



Technological Advances Offer Women a New, Louder Voice

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April 08, 2024

Throughout history, women have had to overcome significant barriers to entry in industries like publishing, media and business, proving to mostly male gatekeepers that there was a market and an audience for their products.

Yet, while women still face these barriers, technology — particularly the rise of user-generated content platforms — has helped women start their businesses, have their voices heard, and prove that there is a market for their products.

According to the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council, women-owned businesses (where a woman owns at least 51 percent of a business) make up just over 39 percent of all U.S. businesses. Small Business Administration data show that these businesses employed 10 million employees and accounted for more than \$2 trillion in sales. In fact, in recent years, more women have started businesses than men.

These statistics include online and offline businesses. Women face several barriers to starting or growing a business, but online platforms can make it easier. The existence of platforms like Etsy, Shopify, or Amazon’s marketplace means business owners no longer must undertake the costs of a brick-and-mortar store or even building their website.

Female entrepreneurs seem to have embraced these opportunities even more than their male counterparts. For example, 86 percent of Etsy and 52 percent of Shopify store owners are women. No longer does a big business have to pick the product for it to be successful or reach its target market. Online platforms (as well as the lower cost of online advertising) allow small businesses to find a target audience, even if their audience is a small or niche one.

But women have also been using online platforms to expand their voices and make their opinions heard in other entrepreneurial ways. It is easy to roll our eyes at the ideas of “influencers,” but a variety of content creators are providing reviews and information to audiences who might not have been served by the traditional gatekeepers with their single reviewer. This is particularly true given that many industries, like publishing and entertainment, have long been dominated by men who may have underestimated women’s opinions.

Now, online platforms provide more opportunities for those traditionally ignored by empowered people, including women, to find reviews and information from those whose experiences more

closely resemble their own. For example, the majority of content creators on TikTok and Instagram are women, while the traditional industries that create content or review products remain male-dominated. These entrepreneurial users are leveraging the platforms not only to have their own voices heard but also to provide information to audiences whose opinions were often valued less. The result can be incredible market power that makes it more difficult to ignore these audiences.

The opportunities for user-generated content provided by this range of platforms are supported by the United States' light-touch approach to technology policy regulation. Section 230 plays an important role in helping elevate women's voices in two critical ways. First, Section 230 supports platforms carrying user-generated content by placing the liability for what is said on the person who said it, and not the platform. This is crucial for controversial topics such as sexual harassment in the wake of the #MeToo movement.

Section 230 also empowers platforms to engage in content moderation that best supports their communities without fears of frivolous litigation that could end the platform entirely. This can be critical to combatting the unfortunate harassment women may face online or if platforms want to serve a particular community with its standards.

It is also important to focus on the voices of those who were forgotten and unacknowledged in their time. Technology continues to give more women an opportunity to have their ideas heard. The policy approach that does not put barriers to technology is particularly critical for those individuals and groups who would traditionally be dismissed by analog gatekeepers, and we have seen that women, in particular, have embraced these tools in a variety of ways.

Policymakers should consider how changes to tech policy might limit these opportunities not only for traditional innovators but for the number of entrepreneurial users, including women who may be making history online in ways society doesn't always recognize at the time.