



EMAHILA, A DIGITAL PLATFORM PROMOTING UPLIFTMENT OF FEMALE SELF HELP GROUPS (SHG) ACROSS THE NATION- A NOVEL INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: The eMahila is a novel online platform that facilitates various corporate institutions and the governments to expand their reach and distribute quantifiable help to over nearly 7 crores of 'Self Help' groups across the state. In this manuscript, the authors discuss the stellar role of the eMahila digital portal that promotes and uplifts the Female Self-help groups across the nation. The eMahila is a meticulously designed and scientifically built platform that combines three factors namely, e-learning, online collaboration and e-commerce. Amtex Systems is a multi-national certified minority business enterprise that provides a highly specialized technology in Software Development & Information. Amtex Systems was instrumental in associating with the Government of Tamil Nadu in enabling eMahila, the country's first digital platform to empower women SHG. As a fresh intern, as this was my first internship experience, I entered the company with huge aspirations and ambitions. As I wanted to try my skills at product development, the components that were initially given to me were content writing and poster creation. The eMahila was a beautiful concept conceived by Amtex Systems, with the sole aim to uplift women from low socio-economic status and make them self-reliant. I could involve myself in writing the content, creating posters and images, helping promote awareness amongst the public. The internship gave me an opening to explore what a future career in business marketing would be like. Overall, it was a nice and useful learning curve.

Keywords: Amtex systems , eMahila, internship, self help group, digital platform

I. INTRODUCTION

Summer internships and work placements that are carefully selected and monitored provide a fathomless learning experience for engineering students. The actual hands-on familiarity that the students get as interns, enriches them with the much needed real-time experience, that in turn augments the academic knowledge they get from their institution. Coco describes such voluntary work placements as a win-win situation for both the internee and the employer [Coco, 2000]. Internships not only help those students to gain practical experience but also facilitate the employer to make a first-hand assessment of the candidate. Later on, it becomes easier for the employer to pick out the best amongst the internees, who would suit their company profile and aim at a long-term association with the firm. Internship experience that is shared with others also helps the internee to revisit the company and paves way for a platform to assess whether he/she can have a long-term association with that company. In this manuscript, the internee discusses the experiences about her internship experience, the merits of choosing the type of internship that closely relates to her future career and also an overview of the details of the internship that she had undergone. Various studies have shown that students graduating with internship experiences have a higher probability to find employment upon graduation than those without any such experience [Callahan, Gault]. The other advantage of such internship experience is that these interns stand a better chance of employment even before the completion of their undergraduate courses [Knouse& Fontenot (2008)].

II. THE CONCEPT OF EMAHILA

The eMahila is a novel online platform that facilitates various corporate institutions and the governments to expand their reach and distribute quantifiable help to over 6.8crores 'Self Help' groups across the state. This Government of Tamil Nadu (GOT) introduced this novel concept as a digital transformation initiative. It comprises of a technology platform that is supported with mobile phones that are tailor-made for usage by the Self-Help Groups (SHG). The eMahila functions as a one-stop-solution for the day to day needs of the SHG community. This digital transformation not only benefits the community but also saves a lot of time and resources.

eMahila is a meticulously designed and scientifically built platform that combines three factors namely, e-learning, online collaboration and e-commerce. Fig 1 illustrates the role of eMahila in achieving their goal and also illustrates its various functional components.



Fig 1: Functional components of eMahila

The three major components of eMahila are eMahila e-learning, Mahila Bazaar and Mahila Money. While the Mahila bazaar provides e-commerce support, that allows trading of raw materials and the finished products through an online portal, the Mahila money makes a useful contribution in the form of financial support through microfinance. There is also an e-learning platform that helps in providing skill training and upgrades to women in SHG. All three components put together is an eco-system where one can look at the overall growth of the SHG member and household. The bazaar facilitates the distribution of the finished product amongst SHG women and also creates a favourable environment needed for wholesale/retail transactions. The main advantage is that the hassle of finding buyers is grossly eliminated. The promotion of sales through online portal greatly facilitates the monetary growth and makes the women more self-reliant. Mahila money is a novel concept where the SHG can borrow money from bankers by the digitized credit linkage process. Mahila wallet ensures that the SHG women make good use of the money lent to them.

III. ROLE OF EMAHILA IN SHG PROMOTION

The success or failure of SHG depends on multiple factors. The major ones include lack of support and guidance, inability to sell products, and lack of timely finance. The eMahila aims to fill these gaps with the power of technology. By enabling the SHGs to sell online, eMahila accelerates the Government's efforts by use of newer technology like artificial intelligence, machine learning and predictive analytics. It functions as a digital platform that enables empowerment from 3 angles, namely digital, Financial and Social empowerment.

eMahila actively involves various banks and microfinance institutions to take part in their portal. This enables them to streamline the verification process. Mahila Money allows for an e-banking approach to money management and allows women to freely transact within the eMahila ecosystem [Keshava, Rajendran].

The eMahila offers multiple courses related to Dairy, Catering, Embroidery, Handicrafts, Tailoring, weaving and many more. Many prominent universities come forward to offer incentives to make these SHG women get certified themselves in their chosen stream. Digitalized Capacity Building Programmes (CBP) motivate and help SHG women to improve their business strategies and financial management skills.

IV. ROLE OF AMTEX SYSTEMS IN EMAHILA PROJECTS

Amtex Systems is a multi-national certified minority business enterprise that provides a highly specialized technology in Software Development & Information. Amtex is ranked amongst the top 4 private companies in New York City of the United States for content management solutions and business intelligence. Their vision is to create lifestyle enhancing businesses by leveraging their expertise in Business Intelligence, Data Analytics, Big Data and Digital Media.

Amtex Systems was instrumental in associating with the Government of Tamil Nadu in enabling eMahila, the country's first digital platform to empower women SHG. Amtex systems offered various internships to the engineering students and utilised their services in the application of various cutting edge technologies such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), Machine learning, deep learning, and cognitive Artificial Intelligence to achieve their goal. All the theoretical knowledge in the fields of Machine learning was applied by the internees and it was a great 'Real Time' experience for all the interns.

V. ROLE OF STATE GOVERNMENT IN EMAHILA SCHEMES

Tamil Nadu has been the front runner in Self Help Group movements from 1991 onwards. During the period 1991-92, NABARD launched more than 90 pilot projects on linking SHGs with Banks, in various parts of the country [Ramanujam]. The then Chief Minister of the state, being a woman herself, had largely believed that the actual growth of the state largely depended on the empowerment of women and was convinced that SHGs was a very effective tool in poverty removal.

The state government through one of its wings, the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of women (TNCDW), introduced a programme called, 'Mahalir Thittam' (MaThi) –and this gave a massive impetus to the movement [Seilan]. The TNCDW has been

functioning with the primary objective of bringing about women empowerment and their socio-economic progress. For better coordination in implementing various schemes for Self Help Groups, TNCDW was brought under Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department from July 2006 [Nagaraj].

The TNCDW mainly concentrated on educating and training the SHGs to function as a group. They encouraged regular meetings and cultivated savings habit. The SHG members were also motivated to go for self-employment [Hemavathy].

Suprabha emphasises that the main focus of microfinance should be to empower the SHG members to undertake income-generating microenterprises, on a sustainable basis [Suprabha].

VI. MY POSITION AS AN INTERN AND RESPONSIBILITY

Today young professionals are making impressive strides in the field of digital marketing. If one needs to have a strong desire to hone their skills, an internship is an effective way to accomplish their goals. Digital marketing internship can provide hands-on experience that one needs to gain a better understanding of content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO) and website development. An internship can also help one build a wider network of professional contacts.

During my short tenure at Amtex systems, I was fortunate enough to get enough first-hand experience. I initially learned about what goes into a project, the process of how a project is planned, developed and completed. Another valuable lesson I have learned during my stay was the many different types of work a software engineer has to perform, which in turn provided me with more insight into the various roles and responsibilities that I could perform tomorrow as a Software Engineer. The work that I had to perform varied day-to-day depending on what level of progress was achieved in the project. This allowed me to understand a bit more about the company and I felt like I had contributed my part into the growth of that company.

As a fresh intern, as this was my first internship experience, I entered the company with huge aspirations and ambitions. As I was a Computer Science Engineering student, the jobs allocated were either coding or product development. Coding is something that every computer undergraduate must be exposed to, in their regular academics as well, and that was the reason why I thought I try my skills at something different. My mentor and guide convinced me to have a try at Product development. Since I had an interest in the management field, I thought it was a great opportunity to hone my skills in this new domain.

The components of product development that were given to me were content writing and poster creation. As the current ongoing project was about the digitalisation of the Female Self Help groups, I got attracted towards women empowerment. The eMahila was a beautiful concept conceived by Amtex Systems, with the sole aim to uplift women from low socio-economic status and make them self-reliant. I could involve myself in writing the content, creating posters and images, helping promote awareness amongst the public. Social media Marketing was yet another upcoming domain that, I felt had a tremendous future. I involved myself in promoting awareness amongst common men and women in the form of posters, short videos and take-home message clips through Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

A popular quote by Confucius at around 450 B.C. that highlights the need for active engagement and real-time experiences in learning goes like this: "Tell me, and I will forget, show me, and I may remember, Involve me, and I will understand". The onsite experience from Amtex Systems indeed helped me immensely in getting that 'Real-Time experience' that everyone talked about.

VII. SKILLS LEARNED

Kolb's experiential learning style theory is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle in which the learner touches all the bases [Healy]. Fig 2 depicts a pictorial illustration of the experiential learning theorist David Kolb, who explains how interns learn from experience.

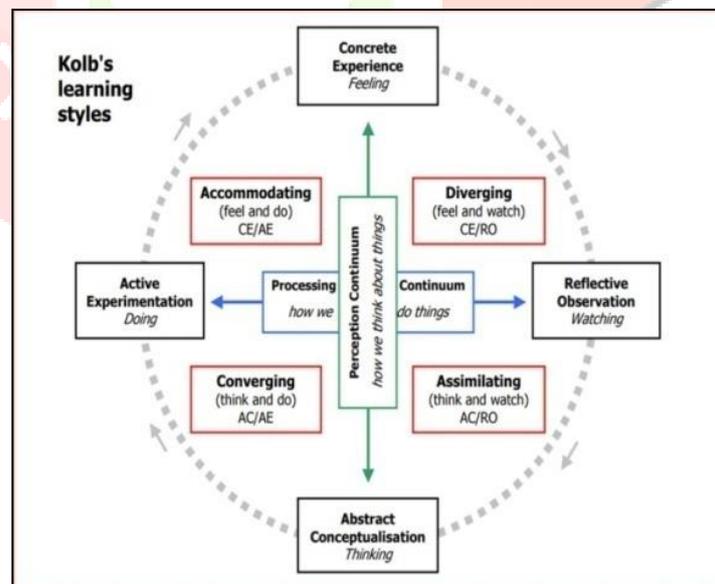


Fig 2: Kolb's experiential learning style

The first thing I learnt in digital marketing was that one must possess some basic knowledge of social media platforms, Adobe Photoshop, and content management systems such as Word Press. The other skills acquired were verbal and written communication skills, organization skills, and prioritization skills. As I had to work with other team members on certain tasks and projects, I needed that ability to work collaboratively across various teams and all levels of staff. I also had to work on several different assignments at the same time. Multitasking was found essential when working in a high demand field like digital marketing.

In addition to building experience in my field, experience in digital marketing allowed me to create a portfolio that will impress future employers. Having hands-on documentation of my internship experience may make my resume much more impressive on any job application.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The digital marketing internship enabled me to gain first-hand exposure to working in the real world. It also allowed me to sharpen the skill, knowledge, and theoretical practice that I learnt in my university. The great thing about this internship is that it taught me about those subtle nuances in digital marketing. Even the experience of trying something new was extremely beneficial. It exposed me to new people in a more controlled and stable environment. The internship gave me an opening to explore what a future career in business marketing would be like. Overall, it was a nice and useful learning curve.

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