Female entrepreneurship and social capital: Exploring the relationship between social connection and women-owned social media-based businesses in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Businesswomen in Bangladesh are using social media to do business from their homes, in support of their financial development. Social capital theory is applied to investigate the role that family and other close and external networks play in conducting business through social media. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 31 businesswomen to understand why they chose social media for their business, and to identify the type of support they got from their social connections and the hurdles they encountered. Content analysis examined their Facebook and Instagram pages for two weeks to understand the support that their external networks provided. This study finds that family and other close networks encouraged women entrepreneurs with loans, free labour, and product promotions that contributed in building and sustaining the businesses, while external networks helped with more formal or institutional support. Meanwhile, customers provided intangible support that encouraged the businesswomen to start, survive, and succeed.

Keywords: businesswomen, social media, social capital, financial development, developing country

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Introduction

Bangladesh has a population of 160 million people and women make up nearly half of this number. However, women's access to resources and decision-making is still limited. They are treated as inferior to men in every sphere of life and thus their subordination is evident. The patriarchal society of Bangladesh is explained by Abeda Sultana (2010), who writes:

> The issues of son preference, discrimination against girls (e.g. food distribution, burden of household work, lack of education, freedom and mobility), dowry, violence against women (e.g. wife-battering, rape), unequal wage, discriminatory personal laws, the use of religion to oppress women, the negative portrayal of women in the media, all of these patriarchal practices exist. (p.14)

These conditions create restrictions on women's economic development, which is reflected in the labour market. Only 38.5% of women participate in the labour market, compared with 84.2% of men. Only 10.7% of management positions are held by women, while men make up 89.3% of managerial roles., Meanwhile, the gender breakdown between professional and technical roles is24.4% women, 75.7% men (World Economic Forum, 2021). Momtaz Uddin Ahmed (as cited by Afroze et al., 2014) suggested that approximately 3,000 women in Bangladesh are entrepreneurs, which is 2% of the total number of entrepreneurs in the country.

Within this specific area, social media-based entrepreneurship has emerged as a new field where the number of women is on the rise. In 2020, Bangladesh saw up to 150,000 women using social media platforms for conducting business (Deutsche Welle, 2020). This is an encouraging number, as it means that more employment opportunities are being created for women. Data shows that in Bangladesh women who run enterprises are more likely to hire women, who comprise about 85% of the total employees in women-owned companies (Ahmed et al., 2017).

Despite these positive improvements for female business owners, women entrepreneurs face many obstacles, including the lack of funding opportunities and business-related knowledge, and family responsibilities (Ahammad and Moudud-Ul- Huq, 2013). Afzal Hossain et al. (2018) also found that "economical, psychological, knowledge and skills, family, and legal and administrative [are] the crucial factors, which significantly affect women's involvement as entrepreneurs in the SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises] sector in Bangladesh" (p. 62). Social media creates a platform for these women entrepreneurs to tackle some of the barriers mentioned. Despite male domination, discrimination, unequal pay, and

harassment, women in Bangladesh are trying to make a space for themselves through social media entrepreneurship.

Women in Bangladesh, their journey, experiences, and challenges are the focus of this research paper. Specifically, this study revolves around businesswomen who run their businesses through social media. Semi-structured interviews were used in this research to understand the motivation behind choosing social media as a site for their businesses and the role their close and external networks play in this regard. This paper aims to explore the type of support received through these networks in conducting social media-based businesses.

One of the contributors to the successful start and growth of women-run businesses is social capital. Women struggle more to establish businesses in comparison to men. Social and familial responsibilities as well as restrictions on mobilities limit women's networks and their ability to access funds and other resources. Thus, the researchers believe that social capital plays a significant role in establishing businesses (Stam et al., 2014; Tundui & Tundui, 2013). Relationships hold great value in Bangladesh, and the maintenance of relationships with respect and honour are the basis of social and cultural as well as financial activities (Choudhury, 2021). Women are encouraged "to develop, promote and use appropriate forms of social capital" as support from their social networks has a positive impact on the performance of businesses run by women (Tundui & Tundui, 2013, p. 59). Nan Lin (1999) compared the importance of social capital to financial capital in initiating and expanding businesses. Women's access to social capital, along with other forms of capital, is thus crucial for the stability and growth of their businesses (Dah and Zolnik, 2011). This research examines what role these relationships play in helping social media-based women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. After all, Bangladesh, although male dominated, is an emerging and promising market for women and this research explores what impact social capital has on the initiation and performance of women-owned businesses.

There are at least a couple of reasons for focusing on women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. Research focusing on social capital's role in entrepreneurship from the perspectives of developing countries as well as from the perspectives of women entrepreneurs is limited (Gailey, 2010; Muniady et al., 2015). There is a need to look into markets other than those in developed countries where the majority of research is conducted (Hughes et al., 2012). Second, collectivism and patriarchy are strongly embedded in Bangladeshi society. It is therefore important to investigate how women within the society of Bangladesh conduct their businesses on social media with the support of their close and weak ties.

Social media and entrepreneurship

Starting a business is not an easy task for either women or men. Difficulties in obtaining loans, a lack of purchasing power, and infrastructural problems all create impediments towards establishing and running a business. Along with these hurdles, women face the added obstacles of social and family-specific duties. Gary Akehurst et al. (2012) found that women face both external and internal barriers in turning a business into a success. These hurdles impact the motivation behind launching a business as well as running it. They found that the "main motivation for women to create a business was the same as those for men: the need for success, independence, economic reward and job satisfaction" (p. 2490). Focusing on women in developing countries such as India, Ashima Bhatnagar et al. (2017) found that the reasons women decide to launch a business were "autonomy and adequate income, flexible working environment, opportunities to use and develop human capacity, inducement of empowerment and growth and promotion of societal responsiveness" (p. 50). Flexibility in work hours and work environment has been identified as being more important to women who have children than to men (Hill et al., 2008; Plantenga & Remery, 2009). E. Jeffrey Hill et al. (2008) noted that "depending on life stage, 48–63% of the men and 64–85% of the women valued flextime" (p. 178).

Social media can offer support to women entrepreneurs by providing the flexibility of being able to incorporate work into their daily lives. Celestine Lugaye Ukpere et al. (2014) argued that "social media has enabled [women] the luxury of being able to adequately manage their time and daily tasks enabling them to represent in all aspects of daily developments of their family and business spaces" (p. 558). Other reasons for using social media in doing business are low cost, global reach and direct interaction with customers (Genç & Oksüz, 2015; Rahadi & Abdillah, 2013;).

Social media is a tool that can help women overcome certain obstacles in the way of professionally running their businesses. Francesca Maria Cesaroni et al. (2017) suggested that the cultural background of a country plays an important role in understanding the circumstances under which women use social media for businesses. Social media can provide support for those in a subordinate position faced with many social and family obstacles. For instance, social media can help individuals expand their networks, which women can utilize to expand their businesses (Cesaroni et al., 2017). Similarly, culture also plays a role for businesswomen in the United Arab Emirates, where Instagram users were found to depend on their immediate network for business. Eman Wally and Swapna Koshy (2014) explain:

The fact that Instagram derives its success from the cultural emphasis on family and social groups which is a basic feature of the Emirati society is non-negotiable. The Emirati culture and tradition is strongly based on the tribal concept all for one and one for all. All the participants highlighted the importance of the family support not only for finances but also on the emotional front. All of them had family members as their first line customers (p. 13).

Social networking also plays an important role in online shopping (Parsons, 2002; Rohm & Swaminathan, 2004; Tuten, 2008), where social media contributes to purchase-related decision-making processes. Lisa Harris and Charles Dennis (2011) showed that people trust their friends for product recommendations. As most friends are on Facebook, they turn to Facebook to gather these recommendations and reviews on items to purchase (Harris & Dennis, 2011). Hence, social media creates new ways to do business that support women who face social and financial hurdles in life.

This paper examines what motivates women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh to use social media for their business, and what support they get from their close and external networks and the problems they face.

Social media and women's empowerment

Financial independence is one of the ways by which women can support themselves and others. This form of independence also encourages women to voice their opinions and contribute to the decision-making process. Economic independence is not only related to joining the labour force but also to initiating and engaging in their own businesses. Income-generating activities ensure some form of independence for women. Syed M Hashemi and Sidney Ruth Schuler (1993) described women's empowerment as entailing economic stability. Other researchers noted that economic dimensions such as participating in the market economy, gaining knowledge and skills, and making decisions over household expenditure are part of the greater empowerment of women (Acharya & Bennett, 1982; Ackerly, 1995). Entrepreneurship offers women the space to blend their family duties and personal pursuits; a space where they can take care of children and elders in the family and also create opportunities for monetary gains. These advantages are seen as a convenient arrangement to build a platform for them to make a name for themselves. A study showed that microfinance initiatives taken by women in Nepal and Pakistan brought significant changes to their lives (Gobbi, 2005). In Nepal, self-confidence increased in

94% of women and 46% saw changes in their position at both the societal and family level. In Pakistan, 86% of women witnessed their relations change positively with family members (Gobbi, 2005). In India, women in the silk-reeling industry who received microfinance support experienced not only political empowerment but also

> [A]n increase in their economic and social status, stemming from the fact that they were now earning their own income. Working as independent entrepreneurs and no longer as waged labourers was obviously important to them. They felt that they had more respect in the community and their own self-esteem increased accordingly. Their mobility also increased; they moved around the village more freely, even talked to men, and they went to the cocoon market and Silk Exchange without their husbands. They became much more articulate and self-confident. They had a sense of security and could provide for their children independently of their husband. (Leach & Sitaram, 2002, p. 580)

Financial independence can be a way for women to improve their condition. It can assist in enhancing self-confidence and status in families and also in preventing violence towards women. Koustuv Dalal (2011) conducted a study in India that showed that the combination of employment and higher education helped to combat intimate partner violence. This form of independence can come through the market, as Delphine Godefroit-Winkel (2018) believed that "it has long been regarded as a place of social mutation and transgression" which "opens doors to mutations of power within families and communities" (p. 2).

Online social platforms can be a tool for women to expand their networks and businesses. As these platforms offer spaces to share user-generated content, women can gather information to equip themselves for the development of their business and to expand their market. Over the past decade, social media has been instrumental in opening doors towards empowerment for women. Dana Rotman et al. (2011) explained that "what social media can provide is a way to facilitate awareness of issues at a much larger scale which may translate into further action" (p. 821).

Women have been taking initiatives, such as building unity to further their cause, making profit by doing business online, and giving or seeking advice to use this online tool for their betterment. Echoing this sentiment, Egyptian-American activist Mona el-Tahawey (as cited by Radsch, 2017) believes that "the power of women is in their stories. They are not theories, they are real lives that, thanks to social networks, we are able to share and

exchange" (para 1). Sharing experiences is one of many routes in social media through which women are expanding their networks. By sharing recipes and pictures of foods, Arab women are not only projecting their way of life but are also building their own community (Aharoni, 2013).

Social media has given women a platform to voice their opinion and unite for a cause. Manal al-Sharif's hashtag movement for driving in Iran in 2011 and the "Black dot" movement and online petitions regarding the Delhi rape incident in India are prominent social media movements initiated by women and for women's causes (Rajendran, 2015). In their paper, Ukpere et al. (2014) provided examples of how women entrepreneurs around the world are using the internet and social media to bring changes to their lives. Women in North America, Asia, and Africa are utilizing these technologies to not only support their businesses locally but also to expand it at the international level. Furthermore, they argued that these women are "forming forums for advice and networking that make expert advice available in real time/instantaneously at the same time making use of the same for interacting with existing as well as meeting prospective clientele" (p. 554). In Pakistan social media has been positively associated with women's empowerment. Qurra-tul-ain Ali Sheikh et al. (2015) showed that access to knowledge, skill, and information is available on social media, which assists in women's increased understanding of their rights. Moreover, as these social media platforms open the door to the outside world, women's perspectives change, enhancing their economic development and decision-making processes (Sheikh et al., 2015). One of the areas highlighted by researchers is the fact that social media has ensured women's participation in diverse areas, giving them voices and opening paths for these voices to be heard nationally and internationally (Radsch & Khamis, 2013; Schuster, 2013).

Although social media offers a supportive platform for women and provides them with new opportunities, it still presents challenges. The physical and mental burdens faced by women in society also exist in social media. Brian D. Loader and Dan Mercea (2011) argued that social media should be studied from both the utopian and dystopian perspectives. One of the common obstacles relating to social media is basic access to technology and, more specifically, subscriptions to the internet in developing countries. As mentioned above, the development of women's positions is hindered by many social and cultural hostilities as well as religious rules. Hence, Victoria A. Newsom and Lara Lengel (2012) rightly state,

> We question whether these spaces can in fact provide
> voice to marginalized persons, or if they are re-creating

digital, gender, and political divides. We suggest they are simultaneously empowering and restrained by hegemony, that they provide an impetus if not the means for altering hegemony. (p. 33)

Moreover, social media is still a place dominated by those in advantaged positions in society, especially in developing countries. Those who are in lower socio-economic positions are excluded due to a lack of the technological infrastructure needed to access social media and the internet. Hence, a significant segment of society is not enjoying the benefits offered by social media.

Women have both positive and negative experiences on social media. If they take advantage of the tool's positive aspects, then their position in society could change. Victoria A. Newsom and Lara Lengel (2012) concluded that "[i]t is important to understand that for many repressed and isolated voices social media are a primary way that needs and goals can be recognized to gain support from global institutions" (p. 38). Thus, it is critical to examine the opportunities created by social media for women entrepreneurs; in particular, how women use social media as entrepreneurs through the lens of social capital theory.

Social capital and entrepreneurship

Extracting benefits from social relationships is popularly known as social capital. Michael Woolcock and Deepa Narayan (2000) explained that "the basic idea of social capital is that a person's family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called on in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for material gain" (p. 226). Both close and external social networks contribute to the formation of social capital. Trust, norms, reciprocity, and connections between social networks are essential elements within the concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, Coleman, 1988, Putnam, 2000). Generally, there are two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Tight social relations such as close friends, family members, and neighbours are known as bonding social capital (strong ties). In contrast, bridging social capital (weak ties) includes loosely linked relationships, such as those often seen among acquaintances and colleagues.

Social capital as a vital resource is positively linked to the success of a business. Various forms of social relationships are essential for turning a business into a profitable endeavour (Bennet & Richardson, 2005; Lin et al., 2000), as financial, social, and individual networks help entrepreneurs gain access to valuable resources (Lages et al., 2009; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) including information, knowledge, skills, financial support, product

advertisements, and access to customers and suppliers (Marin et al., 2012; Muniady et al., 2015; Teoh & Chong, 2008). In these areas of social capital, women are less privileged, as their social connections are generally limited. Research in Asian countries showed that compared to men, women are unable to maintain their networks because of heavy family and household duties (Dhaliwal, 2000). This spills over to the lives of women entrepreneurs as well. Their businesses start with inadequate access to human and social capital (Schmidt & Parker, 2003) and the valuable social networks that can assist them in attaining helpful resources (Smith-Hunter & Boyd, 2004).

Social connection, social interaction, and social relationships can play significant roles in building businesses. Lavlu Mozumdar et al. (2017) found that social capital was effectively impacting business performances of rural women in Bangladesh by creating skills, trust, and access to other capital. Formal and informal networks functioned as loan providers. Although no gender-based differences were found for seeking formal loans in Vietnam, better relationships with members of government and business institutions could help in acquiring loans (Pham & Talavera, 2018). A similar finding was also seen in Malaysia, where group-based lending through social capital proved helpful for women as they were unable to access business loans (Yusuff et al., 2016). Another study in Malaysia also suggested that as there is a positive relationship between social capital and micro-enterprise performance, and that women should invest more in strengthening business relationships with those in the concerned sectors (Muniady et al., 2015). Women in South Africa gained emotional, instrumental, and financial support from their families, which positively impacted the performance of their businesses (Neneh, 2017). However, they were not fully utilizing the benefits that could be accessed through bonding and bridging social capital, such as hiring competent employees from outside their family or taking informal loans from external members (Neneh, 2018). In the context of Malaysia, Wendy Ming-Yen Teoh and Siong-Choy Chong (2008) argued that bonding social capital can be a great support for women entrepreneurs as they often provide free labour. By focusing on trust and obligation, Muhammad Azam Roomi (2009) found that bonding social capital was more helpful for businesswomen in England than bridging social capital. Access to vital information and resources available through bonding social capital helped in the "growth stage of the business" (Roomi, 2009, p. 18). A similar finding was also evident in Ethiopia and the Philippines. Families for women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia provided either financial or labour support (Hundera, 2014). Meanwhile, Vimolwan Yukongdi and Jennyvi Mosuta Cañete (2020) found that the 27 Filipino women entrepreneurs they interviewed were less inclined towards obtaining a loan from micro-

finances but instead relied on their own savings. After consultation with their relatives, rather than other personal social networks, these women initiated their own businesses (Yukongdi & Cañete, 2020). In Ghana, John Kuada (2009) found that family was the main source of financial support for women because they found it challenging to seek formal loans in that country. In addition to this, prayers and "fellowships" attained through Church membership provided moral support to the women entrepreneurs (Kuada, 2009, p. 98). Church-based ties also contributed to women's success in business in Indonesia. Pudjo Suharso et al. (2019) studied three dimensions of social capital in understanding its role in Indonesian women enterprisers' lives. Moral support was the most influential factor and it made a strong contribution to the sustainability of their businesses. The other two dimensions, trust through financial support and formal and informal network support, had less significant involvement.

Social capital does not inherently entail success. Actors do not always benefit from their maintenance of social connections (Portes & Landolt, 2000). Complications in the form of mismanagement, anxiety, and social and economic pressures may exist within these networks. In a comparative study between women entrepreneurs in Pakistan and Tanzania, Marta Lindvert (2018) argued that social capital is a complex process within the arena of business where there are no straightforward positive or negative rewards. Echoing the work of Ian R. MacNeil (1980) and Alejandro Portes (1998, 2010), she claimed that women in both Pakistan and Tanzania face more family constraints than benefits despite getting loans and other assistance. Additionally, these women could acquire support only from informal networks and not from external or formal networks, which in turn limits the expansion and success of their businesses (Lindvert, 2018).

In this research, social networks and the external networks of entrepreneurs are examined in order to understand the support and challenges they provide to women in running their businesses. The support can be in the form of tangible or intangible resources. Tangible resources are "finance, technology, and materials" while intangible resources are "knowledge, capabilities, and relationships" (Kuada, 2009, p. 86). How these forms of support are accessed through bonding and bridging social capital will be explored here.

Methodology

Women entrepreneurs who do business through social media were interviewed. Data were derived through the mixed methods of content analysis and semi-structured interviews. As there was no data available on business women's use of social media, snowball sampling was the most

suitable method for this research since it offered a way to closely investigate the use pattern and the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. For the snowball sampling, a request to participate in this research was posted on potential participants' and their networks' Facebook walls. The criteria for identifying and selecting a participant were: i) above the age of 18; ii) must own a business not jointly owned with men; ii) must use social media to run their business; iii) willing to allow the researcher to join their social media group, page or wall (if private or locked); and iv) must be prepared to speak freely about their experiences. Those who responded favorably were selected for the interview.

Table 1 describes in detail the methodology. Thirty-one urban-based women entrepreneurs between the ages of 24 to 47 years old were chosen. The majority (65%) of them were from 30 to 35 years old. Of the rest of the participants, 20% were less than 30 years old and 10% were between 35 and 39 years of age. Only 5% were between the ages of 40 to 47. Most of them had college/university graduate degrees (75%). After the selection, consent was taken from the women participants.

Table 1: Detailed information on methodology

Methodology	Details
Method of data collection	Semi-structured interview Content analysis
Sampling	Snowball sampling
Total number of participants	31
Age	24 to 47 years old
Length of interview	50 to 70 minutes
Duration of interview	1–30 September, 2020
Language of interview	Bangla
Content analysis	Comments section of Facebook and Instagram pages
Analysis technique	Thematic analysis

First, a content analysis of their Facebook and Instagram business pages was done for two weeks. The customers' comments in the "comment section," both positive and negative, were carefully studied to provide an understanding of the tangible and intangible support from their network. After the content analysis, semi-structured interviews of around 50 to 70 minutes were conducted to bring forth the participants' feelings about, perceptions, and experiences of social media usage for businesses. This form of the interview allowed the researcher to hear the stories from participants about the role their close networks played in their online

business. A comfortable environment was created where the participants could share their experiences, including the challenges they faced. The interviews were structured around broad questions on social media types, business, motivation, support from networks, and problems faced. The businesswomen were also asked about how they interpreted the positive and negative comments on their pages. Data from the comments and interviews were coded and thematically analyzed, and background data on the participants were incorporated to complete the findings. The structure of the discussion below is based on the themes of motivation, type of business, form of support received, and challenges faced.

Analysis

Women entrepreneurs and their businesses

During the interviews, the participants talked about their businesses, including about their customers, monthly incomes and the motivation behind launching an online business. The findings show that the businesswomen in this study used multiple social media platforms to conduct their businesses, including selling various types of products. Their responses are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Background of the business

Category	Percentage
Social media platform used:	
• Facebook	78
• Facebook and Instagram	22
Type of business:	
• Homemade food	30
• Cosmetics	25
• Clothes for women	25
• Stationery and crafts	20
Gender of customers:	
• Women	78
• Men	16
• Both	6
Type of customers when the businesses began:	
• Family and friends	93
• External networks	7

Category	Percentage
Monthly income from business (in taka):	
• 15,000 – 25,000	17
• 26,000 – 35,000	33
• 36,000 – 45,000	30
• 46,000 – 55,000	20
Full time/part time:	
• Business as full-time job	54
• Business as part-time job	34
• Business as part-time job and different full-time job	12
Motivation:	
• Convenience	48
• Small investment	37
• Easy to build trust	11
• Inspired by others	4

a) Type of social media

LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are some of the most popular social media platforms in the world. The total number of Facebook users in Bangladesh was recorded at 28,000,000 in 2017 (Internet World Stats, 2018). In the same year, Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, had the third highest number of active Facebook users in the country (We are social, 2017). This is reflected in this study, as 78% of the Bangladeshi named Facebook as their preferred social media for business (see Table 2).

Participants in the 24 to 31-year age group had their business accounts both on Facebook and Instagram and they reported using both of these social media platforms simultaneously. Twenty-two percent of the participants are in this category. When asked about the reason for doing business through both Facebook and Instagram, one participant (age 27) said,

> I wanted to reach out to the younger generation who are now using Instagram more and more. Being on two social media has helped me to get more buyers. I used to be on Facebook only. But I realized the importance of Instagram and my sales increased by 25%.

b) Type of business and its customers

The participants used social media for doing business selling homemade food delivery (30%), cosmetics (25%), clothes for women (25%), and stationery and crafts (20%). Generally, items that are likely to be purchased by women are sold by these businesswomen on Facebook (see Table 2). Women for women is the participants' business goal so they concentrated

mainly on women Facebook users' needs.. Customers for their products were mostly women (78%). Only those who sold food and stationery had both men and women as their customers.

Initially, almost all of the participants (93%) depended on their social networks to sell their products. It was the family members and friends who lent their support by ordering products and promoting the businesses among their own networks. This resembled the findings of research conducted in other parts of the world (Parsons, 2002; Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004; Tuten, 2008; Harris and Dennis, 2011).

c) Monthly income

The businesswomen noted in their responses that their monthly income from their social media-based businesses ranged from 15,000–55,000 taka (179–650 USD). In the Bangladeshi context, the average per capita income in 2018 was 1,751 USD (The Daily Star, 2018). Table 2 shows that more than half of the participants earned between 26,000 and 45,000 taka per month. Hence, their profit level can be regarded as moderate to high.

A large number of women in this study engaged in business as their full-time job (54%), while some (34%) preferred it as their part-time profession. According to the participants, online business has given them "flexibility," "a new network of people," and "new ideas" including the possibility of simultaneously performing two jobs. Around 12% of the informants had a full-time job and conducted business as their part-time job. Social media-based businesses opened new avenues for their economic development. But this flexibility also reconfigured their role as the spatial boundary between work and home fade away.

d) Motivation behind using social media

Social media offers the flexibility to work at different hours and in different work environments. Women in this research reported using social media to conduct their businesses for this specific reason, with 48% citing convenience as a benefit (see Table 2). Participants reported finding this form of business convenient because it allowed them to create a balance between personal and professional lives. An informant who ran a homemade food delivery business (age 38) said:

> It is very easy for me because I have two high school-going kids and a family. I am very busy with my family's work. On the other hand, Facebook has a lot of people. Many people order food from their home through Facebook. Facebook helps me with my business. I found a lot of diners from Facebook.

Regarding convenience, another participant (age 28) felt that

> Facebook is one of the widest marketplaces to get in touch with real clients. It is easier to communicate or reach my target group. In a physical store, one needs to wait for clients to come and choose to buy but here I can reach my clients by myself through Facebook.

The second most popular reason for conducting business through social media (37%) was the small financial investment required. Compared to regular forms of business, these online businesses needed less financial investment because, as one informant said (age 31), "No physical store or large number of employees are required."

Being able to build trust with customers was the third most cited reasons for doing business online (11%). This was possible as online platforms allowed business owners to "create trust more easily," reported one participant (age 37) who ran a food service. Another participant (age 26) who sold cosmetics on social media explained that "as the customers can communicate with me directly at any time of the day, I can clarify their concerns or suggest products suited for them. This helps to gain trust of my customers."

Table 2 also shows that for some (4%) of the businesswomen interviewed here, inspiration from others was a reason to start a business through social media. A participant (age 30) who has a makeup-related business said that:

> I saw some of my friends doing well in business so I was inspired by them. So I decided to start my online business through Facebook. And I found it really helpful.

Support from bonding social capital

One of the main aims of the research was to investigate the forms of support these businesswomen attained from their close networks or bonding social capital. Aside from the background of their business, women were asked questions about the support they gained from their social connections. A large part of their close network were their families. Friends, relatives, close neighbours and colleagues were also involved as close ties. The support these businesswomen got is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Type of support from bonding social capital

Category	Percentage
Family support	90
No family support	
• Runs business by themselves without family support	10
Type of support from families:	
• Encouragement	33
• Loan providers	30
• Help with business activities	15
• Technical help	12
Other close networks:	
• Purchased products	7
• Conducted free promotion	6
• Both	87

a) Family support

Ninety percent of the participants reported that they had support from their family in doing business. Of these, the majority (33%) received encouragement from their families, as can be seen in Table 3. Encouragement took the form of "emotional support," "looking after kids," and "helping with household chores" Although some of the previous research mentioned family responsibilities as an obstacle (Ahammad & Moudud-Ul- Huq, 2013; Cesaroni et al., 2017; Hossain et al., 2018), the majority of the participants in this research found family to be a strength. Encouragement from families reinforced the findings of Wally and Koshy (2014), as discussed previously. One participant (age 36) said,

> Without my family, running this business would be near impossible for me. I have children and older parents to look after. To send the parcels and to accept the orders through social media, my family supports me. After my family responsibilities are taken care of, I try to work on my business. As it is expanding and gaining customers, the amount of work is also increasing.

Some of the participants argued that the encouragement was mutual. A woman (age 29) who sold homemade foods explained that "some families encourage us as we contribute to the family expenses and so they feel encouraged to encourage us more." It is the financial benefit that encouraged them to provide assistance. Another participant (age 37) added that

> My earnings have helped me to have a voice in the family decision-making power. My contribution in the family or

social life is not only through financial support but also through decision-making opportunities.

Increased self-confidence and position in family decision-making was also found in other South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, and Nepal (Gobbi, 2005; Leach & Sitaram, 2002).

Families also worked as loan providers for some of these women (30%). They claimed that family members, mainly husbands, fathers, and siblings, helped to launch the business by providing loans. Seeking a loan from financial institutions involves a lengthy and complex process. The participants reported opting out of acquiring loans from financial institutions for the following reasons: "too much hassle," "interest rates," "running around from office to office," and "too much paperwork." Loans offered by families were also witnessed in Ghana and Malaysia (Kuada, 2009; Yusuff et al., 2016).

The other types of support received were helping with doing business-related activities (15%) and providing technical help (12%). Families contributed by doing "inventory," "taking orders," and "ensuring delivery." A woman (age 44) whose business focused on crafts had a crisis with her laptop and her family helped by fixing it. She said, "I know how to run social media but I have zero knowledge on computer hardware. My family was most supportive in this matter."

Not all of the participants in this research had support from their families. Around 10% of the women entrepreneurs started the business on their own initiative and ran the business by themselves. No family support was needed or provided to them.

b) Friends and other close networks

The driving force behind these women's online businesses were their friends, relatives, close neighbours, and colleagues. A majority of the participants (87%) had these close networks help by purchasing their products and also promoting their business. Almost all of the participants identified these bonding ties to include those who first bought their products. Members of these social networks also campaigned for their business and did free promotional activities on their own personal social media profiles. Free advertisements through word of mouth boosted the participants' businesses and increased the numbers of subscribers of their online business pages. An informant with a business selling crafts (aged 30) explained:

> My friends and relatives wrote a small note on my products and tagged my business page. Initially, customers came

through their contacts. A relative paid for promoting my page on Facebook. Support from them helped to establish my online business.

Bonding social capital offered support at multiple levels of the business, ranging from motivation to technical assistance. Family, friends, and other close networks contributed to the establishment and survival of the businesses run by women on social media.

Support from bridging social capital

The businesswomen in this study identified officers in banks, other businessmen, and women and suppliers as their external network who provide some support to their business. Table 4 shows that these networks were seen as providing more of a formal or institutional support. An informant (age 35) regarded these networks' support as "office or paper-related support." Most of the businesswomen spoke of the staff in banks in a positive way, reporting that they helped with the completion or submission of forms, the collection of documents, and other loan-related support (36%). Business-related problems (33%), such as where to lodge complaints against clients and information about better delivery services, were also received from these external networks. The participants also appreciated the logistical support (31%) received in the form of shipment, transportation, and skilled employees. Overall, the performance of their businesses appeared to rely on bridging social capital.

Table 4: Type of support from bridging social capital

Category	Percentage
Type of support	
• Paperwork for loans	36
• Help with business-related problems	33
• Help with logistics	31

Support from customers

Customers fall between bonding and bridging social capital, and the participating businesswomen also had customers who belonged to their close network as well as their external network. A blend of these two social capitals can be seen within their networks of customers. As shown in Table 3, close relations provided support in the initiation of the sales. They also contributed to increasing the number of customers via free promotional activities. These customers' comments on Facebook and Instagram pages, both positive and negative, were taken into consideration and analyzed to get a glimpse of the support they gave. The type of businesses that received

the highest number of comments were those that sold cosmetics (35%) and clothes (33%). In comparison, businesses related to homemade food (25%) and stationary and crafts (7%) received fewer comments. On average, more positive comments were posted (55%) than negative (45%), as seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Type of comments

Number of comments:	Percentage
• Cosmetics	35
• Clothes	33
• Homemade food	25
• Stationery and crafts	7
Comments:	
• Positive	55
• Negative	45
Positive comments:	
• Friendly customer care	26
• Good quality	21
• Reasonable prices compared to other social media business pages	16
• Owner and her page are an inspiration	13
• Repeat purchases	11
• Detailed description of products	7
• Love this page	6
Negative comments:	
• Lack of response	47
• Delay in delivery	35
• Poor delivery service	13
• Picture and product don't match	5

The positive comments received were mainly about "friendly customer care" (26%), "good quality" products (21%), and affordability (16%). A participant who ran a business selling stationery (age 29) said, "These comments encouraged others to join and order products." Other comments that the informants saw as encouragement for themselves and their businesses were: "owner and her page are an inspiration" (13%), "repeat purchase" (11%), "detailed description of products" (7%), and "love this page" (6%). These not only helped with sales but also formed a relationship between the business owner and the clients. While discussing positive comments and her business, a participant (age 36), whose business sold homemade food, said, "When those who are not my friends or relatives leave positive comments on my page, a new and strong bond is created. I have some customers who have actually became my good friends, which is not limited to business only but beyond that." These relationships turn

bridging social capital into bonding social capital, as more than half of the participants (53%) reported experiencing this phenomenon.

Along with positive comments, the businesswomen's walls or pages also contained negative comments, although there were fewer of them than positive ones. Nearly half of the negative comments were related to "lack of response" (47%). Comments such as "delay in delivery" (35%), "poor delivery service" (13%), and "pictures and products don't match" (5%) were also seen. The cause of "lack of response" is obvious; one young participant (age 24) reported, "The page receives a large volume of comments and it is not possible for me or my family to answer them all after doing both house chores and business-related tasks." Regarding negative comments, an informant (age 28) noted that "these comments help to build business by offering better service and products." Another businesswoman (age 31), whose business sold cosmetics, compared social media-based businesses with other office-based jobs. She said,

> Disagreements or arguments or negative talk occur at every job but do we quit? No. Similarly, there is no point in stepping back. I am here to do business, I cannot be weak and close my shop. These comments mean that people are looking at my products, buying them and giving me feedback so I can improve.

These businesswomen accepted both positive and negative comments as intangible support which contributed to building their businesses. The findings suggest that this type of network helped the businesses to build, exist, and grow.

Challenges

This study found that lack of access to outside funding (35%), home and family-related chores (31%), socially unacceptable profession (18%), limited learning opportunities (9%), and technical and service-related problems in business (7%) are some of the obstacles the women faced in doing business through social media. The social networks of some of these women were not always positive. One participant (age 45) noted, "Family responsibilities burdened my business, for which sometimes I had to remain absent from daily activities." Another participant (age 39) who ran a cosmetics business felt that "heavy reliance on families for funding or technical support is not always good. I feel hesitance in seeking their help in these regards always. If I had the option to get easy loans or hire employees, then that would be better." Another participant (age 28) reported that her business was not being regarded as a profession by society. She summarized it as follows:

Online business is not a socially well-recognized career as yet. Even if I earn more, our relatives and society do not appreciate that; rather, they look down upon our profession. Thus family often puts pressure to stop the business, even if it is going well and has a bright future. Woman doing business which is going well is still a myth to many of us. Thus, it is hard to manage funding from family. Moreover, a woman's career is still an optional aspect of our culture. Thus, in any sort of urgency or problem, the first thing that I had to do was temporarily close my business for a certain period of time. These irregularities make the competition even harder for me.

Bridging and bonding social capital in the business arena poses challenges for women. The presence of impediments was also found along with positive support. Marta Lindvert (2018) also expressed negative aspects of social capital with her findings from Tanzania and Pakistan.

Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the role social networks play in the performance of businesses run by women. The study found that not only the younger women, who are thought to be technology savvy, are taking the opportunities offered by the technology but also older women. However, while younger businesswomen use both Facebook and Instagram as their business tool, older women rely only on Facebook.

From a social capital perspective, bonding ties provided strong and positive support to these women. Family and friends encouraged women entrepreneurs by providing loans, free labour, and product promotions. These forms of initiative helped women to build and sustain their own businesses. On the other hand, bridging social capital offered more formal support in running the businesses.

Customers represented a blend of bonding and bridging social capital. Some customers shifted from bridging social capital to bonding social capital as they created a stronger bond of social network through their comments or feedback. Customers supported these businesswomen in multiple ways including intangible support. Such forms of support built the foundation for the businesses to start, survive, and succeed.

Along with positive support, these businesses also experienced challenges which forced some women to invest less time and effort in their businesses. Funding and technical crises, lack of scope for building capacities, as well as the daily responsibilities of home and family-related

chores were some of the impediments reported by the participants. Despite these barriers, the majority of the participants' families worked as their support system. The perspectives of the families are gradually changing after seeing the benefits of these forms of businesses.

However, funding is still an issue for some women. Financial institutions need to come forward with better and easy loan opportunities for women. Further research can focus on larger groups of participants, including both businesswomen and businessmen, to gain a comparative understanding of the role social capital plays in their businesses. Also, the policies that support businesswomen and businessmen who use social media for their businesses need to be examined.

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Grant Support Details

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