

Interactive Platforms for Promotional Activities: Usage of *Facebook* as a promotional medium by Small Scale Units (SSUs) in Bhopal

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Abstract

The phenomenal growth of social media in the past few years is an indication of its wide range acceptance amongst various sections of people in societies. The increasing popularity of online social media networks as communication platforms to reach customers and consumers is being made use of by many small and big businesses. Small Scale Units (SSUs) are also becoming more participative in social media, especially for promoting their businesses. Facebook is a highly popular platform that is used by both - business and consumer - as a very effective promotional and communicational tool. This study mainly aimed at understanding the usage of Facebook by Small Scale Units as a promotional tool. Other objectives were to check how effective Facebook was as a tool for brand awareness among consumers and business expansion in a three tier city like Bhopal and understand how consumers respond to this kind of communication process through social media in this city. This qualitative study was conducted among three types of SSUs in Bhopal, viz. boutiques, restaurants and event management companies, using content analysis of the Facebook pages and semi-structured in-depth interviews of twelve SSU owners.

Key Words: *Interactive promotion, Brand Awareness, Social Media Network, Facebook, Internet, user generated content, brand identity, business communication*

Introduction

Facebook is a social media network that is widely used by young and old people all over the world, especially in Asia/Pacific countries (See Table. 1 and Table 2). The active users of *Facebook* per month (MAUs) and daily active users (DAUs) were estimated to be 1.44 billion and 936 million respectively as of March, 31 2015 (Facebook, 2015). It is very popular for its social networking and interactive facilities which allow users to create profiles, upload photos and videos to share with friends, family and colleagues and do virtual interactions through online chatting and video chatting free of cost. It has a feature called *Pages* that allows people to create a *page* on a particular subject – individual, institution, theme etc. - and promote it to the public. This feature is useful and economical in characteristic for individuals, artists, companies, small business, etc. to promote themselves or their business enterprises to a large number of targeted audiences. Hence *Facebook* has evolved as an important space for Small-Scale Businesses to create an identity among a large audience where customers can discuss about the products and also allow the people to spread information about the page along with details of the product/service with other Facebook friends. The emergence of the articulation “*Facebook* economy” emphasizes the influence of this social network on the ways in which businesses and promotions are managed and goals of productivity and growth are achieved. (Williams & Aular, 2015)

This research paper is based on an exploratory study conducted on the Small Scale Businesses which use *Facebook* for their promotional activities. The purpose of the study was to understand how useful the medium was to them for their business activities.

Importance of the Study and Literature Review

Promotional activities like advertising and direct marketing have become essential requirements for every business organization - be it small or big, in today’s world. It has been proved that business promotion requires properly planned communicative messages and budget. Consequently, business units regularly update their promotional platforms to follow the trend of their target audience’s use of media in order to reach out to them. That means, promotion in every business is customer oriented in nature. Consumers play an important role in any major or minor communication process from the product and service industries because they are the ones who decide the impact of the promotional communication disseminated through any medium, whether it is a traditional medium like newspaper, radio or television, or a new medium like internet or mobile phones. (Atkin & Rice, 2012)

The emergence of internet as a mass medium has been changing the business environment by creating new challenges and opportunities in the business world. Subsequently, the multifaceted opportunities created by the internet have made it a visual and audio multimedia attraction of communication for all kinds of businesses. It also acts as a platform for commercial transactions. In addition, social media provides for many ways of interactions among people in which they create, share, exchange and comment on contents among themselves in virtual communities and networks using internet which has been not possible with the traditional media. Combining the many operations and functions, social media are defined as, “mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and

communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Business organizations make use of the social Media tools for communicating information about their products and services, for adding value to customers, for creating brand awareness, to keep with trends or competitors, for demonstrating the product, and for saving cost and improving productivity (Barnes, 2010). With the addition of these possibilities provided by technological advancements, consumers are no longer a passive element in marketing and product development. Nevertheless, they are taking an increasingly active role in co-creating everything from product design to promotional messages (Berthon, Pitt, & Kates, 2007).

A study among handicraft businesses in Indonesia found that social media provide more open opportunity to creative managers, and small and medium industries to develop and expand their marketing activities. In order to maximize the usability of social media as a promotional platform, it is necessary to continuously update and review the products and services offered, spread good and useful information to the media users, take advantage of the social media to create and manage the image of the organization and the products and services offered. (Rahadi & Abdilla, 2013). Tina Vukasovic’s (2013) study on impact of advertising campaign through social media revealed that 85% of social media users show interest in accessing ads and other promotions through social media and that these new media help in building solid relationships with the customers than the traditional media. 97% agreed that brand communication strategies using social media directly impact brand recall and “create impacts on brand effectively”.

A *Small Scale Unit (SSU)* is a business enterprise which involves a small budget and run by a small group of people - sole proprietors, corporations or partnerships. In Indian context, a Small Scale Industry (SSI) “is a business setup in which a financial commitment towards infrastructure such as building & equipment, whether made as an owner or on rental or purchase basis, does not surpass Rs. 1 Crore. However, this investment cap is subject to change by government of India anytime.”(Business Maps of India, 2012). Realizing the importance of Small Scale Industries in India, a simple and workable definition was given early in 1960s itself by Prof. K.T. Sash, an Indian economist, that it is an enterprise or series of operations carried on by a workman skilled in the craft on his responsibility, the finished product of which, he markets himself. Located within a single place and producing goods or managing services meant for a few people, they consist of small number of employees and workers, and have low amount of sales and revenue (Quoted in Sindhukumar, 2010). They include restaurants, fitness centers, hairdressers, event organizers, mobile food shops, wedding planners, photography studios, laundry

services, catering services and so on. Small Scale Unit sector in India is renowned for its socio-economic growth factors and even industrial expansion. The countries which are affected by acute unemployment problem specifically emphasise on the model of Small Scale Units. It has been observed that India along with the countries in the Indian sub-continent has grown extensively in this field.(Economy Watch, 2010)

SSUs in Bhopal: Bhopal is a district located in the central part of India and the city of Bhopal is the capital of the state of Madhya Pradesh. The registered Small Scale Industries in Bhopal in 2011 were 10989 and an estimated 34599 people were employed as workers in these Units. The turnover of these SSUs for the year was 46000 million rupees. (Source: DTIC, Bhopal quoted in Ministry of MSME, 2012)). A consistent increase in the number of SSUs has been observed from the year 1984-85 when it was only 377. (Ministry of MSME, Ibid)

This study was conducted among the SSUs in Bhopal city that use *Facebook* as a promotional medium to reach out to the customers and increase their business opportunities.

Facebook as a Promotional Medium

Facebook has been developed into a new platform of promotion and marketing for businesses and organisations where consumers can play a contributory role. The vast growth of consumer-base which uses *Facebook* enables the Small-Scale Units to explore it as a separate medium of promoting products and services. It results in decreasing the problems of clutter of advertising in traditional media for reaching the mass customers. Accordingly, it was found that the benefits of *Facebook* advertising include (Yang, 2014): popularization of products, idea or service to the targeted group, informing target audience about products or service present in the marketplace, encouraging healthy competition and allowing the audience to interact and keep them connected with the businesses. Also, another research on *Facebook* brought out that 33% of *Facebook* users are fans of one or more products and brands, and 60% of them recommend those products to their friends (Martin, Cadwickh (2010) Quoted in Rahadi & Abdilla).

The basic functions of ‘Facebook Pages’ for organisations and businesses were found to be: (1) existence: it ability of making the Organisations’ existence visible to large audiences (2) alliance: it is a tool which allows to create alliances through sharing texts, videos, audios, photos, presentations and other combinations of functions (3) information access: it allows access to develop information and contents by the official or certified individuals who are the administrators that regulate the page as well as gives access to the audience to create content in the page through comments and posts, (4) timely communications: it

allows doing one-to-one communication with audience through videos, audios, messaging, etc. and (5) access to proficiency: Facebook is a platform which allows Small-Scale business Units to post information about themselves, their qualities, and their services. Since it is highly interactive platform, it allows for discussions on businesses, services and information with the audience. (Gunn, 2011).

The feasibility to discharge integrated marketing activities with much reduced effort and cost than before (Kim & Ko, 2012) and the facilities for creation of “user-generated content”(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) that allows for quick feedback availability and possible immediate actions based on them make social media and *Facebook* very useful media for promotional activities. Evidences indicate that companies that actively use the social media for marketing purposes outperform those that do not use them (Fidelman, 2013). Therefore it has become necessary for organizations and businesses to get engaged with their potential customers through the popular and growing platform of *Facebook*. (Luk, 2013)

This study was conducted for analyzing and understanding the usage of these new facilities of social media especially that of *Facebook* networking by Small Scale Industries.

Research Problem and Objectives

As discussed above, *Facebook* is an accessible and affordable medium of promotion for the Small Scale Units. The constantly widening reach of internet hugely increases the number of users of Facebook on a day-to-day basis. Promotional activities through traditional media like radio, newspaper and television are very expensive and unaffordable for Small-Scale Units. But it was found that there are hardly any researches conducted to understand the usage of Facebook by small-scale units of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, which is a growing three-tier of India.

Hence the research problem was to find out the usage of Facebook by Small-Scale Units in Bhopal as a promotional platform and the effectiveness of it as a medium to communicate with the customers. The study was not concentrating on any one type of business, but three businesses namely – boutiques of clothes and accessories, restaurants and event management companies.

This study was conducted with the following objectives:

- i. To analyze the different purposes with which different Small Scale Units (SSUs) use the *Facebook* pages
- ii. To study the effectiveness of *Facebook Pages* in a three tier city as a promotional platform to reach out to the target audience and to understand their preferences
- iii. To understand the achievements of Small-Scale business Units through *Facebook* pages

The main scope of this study is the geographical location of samples and three different types of Small-Scale Units of Bhopal that are covered in this study. Bhopal is a developing city of Madhya Pradesh with many different Small Scale Units and Industries which facilitate in economic and social growth of the country. The small- scale units create and manage *Facebook* pages for their promotional purpose.

Methodology

This is an exploratory research to understand the usage of *Facebook* by Small-Scale Units of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Two methods were adopted for collecting the required data for the study: (1) content analysis of the *Facebook Pages* of the SSUs and (2) Semi-structured interviews of the owners of the SSUs studied. The owners themselves were found to be the managers the businesses as well as the administrators of the *Pages*. Systematic recording and documenting of responses joined with intense questioning for obtaining useful information for the research were adopted during the data collection. The analyses of *Facebook Pages* of the samples were conducted on two occasions – on March 20th and October 20th of 2015 - to understand the usage of pages by the SSUs. This helped in revealing the usage and usefulness of it as a medium of promotion of small-scale business.

Convenient sampling was used to identify the samples of study. The samples studied include: four Units in the field of event management, four restaurants and four boutiques of clothes and accessories. The criteria for selection included accessibility, willingness to give interview and share views and time factor that necessitated to consider distance and availability of people. Interviews were properly recorded and transcribed; thematic content analysis of them was used for the analysis the data.

Usage of *Facebook* by Small Scale Units in Bhopal: Analysis and Findings

a. Boutiques

Boutique is a small shop or small department inside a large store that sells fashionable clothes and accessories. This type of business provides customized services. In Bhopal there are many boutiques based on fashion related services which sells and provides customized clothes and accessories. The main target audience of these kinds of boutiques, according to them, is those between the age group of 16 to 40 years, especially women who buy clothes for themselves and also for their children and relatives. All the four samples of boutiques used *Facebook* as a promotional tool for their businesses and it was found that they never used any traditional media for promotion at all. Starting a Facebook page was a decision of ‘going with the flow’ with the widened use of computers, and internet and social media. One of the boutiques was started in 2009 and the others in 2013 and 2014. All of them started their *Facebook Pages* in 2014, months after the

commencement of their businesses. All of the owners personally represent and administer their *Facebook page* as well as create new content and do the updates themselves. Even though they claimed that they create new content daily or twice a week, it was found to be incorrect.

The main purposes of using *Facebook*, according to them, were creating brand awareness, promotion and update, and customer acquisition. They recommend other organizations also to use *Facebook* for promotion. According to three boutiques *Facebook* content always support in their selling process also and for one boutique the *Facebook* usage is not supportive in the sales process.

b. Event Management Companies

Event Management companies are service providing companies. Their functioning consists of processes such as planning, executing and evaluating 'events' for corporates, associations, nonprofits, government and for other family events like birthday, wedding etc. In Bhopal there are many event management companies which provide services to different people. This type of business requires, according to the interviewees, strong organizational skills, budgeting, coordinating and creative skills, and in addition, good communication skills.

The event organizing companies of Bhopal that were studied began using *Facebook* after the start of their businesses as part of their business expansion strategies. In addition to *Facebook*, they use other internet promotional supportive websites like *sulekha.com*, *yellowpages.com*, etc. to promote their business to large audiences.

Their main purposes of using *Facebook* were making brand identity to a bigger audience and to create awareness among people about their company and services. Event organizing companies feels *Facebook* as a very useful and effective platform and they also recommend it to other organization for promoting purpose. Three of them use, in addition to social media, radio advertisements and direct marking techniques also for more effective communication with audience. The target audiences for these event management companies are mainly corporate, families and specially, youngsters. All units personally represent their *Facebook* pages and they agreed that *Facebook* content supports in their selling process. During the second analysis of the *Facebook pages* of Units studied, the page of one of the Units was not found on the *Facebook* website.

c. Restaurants

Restaurants offer dining with a wide selection of foods and beverages in exchange of money, and they may also have attached coffee shop and fast food. Out of the four restaurants studied, two started using *Facebook* for their promotion before the commencement of their business; one started using the social media site from the beginning of restaurant services. Soorma

Bhopali M.P Nagar deactivated its *Facebook Page* later. All of them use *Facebook* for promoting their services to young audience, their target audience being young people of age group of 16 to 30 years.

For three of the restaurant owners, *Facebook* was a very useful tool for promotion and for making identity and awareness among large audience. It is very beneficial for them to attract people in society, specially the students for dining in their restaurants and they recommend *Facebook* to other organizations. They also agreed that the *page* also supported their selling process and they give 20 to 30 percentage of the credit of their progress to *Facebook*. One restaurant owner found it as a not very useful and effective tool for business expansion and services in comparison to traditional media.

The owner said that a Public Relation report on a special food festival of the restaurant on a Sunday supplementary newspaper brought more propaganda and business to them than the *Facebook page* promotions.

d. Usage and effectiveness of Facebook Pages

Analysis of *Facebook Pages* and interviews with the owners of SSUs of three types reveals many commonalities and differences between the usages of Pages as well as the perspectives on effectiveness of using the Pages. The responses by the owners of Small Scale Business Units were mixed in nature. Three SSUs out of twelve were not pleased with the effectiveness of *Facebook* in their businesses. However, the majority of SSUs were satisfied with the *Facebook's* usability as a promotional medium. Other social media networks like *zomato*, *justdial*, *WhatsApp*, *yellowpages.com* etc. are also used by the Small Scale Businesses in Bhopal for their promotional purpose. Some of the SSUs give 30% to 40% credit for *Facebook* in their business growth and success which is not a small percentage.

Understanding and Perspective about the Usefulness of Facebook as a Promotional Medium for SSUs: Majority of SSUs said that *Facebook* was a great tool to promote product or services in large audience. It is more effective and useful than other media to reach young audience. It helps in better communication and interaction. *Facebook* is a very easy to access and easy to understand medium. High education or knowledge is not necessary for using and accessing *Facebook*. It helps in creating identity among a large audience and among people doing the same or similar businesses. It has immediacy in its working and accessibility. The one-to-communication with customers is easily possible in *Facebook* promotion. The companies get quick responses and feedbacks from the customers and these help them to do improvements in their business and services. They get online orders also by using *Facebook*.

Purpose of creating and maintaining a Facebook Page:

Three main purposes were identified – creating brand awareness to a large audience, developing brand identity among the audience, and for customer acquisition and sales of products and services. Majority of them were satisfied with the use of the medium for making audience aware about their businesses and also give their share of credit of success to *Facebook pages*, except for three SSUs. Most of them only use only Facebook and other social media for promotion, not traditional media. In addition, five of them have their own websites also. The target audience of Facebook promotions is youngsters of age group 16 to 30 or 40 years for all types.

Maintenance of Facebook Page and Updating of content: During the interviews, the owners claimed that they update the content of the *pages* daily or twice a week. They said that they create new content on their page to make their presence felt in the daily lives of people and to make people aware about new offers and schemes to attract audience.

But the analysis of the Facebook Pages brought forth that in actuality they take very less effort to keep their Pages updated and current. Table 3 gives the gaps between the dates of adding new content and the delays in addressing the audience with new information. Only five of the SSSUs studied updated their paged in the month of October, 2015. Some of the Units had not made any changes on their *Pages* after February or July or August of 2015. These observations point toward a contradiction in what the managers and owners say about their expectations from *Facebook Pages* and what they do to achieve them.

Feedback and Customer acquisition and relationship development through Facebook pages: The main indicators of reception of the messages sent through *Facebook Pages* are the use of facilities such as 'like', 'comment', 'post' and 'share' provided by this social media site. In fact, only one SSU studied (Soorma Bhopali Food Corner) had more than thousand 'likes' of its *page*. They were active on the page with updates and also found to almost doubling their likes in six months from 3765 to 7411 'likes'. A few of the 'posts' of it were also shared by some of its *page*-'friends'. Other than this Unit, only two had got more than 500 likes on their pages and another two had the 'likes' only in double digits. Three of them (two with only double digit 'likes') had deactivated their pages also.

25% SSUs studied said that *Facebook* was not a very effective promotional tool and said Facebook is not that much useful for their business. They believe traditional media and other social media tools of direct marketing like emails are more effective for promotional purpose. They answered they didn't have any kind of profit or growth from using Facebook; it is just of 'likes' which were not converted into business. Some of the

organizations said that they had not gained many advantages by using *Facebook* pages for promotion. Those who were not satisfied with *Facebook* and the promotions initiated through *Facebook* consider it as a 'not-a-very-useful' platform because for them it never supported in the selling process. They stated that *Facebook* has just one advantage - the "likes" - which is not very effective in increasing the revenue side. In marketplaces like Bhopal, if the *Facebook* page gets 100 *likes*, only 10 to 15 persons pay their visits for business. Some of the owners feel that other social media like zomato, justdial and WhatsApp are more effective and traditional media such as newspaper, radio and television ads are more effective compared to that of *Facebook*.

Quality and Attractiveness of Content and Information on Facebook Page: The cover pages of all represent the respective business in title, picture and slogan given. Many of them were giving information about the business briefly, location map, address of the store, phone number, website link etc. The update posts are mostly with pictures of clothing, food or event locations as in accordance with the business. However, they are not getting much encouraging responses in the forms of 'likes', 'comments' or 'shares'. That means they need to assess and evaluate the quality and attractiveness of their *Facebook Pages* and take measures to improve them so that they get more active visitors to their pages. The administrator of the *page* should know how to write good content in how much time duration, when to update and how to attract the customers not only for *liking* the page but also for converting them to business and revenue generation.

Conclusion

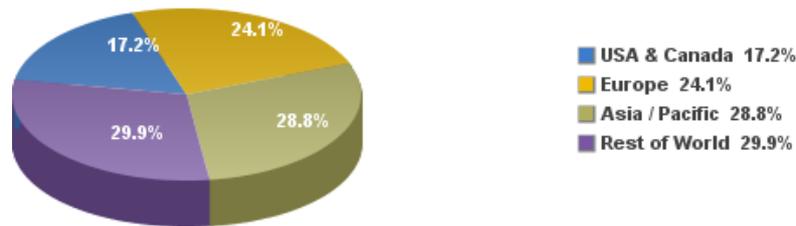
This study analyzed the promotional activities by three types of Small Scale Businesses in Bhopal, a three tier city in central India. The expectations of the owners of SSUs are high when they use this medium of social networking. However, the efforts taken to provide updated information to the audience are not consistent and lack innovative strategies which need to be evaluated further. A study on the *Facebook* audience who are potential customers of such SSUs is recommended here for further research on the problem.

Facebook is only a platform to get connected with the audience and reach out to them with proper messages. It can be used as an effective medium of promotion because of its peculiarities: the tools it provide such as like, comment, post, share and follow the page, and the large extent of its users from various demographic backgrounds that allows businesses to reach a large group of customers. The effectiveness of it in selling process of products or services is depended on the users who know how to optimise it in more striking and dynamic way which will support in their business.

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APPENDIX



Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/facebook.htm
Basis: Facebook Published Data, retrieved on April 26, 2015
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Chart. 1 Facebook Users in the World – Daily Active Users (DAU) 2015Q1

Source: (Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics)

FACEBOOK DAILY ACTIVE USERS (DAU) from 2013 to 2015 - in millions					
Geo graphic Regions and Time Periods	FB Users in USA & Canada	FB Users in Europe	FB Users in Asia-Pacific	FB Users in Rest of World	FB Users Total World
2013 Q1	139	179	167	180	665
2013 Q2	142	182	181	195	699
2013 Q3	144	188	189	208	728
2013 Q4	147	195	200	216	757
2014 Q1	150	203	216	233	802
2014 Q2	152	206	228	244	829
2014 Q3	155	212	242	256	864
2014 Q4	157	217	253	263	890
2015 Q1	161	225	270	280	936

NOTES: (1) Facebook (FB) Daily Active Users (DAUs) in the World from March 31, 2013 to March 31, 2015, according to the numbers reported by *Facebook*, expressed in millions of people.

**Table 1: Facebook Usage and Facebook Growth Statistics
by World Geographic Regions**

Source: Internet World Stats, www.internetworldstats.com. Copyright © 2015, Miniwatts Marketing Group.

S. no.	SSU Name	Business	Established in:	Started Facebook Page in:	No. of Likes on Facebook Page as on:	
					March 20 th , 2015	October 20 th , 2015
1.	Benchmark Events and Wedding Planner	Event Management	February 2014	December, 2014	142	176
2.	Indian Caterers and Events	Event Management	2014	June, 2014	357	552
3.	DAMS Management Pvt. Ltd	Event Management	2011	March, 2014	280	291
4.	Fitoor Fashion Boutique	Boutique	April 2014	December, 2014	536	803
5.	Ada The Designer Boutique	Boutique	2009	July, 2014	72	87
6.	Bespoke Fashion Boutique	Boutique	2013	April 2014	285	472
7.	Rasm - The Boutique	Boutique	March 2014	November, 2014	293	332
8.	Swastik Restaurant	Restaurant	2015	December, 2013	41	45
9.	Soorma Bhopali Food Corner (Shahpura)	Restaurant	January 2014	December, 2013	3765	7411
10.	Satish Event Management Pvt. Ltd	Event Management	2011	March 2015	32	No fb page seen
11.	Parathe Sharathe	Restaurant	November 2013	December, 2014	37	No fb page seen
12.	Soorma Bhopali Restaurant (M P Nagar)	Restaurant	2013	2013	1124	No fb page seen

Table 2: Details of Samples of Study

Sl. no.	Page Title and tagline	Information given on the Page	Dates of last 3 updates of the page as on 20 th October 2015
1.	Benchmark Management	Made as an individual's page and self-employment, No Information given on products or services	January 25, 2015 February, 8, 2015 February 17, 2015
2.	Indian Caterer and Event Planner	Location map, information on services provided, address, phone number & website link	July 28, 2015 August 15, 2015 August 29, 2015 October 13, 2015
3.	DAMS Management Services Event Planning	Location map, DAMS Management Services "A solution to your needs", address, website link	October 2 nd , 5 th , 11 th , 13 th , 2015
4.	Fitoor Shopping & Retail	None	September 16 th & 19 th , 2015 October 11 th & 16 th 2015
5.	Ada The Designer Boutique Fashion Designer, Accessories Store, Cosmetics and Beauty Supply	Location map, address, Phone number	July 22, 2015 August 16, 2015 September, 8 th , 2015
6.	Bespoke Fashion Boutique Bhopal – M.P Clothing	Short description about the Unit, products, phone number, e-mail id and website link	June 22, 2015 August 4, 2015 August 13, 2015
7.	Rasm - The Boutique Clothing Store	Location map, two phone numbers, product description as a slogan	June 11, 2015 July 2, 2015 July 11, 2015

8.	Swastik Restaurant Community	Long description about the foods and invitation to customers, services, specialities, Phone number and website link	September 19 th and 24 th , 2015 October 9 th , 2015
9.	Soorma Bhopali Vegetarian & Vegan Restaurant	Short description of services, 'ask for phone number' link, zomato.com link	October 3, 2015 October 9, 2015 October 16, 2015

Table 3: Maintenance of Facebook Pages and Updates of Contents by SSUs