

2025-11

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## Digital Storytelling as the Voice of Women Entrepreneurs

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PAPER ID : ICEBTM-25-1168

**Abstract** - Today, many women are starting their own businesses, but they still face many problems because of gender roles and low support from society. This paper shows how women use digital storytelling to share their experiences and grow their small businesses. They talk about their struggles, ideas, and success through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, blogs, and YouTube. These stories help them connect with people, build trust, and inspire other women. The paper also explains how storytelling gives women more confidence and helps them speak about their identity and break social rules. It uses some examples from South Asia, mostly from Bangladesh and India. It also tells about some problems like online bullying, poor internet, and low digital knowledge. In the end, the paper shows that digital storytelling is not only a business tool, but also a way for women to speak up, and make space in the business world. It helps us to understand how technology and stories can support women in their business journey.

**Keywords:** Business tool, Digital storytelling, Identity, Gender roles, Women entrepreneurs

### I. INTRODUCTION

In South Asia, many women are starting small businesses. We see this in cities and small towns, in homes and local markets. Still, many women face gender roles, strict family rules, safety issues and less access to money and training. These limitations make starting and growing business hard.

Digital platforms give a new path. Through Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, YouTube and blogs, women can reach customers at low cost. They can also tell their own stories. This is called digital storytelling. In short posts, photos and reels, they share how they began, what challenges they met and how they overcame them. These stories help customers know the person behind the product. They build trust, connection and community. “We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative” [2]. This idea helps us to understand why digital storytelling matters for business.

This paper focuses on Bangladesh and India by using basic ideas from narrative theory to read these stories and explore who is speaking, what challenges they show and how they find a way forward. It asks: how does digital storytelling empower women entrepreneurs in South Asia to overcome gender-based challenges and grow their business? This paper reviews earlier studies, explains the theory, describes the method and then presents findings, case examples and practical steps for training and policy.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### a. Women entrepreneurs in South Asia

Many women in South Asia run small or home-based businesses. They sell food, clothes, crafts, beauty items, tutoring, and services. But access to the internet is not equal. “Women are now 15% less likely than men to use mobile internet” (GSMA, 2024, pp. 7–8). In South Asia the gap is bigger: “gender gaps of 31%” [8]. This gap reduces how often women can post, learn, and answer customers online. Social rules also create limits. Some families expect women to stay at home or avoid strangers. Safety worries and mobility limits make supply and delivery harder. To help, training and policy tools try to reduce these barriers. The World Bank toolkit “provides practical guidance” for such projects [2]. UNCTAD masterclasses aim to “boost... skills to succeed in the digital economy [7]. These help us to know that digital access and skills are the key of growth.

#### b. Digital storytelling in business

Women do not only list products; they tell short stories. Posts and reels show how they started, what went wrong, and what they learned. During lockdown, “Platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook proved crucial for women entrepreneurs” [8]. Story posts also invite talk with customers: “Social media... encourages customer feedback. This helps women build a positive rapport with customers” [3]. In Bangladesh, Facebook-based commerce (“f-commerce”) is common. One report says, “69 percent of women have contributed to family income through f-commerce” [2]. Typical and simple story types include: origin stories, before/after, process videos, customer testimonials, and “lesson learned.” These forms make the founder visible and easy to remember.

#### c. Gender-based challenges

A 2025 audit notes: “57% of respondents reported experiencing at least one form of online harassment through social media platforms” [7]. In India, some founders “hesitated to expand to platforms like Instagram due to security concerns” [4]. Access and cost are also problems. The mobile internet gender gap is 15% overall and 31% in South Asia; limits posting and learning (GSMA, 2024, pp. 7–8). Many women share devices, have small data packs, or lack private time online. Because of this, training should teach both content skills (lighting, captions, simple analytics) and safety skills (privacy settings, blocking/reporting,

watermarking). The World Bank toolkit and UNCTAD masterclasses support this mix [7].

#### 1. Narrative theory: what is it and why it matters

Narrative theory explains why stories help people make sense of life. It says we do not just list events; we connect them into a simple plot with a beginning, problem, and outcome. “Narratives do not mirror, they refract the past” [2]. In other words, a story shapes experience so it is easier to understand and share. These stories are short but repeated. They usually show setting (home kitchen, market, delivery point), characters (founder, family, customers), conflict (bias, time, cash), a turning point, and a resolution. When women post these small arcs again and again, they build a clear founder image and brand. For women entrepreneurs, this matters because a steady story builds trust. It also teaches simple steps; what went wrong, what fix worked and invites advice from the community. In this way, narrative helps women speak with confidence, connect with customers, and support real business growth in South Asia.

### II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NARRATIVE THEORY

Narrative theory helps us see how people turn daily events into stories. It shows how meaning comes from a simple plot: a beginning, a problem, actions, and an outcome. This frame lets us read business posts not as random updates, but as small stories with a point. A clear story has basic parts: setting (where), characters (who), conflict (what problem), a turning point (what changed), and a resolution (what worked). When these parts line up, the audience understands and remembers. This is useful for business because customers trust what they can follow.

On social media, women often post micro-stories. A reel or caption may show a supplier issue, a packing day, or a client review. Each post is small, but many posts together make a larger journey. Regular posting keeps the plot moving and builds a steady brand voice. Stories also shape the self. As McAdams writes, “Narrative identity is the internalized and evolving story a person invents to make sense of the self[7]. When women tell their own stories, they present themselves as active doers. This grows agency (I can act) and voice (I can speak and be heard). It also invites support from customers and peers.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach. I read women’s digital posts as stories and ask how those stories help business growth. Narrative theory is the main lens. I looked for simple plot parts and for the meaning those parts create for the audience. The focus is Bangladesh and India. I studied small and home-based businesses that sell through Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and blogs. These platforms

are common entry points and have low cost. They also allow short, regular posts that work well as micro-stories. Sampling is purposeful. I included pages run by women that post about once a week for at least three months. I selected accounts that do more than list prices. They also talked about problems and solutions in captions, reels, or short videos. I tried to cover different product types (food, crafts, clothes, beauty, services) and both urban and rural settings.

Data come from public materials only: posts, reels, captions, photos, short videos, and public comments that discuss problems, tips, or feedback. I also read recent reports on women’s social commerce in South Asia to give context and to compare patterns from the posts with patterns in formal studies. Analysis treats each post as a micro-story. I coded five parts: setting (where), characters (who), conflict (what problem), turning point (what changed), and resolution (what worked). I also tagged common gendered barriers (time pressure, safety, bias, limited capital) and the strategy used (a new skill, a tool, a network, or policy help). Then I compared many posts to see patterns that link storytelling with trust, learning, and signs of sales (for example, customer testimonials, repeat-order comments, or growth updates).

Ethical care is simple and strict. I used only public content, collect no private messages, and mask names or any direct identifiers when describing cases. There are limits. Public posts show the picture; fears or failures may be hidden. Platform algorithms also change, so reach and engagement can shift over time. The sample is small and not representative of all South Asian women entrepreneurs. Language and translation issues may also affect nuance.

### V. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 2. Digital storytelling as empowerment

Women use short posts and reels to show real work: sourcing, making, packing, delivery, and customer care. These posts mix feelings and simple how-to steps. They turn small wins and mistakes into lessons. This makes the founder look skilled and honest. Over time, followers trust more, ask questions, and share tips. Trust and learning together support repeat orders and steady growth.

#### 5.2 Narrative structures in women’s digital stories

Most posts follow clear arcs. An origin post explains why the business began. A barrier post shows a problem such as bias, cash limits, or time pressure. A breakthrough post marks a first big step. A lesson post tells a mistake and a fix. Each arc has setting, characters, conflict, a turning point, and a resolution. When these arcs repeat, they build a stable founder image and a simple brand story. Customers feel they know the person behind the product, which helps with pricing and loyalty.

### 1. Overcoming gender-based challenges

Story increases visibility and validation. Regular posts act as public proof of effort and skill. Before/after photos, behind-the-scenes clips, and customer notes work as social evidence. Comment sections often turn into mini communities where women exchange supplier contacts, delivery tips, and content ideas. This peer support reduces fear, encourages new steps, and helps founders ask for fair payment. Many households also benefit from added income when these small businesses grow.

### 5.4 Barriers to digital storytelling

Many women face online harassment and privacy worries. Some families also discourage public posting. Internet can be costly or slow. Phones are often shared, and private time online is limited. These problems reduce posting and lower video quality. To handle these problems, many women post photos with short captions, post at quiet hours, or share in private groups. These choices feel safer but may reduce reach and sales. Simple safety training, basic content skills, cheaper data, and better internet can make storytelling easier.

## VI. CASE EXAMPLES

### Case 1: Falguni Nayar (India) - Nykaa

Falguni Nayar started Nykaa in 2012 after a long career in banking. Nykaa grew by mixing e-commerce with strong content. The brand runs Nykaa TV on YouTube and posts many short “how-to” videos, tips, and tutorials. These simple videos help people learn and trust the brand. They also turn buyers into a community that follows the story of beauty, learning, and growth.

### Case 2: Ghazal Alagh (India) - Mamaearth

Ghazal Alagh co-founded Mamaearth in 2016. Her brand story began with her baby’s skin problems; she looked for safer products and then built a line for moms and families. She shared this journey online, spoke to other mothers, and used campaigns with creators to spread the message. Over time, the “mom-to-mom” story helped create trust and a large, active community. The brand later moved from online to stores while keeping the same friendly voice.

### Case 3: Kaniz Almas Khan (Bangladesh) - Persona

Kaniz Almas Khan is a well-known beauty entrepreneur in Bangladesh. She started small in the 1990s and built Persona into a leading salon brand. Persona uses Facebook to

share short videos, founder messages, and updates about branches and training. These posts show service quality, learning, and women’s career growth, which keeps customers close to the brand story.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, digital storytelling helps women entrepreneurs in South Asia in simple, strong ways. Short posts and reels show real work, build trust, and start small learning circles. A clear pattern: problem, action, result, turns daily effort into messages that customers understand. Barriers still exist. Many women face online abuse, costly data, shared phones, and little private time. These problems reduce posting and slow growth. Some steps can make things better: basic safety training, simple content skills, low-data posting (photos, short captions), better internet, and cheaper data plans. Mentors and support groups can guide new sellers. Platforms should make safety tools easy to find and use. Policymakers can close the access gap and give small grants linked to digital skills.

Future studies can test which story types build the most trust and repeat sales, and compare public pages with private groups. In short, digital storytelling is not only marketing but also it is a clear voice that helps women speak, learn, and grow their businesses.

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