic options. Should he alter Lagom’s product offerings, or increase the price of the menu items? Should he increase the focus on corporate customers by undertaking exclusive tie-ups, or should he increase Lagom’s social marketing efforts to attract customers from nearby condominiums? Banerjee had only two weeks to act before the situation became critical.

THE Beer Industry in India

According to India’s 2011 census, the country was home to 1.2 billion people, and 50 per cent of India’s population was below the age of 25.[[2]](#footnote-2) In 2016, India’s estimated annual beer consumption was two litres per capita, compared to China’s 35 litres per capita. China had seen strong growth in beer consumption since 1995, but India had not seen much growth in this area.[[3]](#footnote-3) Beer consumption in India lagged behind the same in China for two reasons, politics and religion. Hinduism, India’s primary religion, as well as Islam and Jainism, other popular religions in India, discouraged alcohol consumption. Further, for political reasons, some Indian states (e.g., Bihar and Gujarat) had imposed an alcohol ban.

Despite these inhibiting factors, India’s large youth population still presented an opportunity in the beer market. As per one estimate, India’s beer market was nearly doubling every five years; 200 million cases of beer were sold in India in 2013, and 300 million were sold in 2015.[[4]](#footnote-4) These figures clearly indicated a high-growth pattern. If India’s per capita consumption grew by one litre, 400 new large breweries producing 1 million hectolitres would be required to meet this demand. Thus, India’s largely untapped potential made it a choice location for large breweries looking to expand.

There were three major beer companies operating in India: United Breweries Limited (UB), SABMiller, and the Carlsberg Group (Carlsberg). UB had more than 50 per cent of the market share, followed by SABMiller and then Carlsberg. Other major beer brands in India included Kingfisher, Hayward 5000, Corona, and Heineken.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Microbrewery Industry

Over the past few years, India’s beer industry had changed rapidly because of the introduction of craft beer and microbreweries. In India, a microbrewery was defined as a [brewery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brewery) that produced limited amounts of [beer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beer), typically consumed on its own premises; these operations were also called craft breweries. Microbreweries or craft breweries were known for their quality, freshness, and brewing techniques. In 2016, entrepreneur Greg Koch stated, “The cult around microbreweries and craft beer is growing. Once you have had this [craft beer], you will never have that yellow, fizzy, industrial stuff they call beer.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Since its inception in India in 2009, the microbrewery industry had witnessed unprecedented growth. Prior to 2009, only a few Indian states allowed licensing for microbreweries units, but the lucrative opportunity presented by the high-growth ecosystem led many to revisit their policies. While many states endorsed the microbrewery industry with favourable policies, states such as Gujarat, Bihar, and Kerala imposed bans on production and on alcohol sales despite the trend. At the same time, India was witnessing the cultural rise of weekend parties and eating out. In metropolitan cities, large numbers of people preferred to eat out during weekends, and even during the workweek. The culture around beer consumption was also changing: many women began showing an inclination towards beer and social drinking. Beer was considered safe to drink among youths, and craft beer was gaining popularity as a favourite drink for parties.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The wide availability and implementation of microbrewing technologies led many restaurants to install microbrewery units, and as a result, the market witnessed intensified competition. “The beer market is the fastest-growing alcohol segment in India by consumption and revenue change, especially with the entry of microbreweries about five years ago, and microbreweries’ growth is a result of the easy availability of technology from Europe and China,” said Banerjee in one interview.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The following factors may have accounted for the fast growth in microbreweries across India: the product was freshly made with excellent taste, and was considered less harmful to health than other alcoholic products; the culture around craft beer was growing, as many young people enjoyed it; and Indian consumers were experiencing an increase in disposable income.

The Microbrewery Industry: Outlook and Challenges

While the microbrewery industry was growing, microbreweries still faced many operational and external environmental challenges. Beer in India was highly taxed, and each state had a complicated tax structure.[[9]](#footnote-9) Additionally, there were stringent state liquor laws, licensing difficulties, high real estate costs, and a lack of skilled labour for the highly technical job of brewing—only three schools in India provided a degree in brewing technology.[[10]](#footnote-10) Training even a microbiologist student in brewing techniques took two years. Further, because of the high ingredient costs, craft beer was more expensive to make than bottled beer.

Demographically, metropolitan cities in India, such as Delhi and Gurugram, were best suited for the industry, as these cities were home to many young professionals with higher disposable incomes. According to estimates, India’s craft beer market was expected to reach $35 million in 2016.[[11]](#footnote-11) In Delhi NCR, four to five new microbreweries were opening every month.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The Microbrewing Process

Most consumers saw craft beer as an all-natural product that was made using four ingredients: [malt](http://food.ndtv.com/food-drinks/malt-makes-the-leap-from-brewing-to-pancakes-1272439), hops, yeast, and water. Commercial beers, in contrast, used sugar, maize, rice, and other adjuncts, along with [enzymes](http://food.ndtv.com/food-drinks/the-secret-to-great-craft-beer-its-the-malt-1271730) and preservatives, which some argued made it less healthy. Craft beer was also unfiltered, which left it with a higher protein content. Each type and style of craft beer had its own unique character. Ishan Grover, brewmaster at Lagom, explained, “There are four primary factors for judging the profile of a beer: appearance (colour, foam stabilization, and clarity), aroma, taste, and finish. One that is perfectly balanced and has all these characteristics is a beer you [will] enjoy drinking.” Microbrewing involved eight steps (see Exhibit 3). Though these steps were typically used in most microbrewery units, it was said that brewing was an art rather than a technique.

Microbrewery Unit Set-up: Licensing in India

Some Indian states had allowed licensing for microbrewery units: Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi, Haryana, and West Bengal. The excise commissioner of the Government of Delhi, Neeraj Semwal, stated, “We had allowed microbreweries at the airport a couple of years ago, but the concept didn’t take off. With the increase in disposable income and lifestyle changes, we have now extended the facility in the NCR where there are quite a few restaurants and pubs.” There were two types of licensing options; one was for serving fresh beer in a restaurant, and the other additionally allowed the bottling of fresh beer. Yet by 2016, only the Karnataka government had allowed the bottling licence.

Lagom Kitchen + Brewery

Lagom opened in March of 2016 on Sohna Road in Gurugram.[[13]](#footnote-13) The restaurant’s location was ideal, as it was situated at the centre of a corporate hub that served as the headquarters of many information technology companies. Among young consumers, Lagom was known as a good place for food and drinks. The restaurant offered three freshly brewed craft beer options: German Wheat, Fantastic Lager, and Dark Knight (see Exhibit 1).

The restaurant offered a relaxing fine dining experience that emphasized entertainment and a family atmosphere. Guests could spend a cheerful evening socializing, enjoying craft beer and delicious food, and listening to a live band. Lagom earned $15 revenue per customer (which was more revenue than its competitors earned), and each customer spent an average of $10 on craft beer and $5 on food and snacks (see Exhibits 4, 5, and 6).

According to India’s 2011 census, Gurugram, or Gurgaon, had a population of about 1.7 million people, and was one of the fastest-growing corporate cities in India.[[14]](#footnote-14) Many Fortune Global 500 companies were headquartered in Gurugram, and owing to high employment rates, income levels were increasing. MG Road, Sector 29, Sohna Road, and Cyber Hub were all key destinations in Gurugram for food and entertainment.

Marketing Strategy

Lagom had hired a dedicated marketing manager to create demand and promote its unique selling point. The company relied on social media as its main marketing platform, and it had received positive reviews on various review websites. Still, Lagom was unable to secure the required footfall to make the operation profitable.

Operation

Lagom had installed its microbrewery units in an area to one side of the restaurant, protected by a glass window so that customers could see the brewing process in action. On the opposite side of the restaurant was a bar, and a seating area filled the middle. Lagom also had space for private parties of up to 50 people. Overall, the company’s operations were divided into five parts: (1) craft beer production was managed by the operation manager, and the key responsibility of this department was to ensure the quality and production of the craft beer; (2) the cooking department was responsible for cooking various dishes served in the restaurant; (3) the purchasing department was responsible for buying all raw materials; (4) the marketing department was responsible for increasing footfall; and (5) the service department, which had the most employees, was responsible for handling customer interactions, and taking and delivering orders (see Exhibit 7).

Leadership Team

Lagom was founded by four partners: Banerjee, Rajdeep Mann, Sameer Gupta, and Prashant Barwala. Banerjee, the founder and chief executive officer of Lagom, had 15 years of experience in the hotel industry. The other founders were not actively involved in the business. Banerjee had worked with several top hotel brands, such as the Grand Hyatt, Taj Hotels, Shangri-La, and Park Hotels. He had immense experience in managing restaurants, and his passion for quality and innovation was evident at Lagom. Banerjee had initiated the new concept of turning the restaurant into a nightclub on Saturdays.

Gaurav Bhasin was Lagom’s general manager and a very experienced professional. He had 12 years of hospitality industry experience, and he had worked at renowned hotels in Delhi and NCR, including the Taj Palace, Hyatt Regency, The Imperial, and Leela Ambience hotels and resorts in Gurugram. Bhasin described Lagom’s appeal: “We have some regular customers who have a preference for our craft beer and some of the specialty food we serve. We also have very relaxing environment here to ensure that customers feel relaxed after a full day of work.”

Competition

The microbrewery Doolally was launched by two graduates of the Institute of Marketing & Management who had pioneered the microbrewery concept in India in 2009 and worked hard to lobby regulators to allow microbreweries to operate in the country.[[15]](#footnote-15) After running a microbrewery in Pune, they opened two Doolally outlets in Mumbai, at Bandra and Andheri.

Bangalore and Gurugram were the fastest-growing locations in India for microbreweries. In 2013, Gurugram had 10 microbreweries; by 2016, this number had grown to 33. Out of these, eight microbreweries were located on Sohna Road. Sohna Road was quickly becoming the top business destination in Gurugram because of the large availability of corporate space. Gurugram had three main areas for food and dining: Cyber Hub, Sector 29, and Sohna Road. Sohna Road, in particular, had many top microbreweries and restaurants, including the following firms, which posed significant competition for Lagom.

Torgauer Brewpub

Located at Raheja Mall on Sohna Road, Torgauer Brewpub (Torgauer) was the 10th microbrewery in Gurugram.[[16]](#footnote-16) It was a popular destination in Gurugram for beer lovers. Torgauer had European-made microbrewery equipment and offered four types of beer. Raheja Mall contained Grand Cinemas and restaurants that attracted good footfall, and Torgauer offered discounts and commercial tie-ups to further increase footfall. There was increased footfall from younger customers on weekends because, according to the restaurant’s manager, they enjoyed the freshly made beer. Torgauer also had a branch in Chandigarh, North India.

Open Tap

Open Tap was another popular microbrewery on Sohna Road in Gurugram. It had seven branches, and the Sohna Road branch was located at Vatika Business Park, one of the corporate hubs there. The company was especially popular among families because of its high-quality food. The microbrewery, which used a Chinese microbrewery unit for brewing, served three types of craft beer, and at times offered live music. Open Tap had positive reviews on social media. Open Tap’s manager said, “People come to Open Tap for good-quality food and music.”

Fortune Select Global

Fortune Select Global was a five-star hotel situated on Sohna Road. Due to the popularity of craft beer, the hotel had installed a microbrewery unit in its hotel café so that it could serve fresh beer to its guests. The café was known for its weekend offerings. Its marketing strategy focused on attracting families.

What next?

In light of all of its competitors, Lagom was facing an uphill battle. Banerjee was exploring various strategic options to increase Lagom’s footfall in order to beat the competition and achieve a return on his investment within his original timeline of three years. He had asked Bhasin to present a detailed growth plan within the next two weeks.

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Exhibit 1: Lagom Craft Beer Menu (INR)

**Lagom Beer Types**

**German Wheat**

A traditional wheat beer originating from Germany with a refreshing and distinctive flavour of banana and clove.

*Pint (330mL) 80*

*Mug (500mL) 150*

*Pitcher (1.5L) 415*

*Tower (3L) 795*

**Fantastic Lager**

A light-bodied lager with high notes of malt brewed according to German purity laws; its unique malt flavour will leave a long-lasting flavour on the palate.

*Pint (330mL) 80*

*Mug (500mL) 150*

*Pitcher (1.5L) 415*

*Tower (3L) 795*

**Dark Knight**

As the name suggests, a beer dark in colour mixed with special German chocolate malt; a heavy-bodied beer that leaves a hint of roasted malt.

*Pint (330mL) 80*

*Mug (500mL) 150*

*Pitcher (1.5L) 415*

*Tower (3L) 795*

Source: Company materials; Vishnu Makhijani, “Swedish Lagom May Be ‘Just Right’ for Sophisticated Palate (Foodie Trail Gurgaon),” *Business Standard*, March 16, 2016, accessed November 15, 2016, www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/swedish-lagom-may-be-just-right-for-sophisticated-palate-foodie-trail-gurgaon-116031600391\_1.html.

Exhibit 2: Lagom Menu (Select Items) (INR)

European Appetizers:

**Vegetarian**

Onion rings, breaded deep fried onion rings, barbeque sauce 295

Loaded cheese fries, French fries, mozzarella cheese, ranch sauce 345

Crispy cigars, mashed potato, cheddar cheese, sweet cabbage, wasabi mayo 345

Mount view nachos, crispy nachos, cheese, pico de gallo, salsa 345

**Non-Vegetarian**

Scotch egg, boiled egg, potato, mutton mince, bread crumb, chilli garlic mayo 295

Loaded cheese fries, bacon or chicken or Keema, ranch sauce 375

Corn flakes chicken, breaded chicken strips, garlic mayo 395

JD Wings, roasted chicken wings, Jack Daniels barbeque sauce 395

Panko crumbed chicken, breaded chicken strips, tartar sauce 395

Ginger chicken, chicken strips, pancake crumb, ginger juice, honey, ginger mayo 395

**From the Tandoor**

Malai broccoli, drained yoghurt, fresh cream, cashew paste, mace, cardamom 325

Paneer tikka, drained yoghurt, turmeric, ginger, garlic 325

Paneer crispy palak, cottage cheese, drained yoghurt, cream, cashew nut paste, hara masala,

crispy spinach 325

Dahi ke kebab, drained yoghurt, chickpea flour, ginger, green chilli, coriander 325

Hara bhara kebab, green peas, spinach, potato, coriander, fresh chilli, spices 325

Khumbawe ki seekh, mushroom, paneer, khoya, coriander, fresh chilli, spices 325

Veg kebab platter, malai broccoli, paneer tikka, khumbawe ki seekh, dahi ke kebab 695

Surkh murgh, chicken cubes, drained yoghurt, kashmiri chilli, ginger, green chilli 395

Murgh jalandhari, chicken, drained yoghurt, cream, kashmiri chilli, fresh coriander 395

Murgh kali mirch, chicken cubes, cashew paste, cream, cheese, crushed black pepper 395

Murgh malai tikka, chicken cubes, cashew paste, cream, cheese, mace, cardamom 395

Galouti kebab, mince lamb, cashew paste, brown onions, Indian spices 395

Shikampuri kebab, mince lamb, cardamom, cloves, coriander, mint, green chilli, pepper 425

Mutton burra kebab, Lamb chop, raw papaya, mustard oil, nutmeg, garam masala 425

Kalmi kebab, chicken leg, hung curd, cashew paste, yellow chilli, degi mirch 425

Hare masala ki seekh, mutton mince, degi mirch, green chilli, fresh coriander, mint 425

Amritsari fish, fried bassa, ajwain, rice and ground flour, green chilli, coriander 395

Kasundi fish tikka, marinated sole, mustard paste, ginger, garlic, mustard oil 425

Nimbu ajwaini fish tikka, yoghurt, carom, turmeric, lemon juice, ginger, garlic 425

Pomfret, drained yoghurt, degi mirch, ginger, garlic, garam masala 475

Non-veg kebab platter, murgh malai tikka, mutton seekh, tandoori chicken, fish tikka 795

Source: Company materials.

Exhibit 3: THE Microbrewing Process

**Milling**

Whole-malted grain is milled (portioned and cracked) to allow it to absorb water. This in turn helps to extract sugars from the malt.

**Brew Water Preparation**

Large copper tanks are used to delicately prepare and store treated hot and cold water, which are essential components in the later stages of the brewing process.

**Mashing**

The milled grain is then added to hot water, where it is mashed and steeped to extract the soluble goodness from the grain and create the character of the beer.

**Wort Boiling**

The mashed liquid is then transferred to the second copper tank, where the spent grain is filtered from the still-hot liquid to obtain the wort. Here, hops are added to the wort, and it is boiled further.

**Cooling**

The wort, once brewed, is cooled rapidly to the ideal fermentation temperature (16–22 degrees Celsius). The cold water that was prepared and stored earlier is used as a coolant in this process.

**Fermentation**

The cooled wort is transferred into a sterile fermenter filled with fresh yeast. The yeast cells quickly metabolize the sugars into alcohol, natural carbon dioxide, and flavour esters, transforming the wort into beer.

**Conditioning**

The beer is filtered from the yeast and transferred to the serving tanks, where it is conditioned for a couple of days to achieve flavour improvisation and the optimum level of carbonation.

**Finished Beer**

About 60 days after the start of the conditioning process, the beer is ready to be served. Ideally, it should be consumed at seven degrees Celsius.

Source: Company materials; Anushree Basu-Bhalla, “In Pursuit of Happiness,” *Business Today*, December 23, 2012, accessed December 2, 2016, www.businesstoday.in/magazine/bt-more/food/the-story-of-the-indian-microbrewing-industry/story/190231.html.

Exhibit 4: Lagom Sales (Revenue) (US$)

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 5: Lagom Cost Details

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Cost Detail** | **Cost in US$** |
| **Fixed Costs (one time)** | |  |
|  | Microbrewery Equipment | 410,448 |
|  | Kitchen Equipment | 186,567 |
|  | Air Conditioners | 29,851 |
|  | Licensing Costs | 7,463 |
|  | Music System and Televisions | 29,851 |
|  | Furniture | 74,627 |
| **Operational Expenses (per year)** |  |  |
|  | Staffing | 179,104 |
|  | Rent and Electricity | 74,627 |
|  | Licence Renewal Fee (every second year) | 7,463 |
|  | Maintenance | 8,955 |

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 6: Profits and Losses (in US$)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Jan** | **Feb** | **Mar** | **Apr** | **May** | **Jun** | **Jul** | **Aug** | **Sep** |
| Sales | 14,925 | 22,388 | 29,851 | 37,313 | 44,776 | 41,791 | 44,776 | 44,776 | 47,761 |
| Raw Material Costs | 5,970 | 10,448 | 13,433 | 16,418 | 20,896 | 19,403 | 22,388 | 23,881 | 25,373 |
| Variable Gross Margin | 8,955 | 11,940 | 16,418 | 20,896 | 23,881 | 22,388 | 22,388 | 20,896 | 22,388 |
| Operation Costs | 21,891 | 21,891 | 21,891 | 21,891 | 21,891 | 21,891 | 21,891 | 21,891 | 21,891 |
| Gross Margin | −12,935 | −9,950 | −5,473 | −995 | 1,990 | 498 | 498 | −995 | 498 |
| Interest Costs | 6,157 | 6,157 | 6,157 | 6,157 | 6,157 | 6,157 | 6,157 | 6,157 | 6,157 |
| Earnings after Interest | −19,092 | −16,107 | −11,629 | −7,152 | −4,167 | −5,659 | −5,659 | −7,152 | −5,659 |

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 7: LAGOM Organizational Chart

Founder and Chief Executive Officer

General Manager

Marketing Manager

Service Manager

Production Manager

Head Chef

Procurement Manager

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 8: Analysis of LAGOM AND ITs COMPETITORS

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Lagom Kitchen + Brewery** | **Open Tap** | **Torgauer Brewpub** | **Fortune Select Global** |
| **Food Quality/Cuisine** | Very good Indian, intercontinental, Chinese, Mexican food | Very good, known for its Chinese food | Very good North Indian food | Very good Indian and intercontinental food |
| **Beer Quality/Types** | Very good, three types | Three types | Very good, four types | Good |
| **Seating Capacity** | 140 | 100 | 100 | 120 |
| **Ambience** | Very good | Excellent (inside a corporate hub) | Excellent (inside a shopping mall) | Very good |
| **Social Media Presence** | Excellent | Good | Very good | Good |
| **Music** | Excellent | Excellent | Good | Mild |
| **Marketing Strategy** | Social marketing | Word of mouth | Social marketing | Offer to nearby condominium residents |
| **Professional Attitude** | Excellent, five-star hotel | Good | Good | Excellent |

Source: Created by the authors.

1. All currency amounts are in US$ unless otherwise specified; US$1 = ₹66.35 on September 30, 2016; ₹ = INR = Indian rupee. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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