With the number of social media users expected to touch six billion in 2027, a new, dynamic market is emerging for South Asian women entrepreneurs breaking the stereotypes.

Anum Hanif, Lubna Jerar Naqvi, Shreya Pareek and Zeba Warsi report from across the border...

Boss Ladies

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Nighat Dad from Lahore, Pakistan, founder and CEO of Sheroes, Pakistan; Business: Mummy and Minime

Says Gupta, “My Insta-shop is open 24x7. Living online, many first-time buyers pay through cash on delivery but the majority of her customers make online payments. Due to her regular and direct engagement with customers, Mir’s business rarely sees any returns or exchanges.”

It’s hard work. You have to be consistent and patient. With time, you can get an idea who is going to continue ordering products and who is just to window shop, just like a regular retail shop,” Mir says.

There are thousands of such women who have social media as their main marketplace, especially in South Asian countries.

The rise and rise of social media

Economies worldwide have been disrupted by the pandemic, but it has also created new opportunities for those who are online, who have tasted the internet.

Women who started online businesses have grown in numbers over the years. They started to have an online presence. A couple of years back, women were not confident about using these platforms for their businesses,” she says.

In Pakistan, Instagram has gradually become the preferred choice to run businesses replacing Facebook as the most popular platform for their businesses, she says.

In Pakistan, Facebook signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry to provide support in hands-on training, skills enhancement and resources to women.

This was a major step towards empowering women to become entrepreneurs. It is estimated that women’s earnings in Pakistan have increased by four percent compared to previous year. One of the reasons is start-ups owned by women, and social media has played a pivotal role in helping them grow their businesses.

While the pandemic put the traditional ways of business on hold, the online market was thriving. With social distancing and people working from home, more and more people shifted to online platforms.

Not all is well in the digital universe

Social media has its share of challenges. The major issue that entrepreneurs like Gupta and Mir face is the need to maintain a sense of trust among customers since it is difficult to showcase the quality of products through just pictures and videos.

Another concern is the easy temptation of bandwagon products to sell at lower prices. This makes it difficult for micro-entrepreneurs to compete in the vast market.

The digital world can also be intimidating for those who belong to a different generation. So, while it is a blessing for some women who have grown up with technology, it might not work for others who are still trying to get used to it.

There is also a serious threat to cyber security. Scarcely any entrepreneur have found their accounts to be hacked causing them not just financial but also immense emotional loss.

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