

# Author of own fortune: F-commerce businesswomen in Bangladesh

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*"I'm Koly, Owner of Koly's Attire, working on Jamdani saree.<sup>1</sup>"* Various similar iconic lines like this are used to express the entrepreneur's identity in Bangladesh. Those lines reached millions of people through Facebook-based business (F-commerce) amid the existing COVID-19 pandemic, reports Bangladesh Economic Review (BSR).

In Bangladesh, it is difficult for women to be self-empowered or work outside, crossing the house's boundary. In the Muslim-dominated country, a male is considered the only earning person in many families. A small portion of women blooms their destiny, encountering unreasonable social context. Countless working women in our social circumstances retire early from the professional world, considering family responsibilities. The crime rate in the country also holds another factor that does not grant women the liberty to work outside. Hence, women's scope of financial independence becomes limited. It will not be easy to transform social order and mindset any time soon. That said, Facebook enables talented women to try out ingenious ideas at minimal risk. As everything takes place online, the pandemic seems a blessing to existing women entrepreneurs, and there is a massive rise of new F-commerce entrepreneurs while staying at home.

## Role of social media in creating businesswomen in Bangladesh

Social media is no longer a place for killing time. Instead, it has shifted to a versatile business platform. With a global user base of 2.35 billion and 25 million in Bangladesh, Facebook is undoubtedly a splendid networking and client-hunting platform for businesses. It converted to a blessing for women, as it allows them to run businesses from home. Hence, entrepreneurs have originated with creative ideas.



Innovative products by women entrepreneurs  
(Pictures extracted from Women and E-Commerce Forum (WE)<sup>2</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> Jamdani Saree is a traditional dress of women in Bangladesh.

<sup>2</sup> Women and E-Commerce Forum, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/140964279985142>

Despite many benefits, a complication arises when connecting with tremendous people according to the target of the individual business. A freshly emerged Facebook page faces difficulty approaching a wide audience. Here, a Facebook community named Women and E-commerce Forum (WE) assists businesswomen in connecting with millions of people at a time. This group is considered to be the most prominent women entrepreneurs' association in Bangladesh.

### **The growing number of women entrepreneurs**

Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Service (BASIS)<sup>3</sup> reports 150,000 Bangladeshi women are running businesses through social networking sites.



Women entrepreneurship online Masterclass organized by the WE forum

Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs 2020<sup>4</sup> reports Women Entrepreneurs Index in Bangladesh is 36.37, which indicates 2.7% growth compared to the previous year. This is an impressive growth given that the pandemic limited the scope of new businesses; many have indeed scaled-down or even shut down during the lockdown.

### **Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Women entrepreneurship is not only an income-generating activity. It also contributes to making women financially independent, helping the nation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The benefit of ICT is tremendous. Without ICT's nourishment, this massive transformation is nearly unthinkable. Sadly, women are still less likely partakers in the ICT related disciplines, and there is a gap in digital skill proficiency levels when it comes to

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<sup>3</sup> The Financial Express, Many women in Bangladesh create online businesses during pandemic, 31 December 2020, <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/many-women-in-bangladesh-create-online-businesses-during-pandemic-1609255446>

<sup>4</sup> The Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs 2020 Report, [https://www.mastercard.com/news/media/1ulpy5at/ma\\_miwe-report-2020.pdf](https://www.mastercard.com/news/media/1ulpy5at/ma_miwe-report-2020.pdf)

women and girls.<sup>5</sup> Since women's contribution to ICT and digital technology is less than men, training can help overcome the gender gap in the ICT field.

### Measures to overcome the challenges

The F-commerce platform requires appropriate economic definitions and guidelines concerning entrepreneurs and consumers. Businesswomen's skills must be developed through training and workshop to alleviate the gap in digital skill proficiency levels, for which government incentives would be helpful.



WE entrepreneurs forum



Image extracted from the *Daily Observer*<sup>6</sup>

Women entrepreneurs create a followable pathway for the rest of society to acquire financial freedom and self-sufficiency. ICT renders the limelight for women entrepreneurs to build their fortunes and narrate a story of overcoming difficulties. Such winner stories win the heart and motivate others to stimulate inherent creativity to be self-sufficient.

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<sup>5</sup> According GSMA 2020 report, women are 29% less likely than males to own a cell phone and 52% less likely to utilize mobile internet in Bangladesh (cited in the Business Standard, The widening gender gap in digital era: A rural Bangladesh scenario, 09 July 2021, <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/widening-gender-gap-digital-era-rural-bangladesh-scenario-196018>).

<sup>6</sup> The Daily Observer, E-commerce business key to empowering female entrepreneurs, 23 January 2021, <https://www.observerbd.com/details.php?id=295423>