

# SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs): MOTIVATION FOR YOUNG WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN BANGLADESH

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## Abstract

This study explores the role of social media in motivating and supporting young women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on promoting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the digital era. This research aimed to understand how social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube influence the entrepreneurial journeys of young women, providing them with motivation, visibility, and access to broader markets. Through a mixed-methods approach, including 20 case studies (ICIs), 4 focus group discussions (FGDs) with young women entrepreneurs and 2 key informant interviews (KIIs) with experts, the study highlighted both the opportunities and challenges young women face in utilizing social media for business growth. The findings revealed that social media serves as a powerful tool for marketing, networking, and inspiration. Many women entrepreneurs struggle with digital literacy, time management, lack of family support, bank loans, insecurity, and negative comments and negative comment from community members. This study emphasized the need for targeted training, mentorship, and policy support to enhance the effectiveness of social media in fostering entrepreneurship. This research makes concluding remarks with policy recommendations aimed at improving digital literacy, creating mentorship opportunities, motivational seminar or workshop arrangements, more budget-related programs, facilitating access to financial resources, and promoting gender-inclusive policies to empower women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh's digital economy.

## 01. Background of the Study

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Traditionally, women in development (WID) in Bangladesh relies on women's empowerment through employment generation, playing as earning sources in family, engaging in decision-making processes, and participating in policy-making processes. The WID approach mainly emphasized women's capacity and skill development process, which comes from some motivational factors and success stories in this digital age. In this age, social media has progressively become a dynamic tool for young women entrepreneurs, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh. With the rapid expansion of internet access and smartphone usage, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are not only widely used for personal interactions but have also become essential channels for promoting and growing small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This trend is especially prominent among young women who view social media as an accessible pathway to entrepreneurship, facilitating opportunities that were previously challenging to attain through traditional business avenues.

Bangladesh's social media landscape currently includes over 40 million active users, with a notable percentage being young women who regularly use these platforms for online shopping, networking, and education (StatCounter Global Stats, 2023). The research highlights that these women increasingly trust social media not just as consumers but as entrepreneurs. They often draw motivation from observing other successful women on social media, who openly share their entrepreneurial journeys, sales strategies, and day-to-day operations through posts, tutorials, and live sessions. Such content serves both as a source of inspiration and as an informal learning tool, empowering young women to envision and pursue their own entrepreneurial goals (Islam et al., 2021).

Many young women in Bangladesh use social media provides a flexible business environment that enables them to balance family and work responsibilities. This is significant, given the socio-cultural context in which traditional employment may not always be feasible or encouraged. In fact, several studies have revealed that women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh are increasingly finding success in industries such as fashion, handmade crafts, beauty services, and home-based food businesses, all of which thrive with the visual and interactive engagement that social media offers (Hossain et al., 2023). These platforms allow female to be entrepreneurs and to promote their products, communicate with customers, and handle transactions directly, thereby reducing the operational costs associated with SMEs.

However, despite the motivational influence of social media, challenges remain. On Facebook (87.77%) and Messenger (76%) platforms, women become victims of bullying like negative comments (Mridha, 2024). While some women entrepreneurs gain experience through informal social media interactions, many lack formal training in key areas, such as digital marketing, customer service, and financial planning specific to SMEs. Addressing this gap through tailored training programs could empower young women to better navigate and succeed in the online business world, helping them to enhance their marketing skills, customer engagement, and financial acumen (Ahmed & Rahman, 2022).

This study investigates how social media can serve as a motivational and empowering tool for young women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, specifically in the promotion and sustaining of SMEs. The study explored the ways social media motivates young women, the barriers they face in fully utilizing it, and the potential benefits of formalized support and training in enhancing their entrepreneurial outcomes.

## **02. Justification for the study**

The role of social media as a motivating tool for young women entrepreneurs is an emerging area of interest, especially within the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Bangladesh. Social media has become more than just a platform for social interaction; it now serves as an essential resource for entrepreneurial growth, offering low-cost marketing, access to a large audience, and opportunities for networking and mentorship (Islam et al., 2021). 100% of youth in Dhaka city are involved in online activities by using electronic devices like smartphones, computers, and smart TV, and that is why this platform is very trending for business (Mridha, 2024).

However, while these platforms offer substantial potential, a critical need exists for research focused on how young women specifically use social media for business motivation and success, as well as the challenges they encounter. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective support systems and policies intended to empower young women entrepreneurs.

Another key reason for this study is to address the existing knowledge gap regarding the training and support needs of young women using social media for entrepreneurial purposes. While social media has made it easier to promote products and interact with customers, there is a significant need for structured guidance on how to effectively leverage these platforms for long-term business growth. Investigating these training needs and understanding the specific motivational factors of young women entrepreneurs has enabled policymakers and support organizations to develop targeted initiatives that address these skill gaps. GOs and NGOs can play vital roles in this regard because they are related to poverty alleviation and women empowerment (Sadia and Mridha, 2021).

Finally, this study makes a potential contribution to women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh. Social media has already proven to be a transformative tool for women's participation in the workforce by allowing greater flexibility and accessibility. This flexibility is particularly important in Bangladesh, where women often face traditional expectations that limit their engagement in formal business settings (Akter & Sarkar, 2020). By focusing on the motivational role of social media, this study highlights how digital tools can facilitate economic independence and confidence among young women, encouraging them to overcome socio-cultural barriers and participate more actively in the economy.

In summary, this study fills a critical research gap by examining the unique role of social media as a driver of motivation and business success for young women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. By addressing the existing challenges and training needs, this research has provided valuable insights into how social media can be more effectively leveraged to support the growth of women-led SMEs, contributing to the broader goals of economic inclusion and empowerment.

### **03. Objective of the Study**

#### ***Main Objective***

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of social media as a motivational tool for promoting the success of young women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, specifically within the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

#### ***Specific Objectives***

- a) To assess the impact of social media on the entrepreneurial motivation and business growth of young women in Bangladesh.
- b) To identify the specific social media tools and strategies that young women entrepreneurs use for marketing, customer engagement, and sales in SMEs.
- c) To explore the challenges and barriers faced by young women entrepreneurs in leveraging social media for business growth and sustainability.
- d) To provide recommendations for policymakers and support organizations on how to improve the use of social media as a platform for women-led SMEs to increase economic empowerment and inclusion for young women in Bangladesh.

### **04. Methodology of the Study**

#### **04.1 Research Design**

This qualitative study uses a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on young women entrepreneurs. This study combines In-depth Case Interviews (ICIs) with FGDs and KIIs, allowing for triangulation and an in-depth exploration of the research objectives.

#### **04.2 Main and Supportive Methods**

This study administrated In-depth Case Interviews (ICIs) as main method and focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs) as supportive methods. The following table shows its justification and purposes.

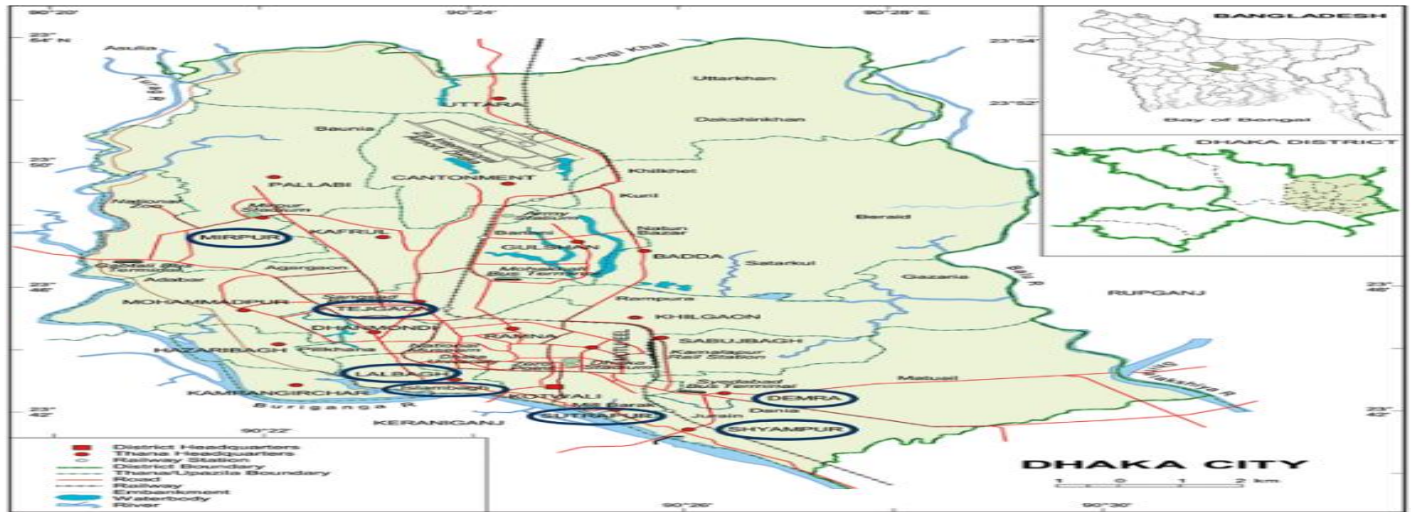
**Table 01: Methods of study**

Sl. No.	Methods	Justification	Purposes
1	In-depth Case Interviews (ICIs)	Exploring individual opinions, experiences expression and comments.	To obtain comprehensive information about the respondents.
2	Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	Crossing opinions on research questions through discussion.	To cross various dimensions of opinion.
3	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	Incorporating expert and researchers' opinions on this issue.	To engage in observed/studied recommendations and policy dialog.

**04.3 Study Area**

This study focuses on Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh, as it is the primary business hub and has a high concentration of young, digitally active women entrepreneurs involved in SMEs. The rationale for selecting this area is that, in Bangladesh, there are about 8.1 million micro, small, and medium enterprises, with approximately 2.3 million operating in urban areas and nearly 5.8 million in rural areas. Among the total active enterprises, the highest 32.2% operate in Dhaka (Abedin, 2019). The map below shows the study location.

**Map 01: Study Location**



Source: Bangladesh Bank, 2018

**04.4 Sampling Procedure**

The study employs purposive sampling to select participants who can provide relevant and rich information that aligns with the study objectives. The sample includes the following:

**20 In-depth Case Interviews (ICIs):** Young women entrepreneurs in Dhaka who actively use social media for their businesses were selected as case study participants. They represented various SME sectors, such as fashion, beauty, handicrafts, pottery, and food, providing diverse perspectives.

**4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Each FGD has include 5-7 participants, bringing together young women entrepreneurs from different sectors to discuss common experiences, challenges, and social media strategies.

**2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Two KIIs were conducted with experts (1) and researchers (1) specializing in digital entrepreneurship, social media marketing, or women's economic empowerment. These informants provided insights into the broader context and trends that impact young women entrepreneurs in Dhaka.

#### **04.5 Data Sources**

**Primary Data:** Collected through face-to-face interviews, FGDs, and KIIs. The data collection methods include in-depth interviews with the participants and discussions in FGDs, supported by observation to gain context-specific insights into how social media is used.

**Secondary Data:** This study was conducted from relevant literature, including academic journals, reports, government publications, and online sources, to provide context and support the analysis of the primary data.

#### **04.6 Data Collection Methods and Tools**

**Face-to-Face Interviews:** Face-to-face interviews were conducted using the Open-Ended Interview Guidelines for each case study participant. This approach allows for further exploration of individual experiences and challenges with social media usage.

**Observation:** Observational data has gathered during interactions to capture real-time social media engagement patterns, digital marketing strategies and communication methods used by the participants.

**Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Each FGD was guided by a moderator and focused on understanding collective challenges, motivations, and the impact of social media on business operations. An FGDs Checklist was created for this purpose.

**Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Formal interviews with experts and researchers have provided additional insights into the broader implications of social media in empowering young women in the SME sector. The KII Checklist has been created for this purpose for both expert and researcher opinions and recommendations.

#### **04.7 Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this study was done on **objective and some theme-based**, following the following steps:

**Thematic Analysis:** Primary data from interviews, FGDs, and observations were coded and categorized based on themes relevant to the research objectives, such as motivation, challenges, strategies, and impact.

**Objective-Based Analysis:** Each research objective guided a focused analysis to determine specific findings related to the role of social media in supporting entrepreneurial motivation, strategies, and success.

**Cross-Case Analysis:** Findings from the 20 case studies were compared to identify commonalities and differences in social media usage, challenges, and outcomes among young female entrepreneurs.

#### **04.8 Presentation and Generalization**

The findings are presented in a narrative format, supported by quotes and examples from participants to illustrate key themes and objectives. Generalizations have been cautiously made, recognizing the qualitative nature of the study and its purposive sample, yet offering insights that may inform broader strategies to support young women entrepreneurs in similar urban contexts.

#### **04.9 Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. The participants were also informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. The principles of self-determination, confidentiality, and sensitive language use are strictly maintained.

### **05. Study Findings**

Findings of the study are presented in three different sections related to the study methods and themes. The first section presents the key findings of the study based on the analysis of **20 case studies**. The findings are organized by the main themes identified from the study objectives, highlighting the role of social media as a motivational tool, the strategies used by young women entrepreneurs, the challenges faced, and the recommendations for further support. Direct quotes from participants illustrate their experiences and insights.

### ***Motivational Tool for Young Women Entrepreneurs***

Most participants reported that social media served as a major motivational force, offering inspiration and practical insights from established women entrepreneurs. Participants described how they were encouraged by observing success stories and learning from influencers who shared their journeys on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. This exposure reduced the fear of starting a business and inspired young women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.

**Case Participant 4, named Rima (30)**, shared, *“Seeing other women like me successfully running businesses on social media gave me the confidence to start my own. I felt that if they could do it, I could too.”*

**Case Participant 12 named Purobi (26)** and remarked, *“Facebook makes it easy to learn new things. I follow several women who share their business stories, which motivates me to keep pushing forward.”*

Thus, social media has become a source of empowerment, allowing young women to feel part of a supportive community where they can observe and learn from others’ experiences.

### **Strategies for Marketing and Customer Engagement**

All 20 participants used various social media strategies to promote their businesses. They emphasized that social media enabled cost-effective marketing, with tools such as Facebook pages, Instagram posts, and WhatsApp groups allowing companies to reach a wider audience without significant financial investment. Many participants also discussed the importance of customer engagement for building trust and loyalty.

**Case Participant 7 Sadia (28)** stated, *“I interact with my customers directly on Facebook Messenger, answer their questions, and sometimes even take live videos to show products. It helps build trust. But sometimes I faced some bad comments from some customers. Dealing with Facebook fake id is big problem”*

### **Challenges Faced by Young Women**

Despite these advantages, the participants noted several challenges in managing social media-driven businesses. The most commonly reported issues include the time-consuming nature of social media management, the lack of advanced digital marketing skills, and challenges related to customer communication and feedback management. Many participants also expressed the need for formal training in content creation, financial planning, and strategic marketing.

**Case Participant 2, named Rakhi (22)** stated, *“I have no training and technical knowledge about online marketing, even I do not know how the online selling mechanism works. I can only show my pottery item on Facebook live along with responses to my flowers. My assistant will take orders. I should know details about it and find out where this training is provided to interested women”*

*A case with the reference of the SME Foundation states that about 24.5 million people are directly employed in the SME industry, primarily dominated by male employees (83.5%). Therefore, there is a need for special attention and support mechanisms for young women entrepreneurs.*

These challenges highlight the need for support programs that can equip young women entrepreneurs with the skills they need to manage their businesses more effectively and scale up their operations.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

The study’s findings highlight several policy recommendations to support young women entrepreneurs using social media. Participants suggested that governmental and non-governmental organizations could play a role in organizing training sessions, workshops, and networking events focused on digital entrepreneurship. Additionally, providing access to low-interest loans or grants specifically tailored for social media-based SMEs could help alleviate some financial constraints.

**Case Participant 10 named Sathi (27)** recommended, *“If the government or NGOs could provide training on digital skills and maybe even some funding support, it would help us grow and contribute to the economy.”*

Overall, the study revealed that social media is a critical motivator and business tool for young women entrepreneurs in Dhaka. While social media provides an accessible and flexible platform for businesses, young women face barriers because of their limited skills and knowledge in areas essential for scaling up their businesses. The findings highlight the need for structured training programs and policy support to maximize the potential of social media as an economic empowerment tool for young women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

The second section presents four **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** provide valuable insights into the role of social media in motivating and supporting young female entrepreneurs in Dhaka.

Participants from all FGDs expressed that social media had become an essential motivator for their entrepreneurial journeys. Observing successful women entrepreneurs online inspired them to start their own ventures, providing both role models and a sense of community. Many participants mentioned that these platforms allowed them to access success stories, tutorials, and advice from other women, which were empowering.

**FGD 1 Participant 3 (Afsana-23)** shared, *“I was nervous about starting a business, but seeing other women succeed on Facebook and Instagram gave me the courage. I realized that I could do it too, and social media was there to help.”*

**FGD 4 Participant 2 (Fahmida-28)** commented, *“Observing other women share their business journeys on social media made it seem possible for me. I could relate to their stories, and that motivated me to start my own.”*

All FGDs emphasized the importance of social media in marketing, allowing young women entrepreneurs to reach a wide audience and engage directly with customers. Participants highlighted the use of visual content, storytelling, and personal interactions to build trust and attract customers. Strategies such as live product demonstrations, promotional posts, and interactive sessions were mentioned as effective ways to connect with potential buyers.

**FGD 3 Participant 1 (Puja-29)** explained, *“I post pictures and stories daily to keep my audience engaged. Social media makes it easy to communicate directly with customers, which builds customer loyalty and helps my business grow.”*

Participants expressed that social media allows for cost-effective marketing, enabling them to grow their businesses without the need for significant financial investment in traditional advertising.

**FGD 1 Participant 4 (Monira-24)** expressed frustration with limited digital marketing skills, stating, *“I don’t know how to use things like paid ads or analytics. I’m just assuming most of the time, and I feel like I could be doing a lot more with proper training.”*

The results of the FGDs suggest that social media plays a dual role for young women entrepreneurs in Dhaka, acting both as a motivator and an essential tool for marketing and customer engagement. While social media platforms provide accessible means to launch and grow businesses, participants face challenges related to skill gaps, time management, and customer relations. The FGDs highlighted the demand for structured training programs to enhance social media competencies and support young women in building successful sustainable businesses.

The third section presents **Two Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** conducted with experts in digital entrepreneurship and women’s economic empowerment to explore the role of social media in supporting young women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

### **Key Insights on Key Informant Interview 1**

Social media acts as an equalizer, offering young women the opportunity to learn from the success stories of other entrepreneurs, which makes entrepreneurship more attainable.

*“Social media gives young women the visibility and encouragement they need. They see other women succeeding, which motivates them to follow the same path.”*

Many young women struggle with time management, content creation, and digital marketing strategies. They often lack the skills to effectively use analytics and paid ads, which hinders their marketing efforts.

*“Many women are unsure of how to use analytics and paid ads. They do not have the knowledge to create an effective marketing strategy or content that resonates with their target audience.”*

The expert strongly recommended developing structured training programs that focus on practical skills, such as content creation, social media marketing, and customer engagement, tailored for young women entrepreneurs.

*“Workshops that focus on hands-on learning and practical techniques are crucial. These women must understand how to create effective content, use analytics, and manage customer relationships.”*

Mentorship and networking opportunities were also emphasized. Entrepreneurs require guidance from experienced mentors and access to supportive networks to improve their business strategies.

*“Having a mentor who can guide you through business growth is invaluable. There should be spaces for these entrepreneurs to network with each other and with more experienced women in the industry.”*

### **Key Insights on Key Informant Interview 2 (Researcher)**

Social media provides women with an opportunity to bypass traditional barriers like limited access to capital and discriminatory practices. This gives them control over their businesses, enabling them to achieve greater economic independence.

*“Social media has empowered women by giving them access to markets that were otherwise closed. They no longer should rely on traditional routes, which may have been difficult because of cultural or economic constraints.”*

Despite these benefits, many women struggle with digital literacy and do not understand how to use marketing tools effectively. This lack of technical knowledge limits their ability to scale up their businesses.

*“While social media is a great tool, women often need help in understanding how to effectively use it for business. They need technical support, not just from social media platforms but also guidance on how to use those platforms to their advantage.”*

### **Recommendations:**

The expert recommended that governments and NGOs collaborate to create digital literacy and mentorship programs specifically for women entrepreneurs. These initiatives should target women at various stages of their business journey.

*“There should be a stronger collaboration between the government, NGOs, and the private sector to provide women with training in digital literacy and business management. These efforts should also be carried out in rural and semi-urban areas.”*

This expert emphasized the importance of peer-to-peer support and collaboration. Connecting emerging and established women entrepreneurs can create opportunities for mutual learning and growth.

*“Collaboration among women is essential. Women entrepreneurs should be encouraged to form partnerships, share resources, and exchange knowledge. This can be done through community-based programs or digital platforms that foster such collaboration.”*

## **06. Discussion of the Study**

### ***Social Media as a Motivational Force***

Across the case studies, FGDs, and KIIs, social media emerged as a powerful motivating tool. Both entrepreneurs and experts emphasized how social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube provide young women with the visibility and encouragement they need to start their businesses. Observing the success stories of other women entrepreneurs inspired many participants to take the first step toward entrepreneurship. As one participant stated, *“Social media makes it easy for women like me to succeed.”* *If they can do it, I can too.”* This



motivational aspect is crucial in a country like Bangladesh, where women have historically faced significant barriers to entrepreneurship.

Experts in the KIIs further corroborated this by highlighting the empowering nature of social media, particularly for women who might face social or financial constraints. The participants agreed that social media exposes young women to role models and provides a platform to bypass traditional barriers. One expert stated, *"Social media has empowered women by giving them access to markets that were otherwise closed."*

Several motivational factors drive the adoption of social media by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), significantly influencing their growth and the competitive advantage:

**Increased Brand Awareness:** Social media helps SMEs build brand visibility at a relatively low cost, allowing them to reach broader audiences. This is particularly beneficial in competitive markets where differentiation is key (Marolt et al., 2022).

**Customer Engagement and Retention:** Platforms enable real-time interaction with customers, fostering stronger customer relationships. This relational capability not only boosts customer satisfaction but also leads to repeat business and referrals, enhancing long-term profitability (Dahnil, 2014).

**Cost-Effectiveness:** Most social media platforms are free or require minimal investment, making them accessible for marketing and customer engagement compared to traditional advertising.

**Data-Driven Decision Making:** Social media analytics provide SMEs with insights into customer behavior, preferences, and market trends. This allows for more informed strategic decisions and targeted marketing efforts.

**Innovation and Agility:** social media encourages SMEs to innovate their marketing strategies and quickly adapt to changing market conditions. This adaptability can provide a critical competitive advantage in fast-moving industries.

### ***Marketing and Customer Engagement Strategies***

The case studies and FGDs also revealed that social media is an effective tool for marketing and customer engagement. Participants reported using platforms to promote their businesses, engage directly with customers, and create brand loyalty. Social media allows women to showcase their products through images, videos, and stories and connect with their target audience at a relatively low cost. One FGD participant stated, *"I use Instagram stories and posts to show my products. Customers feel more connected when I can interact with them directly."*

However, while the potential for social media marketing is vast, there are notable gaps in the breadth of experience. The findings of this case study indicate that many young women entrepreneurs face difficulties in managing their social media presence effectively, especially regarding using analytics, running paid advertisements, and creating engaging content. Experts in the KIIs have pointed out that a lack of formal digital marketing skills prevents many women from fully leveraging these platforms. As one KII participant mentioned, *"Women often don't know how to use ads or analytics properly, and this limits their business potential."*

### ***The Area of SMEs Linked to Social Media***

This study identified several areas of SMEs that are directly linked to social media in terms of category, ICT access, presentation, promotion, and market mechanism. Pottery Items, Clothing Items, ornaments made of local goods, Homemade food, Furniture made of local products, etc.

### ***Market Mechanism***

This study found that platforms such as Instagram Shops and Facebook Marketplace allow direct sales through social media. Online media provide a direct channel for collecting and responding to customer feedback, thus improving product quality.

### ***Challenges and Barriers***

Despite the advantages of social media, the participants highlighted several challenges in using these platforms for business. Many reported time management issues, with the responsibilities of content creation, customer

service, and product management often becoming overwhelming. One participant stated, *“Managing everything alone posting, replying to messages, and handling orders is exhausting.”*

Both the FGDs and KIIs identified digital literacy as a significant barrier. Although social media platforms offer powerful tools, many women entrepreneurs lack the technical skills to maximize their impact. This issue was especially pronounced for women new to digital entrepreneurship, with many learning through trial and error. As an expert noted, *“There is a knowledge gap. Women need practical training to understand how to use social media strategically.”*

### ***Policy Support***

Finally, both the FGDs and KIIs underscored the importance of a supportive ecosystem that includes government policies, NGO initiatives, and collaboration opportunities. There is a growing need for programs that facilitate networking among women entrepreneurs, provide access to financial resources, and offer platforms for mentorship and skill-building. One expert in the KIIs recommended, *“The government and NGOs need to provide more accessible programs to help women entrepreneurs scale their businesses, especially in digital literacy and market access.”*

The triangulated findings from the case studies, FGDs, and KIIs reveal that social media plays a transformative role in empowering young women entrepreneurs in Dhaka, Bangladesh. They provide them with motivation, visibility, and an accessible platform for marketing. However, the success of these women is often hindered by a lack of digital skills, time management challenges, and limited resources. There is a clear need for targeted training programs, mentorship, and ecosystem support to help young women entrepreneurs overcome these barriers and fully capitalize on the opportunities presented by social media. By addressing these gaps, stakeholders can enhance the impact of social media and empower women to become successful and self-reliant entrepreneurs in the digital economy.

## **07. Recommendations and Policy Guidelines**

Based on the findings from the case studies, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs), the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the support systems for young women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, particularly in utilizing social media to promote small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These recommendations address the challenges identified and leverage opportunities for empowerment, growth, and sustainability in the digital economy.

### **A. Develop Digital Literacy and Entrepreneurship Training Programs**

**Recommendation:** Employ government- and non-backed training programs to enhance the digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills of young women entrepreneurs, particularly focusing on digital marketing, content creation, social media analytics and customer engagement strategies.

**Example:** Provide grants or funding to NGOs and educational institutions for digital marketing workshops and certifications tailored to young female entrepreneurs in urban and rural areas.

### **B. Facilitate Access to Mentorship and Peer Networks**

**Recommendation:** Create mentorship and networking platforms that connect experienced women entrepreneurs with younger or emerging entrepreneurs to facilitate knowledge exchange, offer guidance, and foster collaboration.

**Example:** Implement mentorship programs supported by public-private partnerships, where senior women entrepreneurs share insights, success stories, and strategies for overcoming challenges with younger entrepreneurs.

### **C. Promote Gender-Inclusive Policies in Entrepreneurship**

**Recommendation:** develop policies that specifically target the promotion of women's entrepreneurship, addressing systemic barriers, such as access to financial resources, networks, and markets.

**Example:** Provide incentives or subsidies for women-led startups, particularly those operating in the digital space. This could include offering preferential access to business loans, tax breaks, or grant programs for women starting or scaling up businesses using digital platforms.

#### **D. Digital Marketplaces and Platforms for Women Entrepreneurs**

**Recommendation:** Develop and promote digital marketplaces that specifically feature women-led businesses to help them reach a wider audience and connect directly with consumers.

**Example:** Launch an official e-commerce platform or digital marketplace exclusively for female entrepreneurs and provide training on how to list and market products online.

#### **E. Encourage collaboration between the government, NGOs, and Private Sector**

**Recommendation:** Foster collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and the private sector to create a comprehensive support system for women entrepreneurs, focusing on education, financial assistance, and business development.

**Example:** Initiate cross-sector collaboration through annual conferences, webinars, and policy dialogs to discuss best practices and innovations in supporting women entrepreneurs in the digital economy. **The SME Foundation and the Ministry of Industry** can take a major initiative in this regard.

#### **F. Improve Access to Financial Resources and Technology**

**Recommendation:** Ensure greater access to affordable financial products (microloans, grants, etc.) and technology for young women entrepreneurs to help them scale their businesses effectively.

**Example:** Governmental organizations under the Ministry of Industries in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries (BSIC), the SME Foundation, Joyeeta, etc., are involved in the development of SMEs, with a special focus on female entrepreneurs.

#### **G. Promote Awareness Campaigns on Women's Entrepreneurship**

**Recommendation:** Promote national awareness campaigns to encourage young women to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career option and highlight the advantages of leveraging social media for business growth.

**Example:** Partner with media outlets and influencers to run campaigns highlighting successful women entrepreneurs who have leveraged social media to build businesses.

#### **H. Cultural and Societal Barriers to Women's Entrepreneurship**

**Recommendation:** Implement programs to challenge cultural norms and societal barriers that discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurship, particularly in the digital economy.

### **08. Concluding Remarks**

To empower young women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh and ensure their success in the digital era, a supportive ecosystem through targeted policy measures is essential. These include enhancing digital literacy, providing mentorship and financial support, fostering collaboration across sectors, and addressing the cultural barriers that women face in entrepreneurship. By implementing these policy guidelines, Bangladesh can harness the full potential of its women entrepreneurs, particularly in the rapidly growing digital economy.

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