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Facilitating the Self-Made: Utilization of Social Media for Fostering Women Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

As Digital Media takes center stage in every domain of life, it is essential to understand its implications to utilize it better. Unlike Electronic and Print Media, Digital Media is truly democratic as it allows people to exchange ideas, goods, and services without hassles. For this reason, social media is widely used by the masses for expressing their creativity and art. There is a commercial aspect to this as well. The scope of conducting and promoting one's creativity and monetizing it to create a small business can't be found on any other media platforms as these platforms indulge in a top-down and not bottom-up approach. In this regard, the researcher attempts to study the potential of Facebook, the largest social media platform, in promoting the small-scale business of Women Entrepreneurs. For this purpose, secondary data from the validated sources have been considered along with the in-depth interviews to elicit responses on various aspects such as business details, revenue generation, promotional endeavors, challenges, and motivation. The analysis indicates the increasing rate of women-centric entrepreneurship activities that can open up ways for further developments, while women entrepreneurs are yet to explore the full benefits and potentialities of Facebook to promote and expand their businesses.

Keywords: *Women Entrepreneurs, Facebook, Business, Digital Media, Marketplace, Promotion*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship signifies the dynamism of an economic system, which is often reflected in the liberalization and globalization of the economy. Along with the men who have undoubtedly contributed to the growth and development of illustrious organizations, women entrepreneurs on various scales have also set exemplary business organizations that have contributed to the

financial escalation of the nation. The recorded history of Indian entrepreneurship dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization when entrepreneurial activities were primarily restricted to trade practices across human establishments. Similar trading activities occurred during the copper age in the Indus Valley Civilization, northern Iran, and Turkmenistan (3200-2600 BCE approx.). The trading materials were seals, pottery, ornaments, figurines, etc. Some archeological evidence suggests strong trading possibilities between Iranian countries and Central Asia during the Harappa and Mesopotamian civilizations (T. Swetha, 2013). Modern India has witnessed the inception of entrepreneurship right from the eighteen-fifties when factories were set up by individuals like Thomas Parry to run his tannery business in the southern part of India. Another daring attempt was made in the early eighteen hundred to establish the iron plan again in the same region of India.

The Initial entrepreneurship activities primarily originated in foreign lands that came to India for a large and unexplored market; the latter part of Indian history saw Indian investors setting up their cotton and textile industry firms, giving tough competition to foreign competitors. The factory system in India was first recorded in its application in textile industries, followed by several other sectors like tea, coal, and papers, which encouraged Indian entrepreneurs to take an interest and bring more investments into the industry. According to Phiroze B. Medhora, the development of Indian entrepreneurs can be segregated into multiple phases. The first half of the nineteenth century provided a favorable environment for Indian entrepreneurs that were instrumental to the growth of Indian business people, which is considered the first wave. However, they faced a series of challenges, including the dearth of skilled laborers, setting up the proper facilities, etc. During the second wave of development, a few major industries like sugar and cement were set up that required massive investments. For example, in 1875, a sugar factory was set up in Kolkata because the steady supply of raw materials from the favorable irrigation facilities around Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In 1912, TATA erected a cement factory, a prominent example of a large-scale factory from the era. After the Second World War, the planning era helped shape the current stage of entrepreneurial development while pushing the development further (Medhora, 1965).

Entrepreneurship in India and West Bengal

SMEs (Small and medium-scale entrepreneurs) are considered the backbone of the nation's economy, unlike countries like the United States, where large-scale industries monopolize most of the market. The Indian government also played its part in supporting SMEs with incentives and schemes like the Make in India initiative (2014), Start-up India (2015), Digital India campaign

(2015), and Atmanirbhar Bharat (2020) over the years (Sayak Pal, 2022). 2016-17 report from 'Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)' India indicates that Indian 'early-stage entrepreneurship activities' are around 11 percent, among which 4 percent are 'nascent entrepreneurs' who are engaged in business activities actively where 7 percent could manage to establish their business that is continuing for 3.5 years and 5 percent are running their ventures for above 42 months (EDI, 2018). The MSMED (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development) Act, 2006 by the Government of India, set the ground rule for categorizing entrepreneurs according to initial investment and early turnover. A 'Micro-scale' enterprise should not exceed the investment of Rs. 1 Crore for the plant and machinery with a turnover limited to Rs. 5 Crore. The 'Small-scale' enterprises should not invest beyond Rs. 10 Crore and should be limited to a yearly turnover of Rs. 50 Crore. These micro and small-scale industries support international and domestic market development. 'The National Sample Survey Office,' Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, came out with the '73rd National Sample Survey' in 2016, highlighting the distribution of states with the highest contributions from MSME. The report claims that Uttar Pradesh is the top contributing state, followed by West Bengal (BIAC, 2016).

The state of West Bengal carries its lineage in handcrafting with various materials and techniques that support a large number of artisans in sustaining their livelihood and, at the same time, continuing their heritage. West Bengal is especially popular for producing premium artifacts that are in high demand not only in local, regional, and national markets but also in the international market. Some popular sectors are 'terracotta,' 'handloom,' 'leather,' 'sericulture, etc. The list of popular forms of cottage industries belongs to the state of West Bengal are 'Pottery,' 'Handlooms Terracotta,' 'Brass and Bell Metal Works,' 'Clay products,' 'Bamboo and Cane,' 'Leather products,' 'Jute products,' and 'Sericulture.'

Women Entrepreneurs in India

Women entrepreneurs' contribution to India's economic development goes back a long time; however, much of their contribution has been recorded correctly in recent times (T. Swetha, 2013). While in ancient Indian society, women enjoyed almost equal status with men, 'Udyogini' (an NGO conceptualized by the World Bank in 1992 aiming to improve India's economic empowerment) states that the current number of women entrepreneurs is one for every seven male entrepreneurs. The Ministry of MSME has made numerous attempts to intensify women's empowerment through rigorous development of entrepreneurship like the setting up of 1.38 lakh of projects under 'Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) Scheme,' 'Khadi

Programme of KVIC' that has managed to launch more than thirty thousand projects to strengthen and empower women, TREAD (Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development) Scheme, Stree Shakti Package for Women Entrepreneurs, Bhartiya Mahila Business Bank Loan and many more (MSME, women-entrepreneurs, 2022).

The reason behind the women becoming entrepreneurs was an extension of their kitchen and household activities, and they mainly depended on Pickle Pappad and Powder. However, educational and technological empowerment slowly opened up other avenues for them to establish their businesses. There are an array of reasons for a woman to take up the role of an entrepreneur like 'self-identity and social status,' 'education and qualification,' 'support of family members,' 'role model to others,' 'Success stories of friends and relatives,' 'Bright future of their wards,' 'Need for additional income,' 'Family occupation,' 'Government policies and procedures,' 'Freedom to take own decision and be independent,' 'Employment generation,' 'New challenges and opportunities for self-fulfillment' and 'Innovative thinking.' The sixth census made a few observations for the women entrepreneurship development in India: 'Representation of women entrepreneurship is limited to 13.76 percent only'; 'Most of the establishments (83.19 percent) run by women entrepreneurs are operating without hired workforce'; 'Majority (65.7 percent) of the establishment run by women are non-agricultural'; 'Top five states are Tamil Nadu (13.51 percent), Kerala (11.35 percent), Andhra Pradesh (10.56 percent), West Bengal (10.33 Percent) and Maharashtra (8.25 percent)'; 'Non-agricultural activities are primarily covering manufacturing units'; 'almost 13.48 million people have received employment from women entrepreneurs'; and 'most of the women entrepreneurs (79 percent) have financed their establishment' (Tiwari, 2017).

Instrumental role of social media for entrepreneurial development

SMEs can enjoy much more potential when they promote their business on a multi-dimensional and fast-accessible platform. One of the benefits of using social media for promotion is the ability to interact with users through various types of content. This helps the advertisers to analyze the users better and understand their preferences, which would, in turn, help in efficient product placement. Despite the efforts and reach of social media, the impact and engagement depend largely on determinants like creativity, content, degree of acceptance, and similar attributes (Hilde A M Voorveld, 2018). Digitization made it convenient for marketers to utilize social media to promote their products through engaging and innovative ways capable of generating massive views around the products and brand. Social media are often seen as a ground to launch campaigns regarding new products that allow collecting prompt feedback to save time and improve efficiency

(Asur, 2012).

Promotion in an effective form has always been a challenging task for SMEs, and one of the most common challenges they face is the constraint of a budget. While the choice of the channel depends on the requirements of advertisers, research suggests that social media ads are closely linked with the purpose of that medium and also its users. Similarly, social media promotion can prove to be a healthy option for brand promotion as it offers a wider range of users from various geographical accessibility (Hilde A. M. Voorveld, 2018). The social media platforms allow the creation of accounts, groups, and pages to share promotional content. Social media also allow the free flow of information between the vendor and customer, which opens up the opportunity for entrepreneurs to explore the market freely. Simultaneously, the platforms have grown facilities and features (e.g., Facebook Marketplace) to support entrepreneurs and their social commerce (Sonia Camacho, 2021).

Objectives and methods

Objectives- The study intends to understand how women entrepreneurs use social media platforms such as Facebook to host and promote their small businesses, which they have started with little or no help from others. The study focuses on aspects such as promotional techniques, reception of product-related posts, and business-related challenges faced on Facebook. This would help in understanding and establishing the potential of Facebook as a possible platform for budding entrepreneurs (especially women) in conducting and promoting business.

Method- The study is based on the empirical research design to measure the activities of twenty-five women entrepreneurs using Facebook to promote their products. Snowball sampling technique was used to connect and conduct detailed interviews with the entrepreneurs from the state of West Bengal for the study. In relation to this, the first women entrepreneur was chosen through Facebook (based on her entrepreneurial activities on Facebook), and later, through her reference, 24 other women entrepreneurs were approached for this study. The following research questions will be answered through the study.

- RQ1. Why do they choose to be an entrepreneur?
- RQ2. Do women entrepreneurs equipped with the essential requirements for running their businesses on Facebook?
- RQ3. How are they utilizing Facebook for their business?

- RQ4. How does Facebook support their business?
- RQ5. Do women entrepreneurs receive favorable responses to their business promotions on Facebook?

Procedure- The category of the business was also restricted to the arts and crafts. The snowball sampling method was applied to choose the participants for the interview for the collection of data. The women entrepreneurs were asked to nominate other women entrepreneurs for interviews. All the interviewees went through an initial screening process to verify whether they were operating their businesses online and using Facebook to promote their products. The interviewees were also asked about basic demographic details like age, education, monthly income, place of residence (city, town, or village), and marital status to understand the diversity of the participants for the study. The interviewees are all residents of West Bengal, primarily from Kolkata, followed by Hooghly, Durgapur, Barasat, and Belur. According to the sixth economic census, West Bengal is India's third-highest state in terms of women entrepreneurship establishments.

In the second stage, a structured interview consisted of twenty-five questions (opinionated, close-ended, yes and no statements, numerical only, and Likert scale measurement) to understand the nature and volume of business run by the women entrepreneurs. The interviews with individual participants lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and were transcribed in English. The answers were coded as per the nature of the question and analyzed in a consolidated manner. The coding for the study follows the inductive coding structure, where the interviews were taken and transcribed, and codes emerged from the set of data (Delve, 2022). Pearson correlation was also applied to analyze the relationship between two data sets.

Analysis- For the analysis of the data collected from the interviews, the study has adopted inductive coding for the open-ended questions to look for keywords (later turned into codes). The raw outcome was further taken to the QSR NVivo (10) to turn the keywords into codes (nodes) and map the frequencies lined up (compared) with each of the participants. The outcome was illustrated in the form of a 'group query' with the frequencies added to the nodes (edited) and analyzed according to the research question.

Result and Analysis

The research primarily focused on various aspects of the engagement of women entrepreneurs on Facebook to promote their businesses. The participants for the research were mostly from the age

group of 31-40 years. A majority of them were graduates, whereas some of them have pursued post-graduation. Amongst them, only one of the respondents had an average monthly income of 1 lakh and above, three respondents fall under the income bracket of ₹ 50,001 to ₹ 1,00,000, ten of them earn between ₹ 20,001 – ₹ 50,000, and the rest eleven women entrepreneurs earn below ₹ 20,000. Fifteen of the entrepreneurs were married, while the rest, i.e., ten, were unmarried. On being asked about the duration for which they have been in the business, most of them, on average, said that they have been promoting their business on Facebook for at least the past 1-5 years. In addition, on being asked about the period for which they were using Facebook actively for business, three of them said less than one year, seventeen entrepreneurs said one year to three years, and five people said that they have been promoting their businesses over Facebook for more than three years.

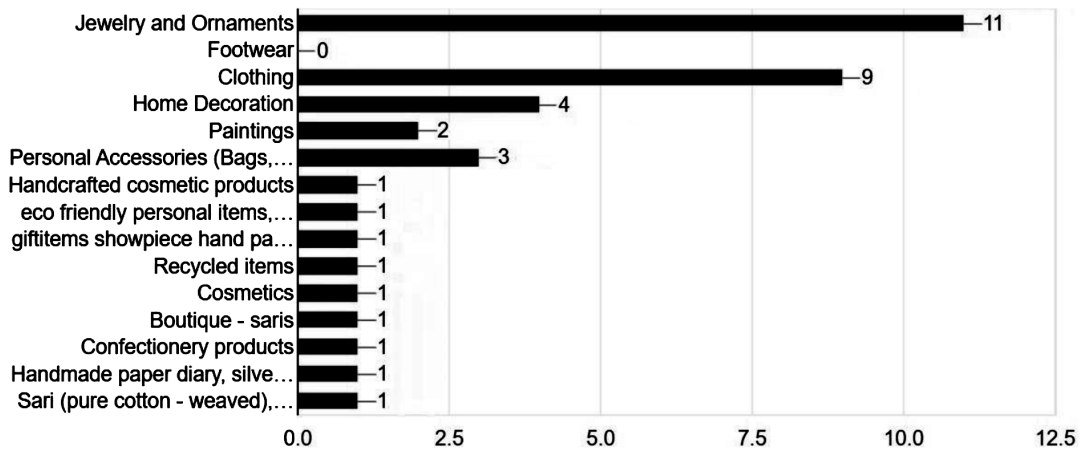


Figure 1. Category of products sold by the women entrepreneurs and their frequencies, Source: interviews conducted for the study

Interestingly, most participants mentioned that they were dealing with jewelry and ornaments, followed by clothing, home decor, personal accessories, and painting (Fig. 1), which can broadly be categorized into art and craft.

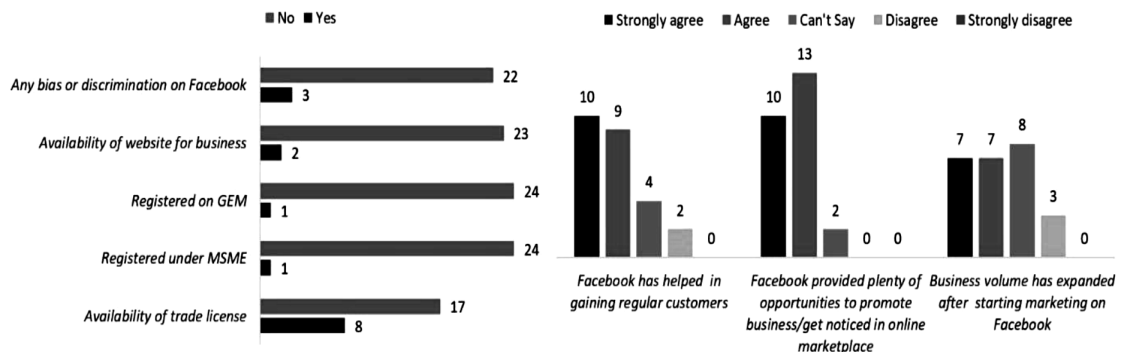


Figure 2. Essential requirements of running businesses and the usefulness of Facebook for online business promotion

The study also required the participants to answer five close-ended questions to map their activities regarding the essential requirements of running their businesses (Fig. 2), which would also align with the RQ2. Almost 17 women entrepreneurs do not have trade licenses for their businesses, and a large majority have no websites to list and promote their businesses; at the same time, they are not listed under MSME or GEM. While each of the participants is using Facebook to promote and sell their products, only three of them felt the medium to be biased in terms of products being copied, loyal customers comparing and demeaning products from other brands, and differentiating in ad performance. The selected entrepreneurs were also asked about their customer base (where they usually get their orders from), to which nine of them referred to both 'within the state' and 'outside the state.' At the same time, two of them mentioned that they get their customers mainly from their city/town/ village, one of them said to cater primarily to the local customers, and four entrepreneurs referred to their usual customers as being from the international territory. Diversity of the customer base and reaching out to external (outside of state or nation) customers with limited resources are prominently indicating social media usage (in this case, Facebook) for their businesses.

The women entrepreneurs were also asked to mark the usefulness of Facebook for their businesses through a five-point Likert scale (Figure 3), and 19 entrepreneurs (10 strongly agree + 9 agree) acknowledged the help they receive to gain customers, 13 entrepreneurs (10 strongly agree + 3 agree) accepts that Facebook has provided the opportunity to promote their businesses and 13 (7 strongly agree + 6 agree) could identify positive changes in their business expansion after they have reached out to Facebook. The set of three questions (with the Likert scale retting

system) demonstrates the acceptance of Facebook among women entrepreneurs. At the same time, they could systematically utilize the platform in favor of their businesses.

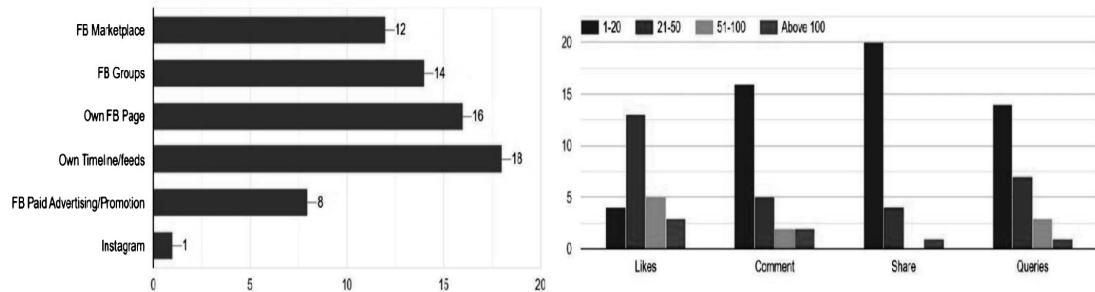


Figure 3. Activities on Facebook to promote products online and the average number of likes, comments, shares, and queries on Facebook

In-depth interviews on their activities leading to the promotion and selling of their products on Facebook reveal a list of activities they regularly conduct on the platform (Fig. 4), which helps align the outcome with RQ3. They were asked about the average number of likes, comments, shares, and queries they receive on their products (Fig. 4), and the compelling data show that 13 of them have said that they get 21-50 likes on an average week while the number of comments, share, and queries are still low on average, proves the requirement of strong Facebook marketing strategy for their business (RQ5). Leading to the same trial and tracking their Facebook activities, the study also found that seven of them are generating ₹ 50,001- ₹ 1,00,000 in revenues annually from Facebook. At the same time, eighteen entrepreneurs could not manage to cross ₹ 50,000. Additionally, they were also asked about the number of employees they have hired for the business. The study found that fourteen of them are running their business without any additional labor, eighteen have several employees limited to 1 - 5, and three of the women entrepreneurs have more than five employees who are working under them, aiding their businesses.

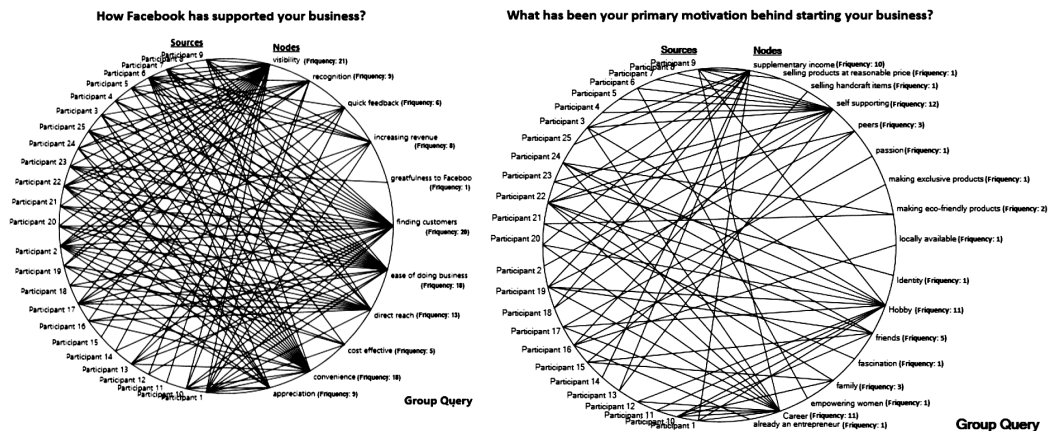


Figure 4. Frequency of the factors (nodes) to understand the determinants behind certain behaviors of participants

RQ4 aimed to find out how Facebook has extended support to women entrepreneurs for their businesses. The ‘group query’ (Fig. 5) shows that ‘visibility’ (21) had the most significant impression when the participants were asked to speak about the support that they receive through Facebook promotion, followed by ‘finding customers’ (20), ‘ease of doing business’ (18), ‘convenience’ (18), and ‘direct reach’ (13) while rest of the factors are having the impression below 10. Similarly, they were also asked about the reason behind starting their businesses (RQ1). The ‘group query’ (Fig. 5) displays certain factors (nodes/codes) have higher impressions than the rest, like ‘self-supporting’ with 12 impressions, followed by ‘carrier’ (11), ‘hobby’ (11), and ‘supplementary income’ (10), while other factors have negligible impressions.

Discussions and Conclusion

With the onset of the digital era, business practices have changed to a great extent. A large number of business organizations have taken their businesses to online platforms to enjoy better convenience and greater penetration. Because of these benefits, even lesser-known brands are heavily using social media platforms to market their products to a larger consumer base. Even small-scale businesses and entrepreneurs are jumping on this bandwagon as social media platforms are a free medium. The 2016 national survey shows the potentiality of social media to the extent that almost three out of ten people had a social media presence, which is gradually increasing with the advancement of technology. The data derived from the 2005 and 2013 Economic Census

illustrates how the percentage of 'Women's proprietary establishments without premises' increased by a massive margin, followed by 'Women-owned proprietary establishments', 'Workers engaged in women-owned proprietary establishments', and 'Women's proprietary establishments in agricultural activities' indicates that the growth rate of entrepreneurial activities among women across the nation.

The demographic data derived from the income interviews suggests that lucrative earning through entrepreneurship is possible under favorable circumstances. West Bengal carries its lineage of mastering handicraft products, including large varieties of craftsmanship, supporting a considerable number of artisans. The cottage industry in West Bengal is known for its premium artifacts exported around the world, including handloom, terracotta, sericulture, leather, and similar items (Rahul Gupta, 2006). Enquiring about the products the interviewees are dealing with led to the result that a major chunk of women entrepreneurs are in the art and craft business. However, the correlation based on their Facebook usage for the promotion of their products stands unfavorable ($r = 0.457$), which means they have yet to explore the full potential of the medium. Most of them are also found to be running their business without a trade license, and many are also not listed under MSME or GEM, making them lose various government supports to improve the stature of their businesses.

While diversity in the customer base is significant in bringing more volume to the business, the women entrepreneurs selected for this study mainly cater to customers from their state, leaving more excellent earning opportunities in the international market. Sound knowledge about the platform is also crucial for a business to flourish through utilizing the tools to an extreme extent, and most of the selected women entrepreneurs are found to be using multiple tools of Facebook for their promotion, leading to income mainly restricted under ₹ 50,000. The lower number of employees can be one of the primary reasons why women entrepreneurs have such limited income opportunities. The detailed analysis of one of the two questions on their motivation to become entrepreneurs brought four significant factors: 'self-supporting,' 'Hobby,' 'career,' and 'supplementary income,' indicating the propensity of the women entrepreneurs towards establishing their business. The second question helps the study to understand the support they receive from Facebook, and 'visibility' has occurred in 84%. Two factors that surfaced during the analysis were carrying exceptionally low weightage, 'making eco-friendly products' and 'empowering women,' indicating the progressiveness of current generation women entrepreneurs, which would also lay the pathways for future development.

Scope of further research

With the understanding received regarding the reception of Facebook as a platform for business promotion, further research might be carried out to get more ideas on increasing the adoption of Facebook among entrepreneurs and the limitations of Facebook as a medium. The study was narrowed down to focus on women entrepreneurs. However, a study on entrepreneurs and their use of Facebook to conduct business can be conducted for further insights.

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