



# Women and E-commerce in Southeast Asia

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



**KANTAR PUBLIC**



**Lazada**



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# Acronyms

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<b>B2B</b>	Business to Business
<b>B2C</b>	Business to Consumer
<b>COD</b>	Cash on Delivery
<b>CGAP</b>	Consultative Group to Assist the Poor
<b>FMCG</b>	Fast-Moving Consumer Goods
<b>GSMA</b>	Global System for Mobile Communications Association
<b>GMV</b>	Gross Merchandise Value
<b>ICT</b>	Information Communications Technology
<b>IFC</b>	International Finance Corporation
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>MO</b>	Men-Owned (business)
<b>MSME</b>	Micro, Small, and Medium Sized Enterprises
<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
<b>UNCTAD</b>	The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>WBG</b>	World Bank Group
<b>WO</b>	Women-Owned (business)



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# Acknowledgements

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This report was developed by the International Finance Corporation as part of the Digital2Equal initiative. Launched in 2018, Digital2Equal is an IFC-led initiative that is carried out in partnership with the European Commission, and brings together leading technology companies operating across the online marketplace to boost opportunities for women in emerging markets.

Additional financial support for this study was provided by the World Bank Group's Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality (UFGE), a multi-donor trust fund administered by the World Bank to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through experimentation and knowledge creation to help governments and the private sector focus policy and programs on scalable solutions with sustainable outcomes. The UFGE is supported with generous contributions from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

This project was conducted by the IFC Gender and Economic Inclusion Group under the overall guidance of Mary Porter-Peschka and Henriette Kolb. The project was led by Alexa Roscoe with Charlotte Ntim. The World Bank Group technical working group included Meriem Ait Ali Slimane, Natalia Bhatia, Yasmin Klaudia bin Humam, Rachel Coleman, Rani Deshpande, Anna Domingo Riu, Jaylan Elshazly, Sammar Essmat, Alicia Hammond, Nathalie Hoffman, Georges Hounbonon, Shalaka Joshi, Anne Kabugi, Erin Kelley, Heather Kipnis, Amy Luinstra, Angela Lumanau,

Xubei Luo, Komal Mohindra, Ciku Mugambi, Qursum Qasim, Thomas Rehermann, Joanna Romero, Oliver Rowntree, Matthew Saal, Aida Sykes, Carol Tojiero and Priyanka Verma. The report was copyedited by Ann Casanova with layout design by Titanium Room. Communications strategy for the report was led by Evangelia Tsiftsi with Bhattiprolou Murti, and Maria Teresa Gonzalez Garcia and with support from the IFC global communication team and the Asia and Pacific communication team.

Research was conducted together with global consulting firm Kantar. Contributors at Kantar included Susan Gigli, Nupur Kedia, Chenbi Liu, Shiyun Mai, Mark Matuma, Jordan Robinson and Samuel Schueth. In-country support was provided by Jessica Bower, Yuli Etasari, David Heijkoop, Mary Anne Ho and Bernadette Villaceran.

IFC is grateful for the company data provided by Lazada that informed this analysis. From Lazada, project coordination was led by Vanessa Seow and Joris Eikendal, with contributions from: Gladys Chun, Ray Alimurung, Carlos Berrera, Monika Rudijono, Ferry Kusnowo, Petra Carbonell, Haikal Bektu Anggoro, Sandra Puspita, Carmina Loyola, Waizly Darwin, Cyril Alfred Castro, Lisa Shen, Fiona Heng.

The team would like to thank the many experts who generously contributed their time and expertise including: Edward Chamdani, Gayo Capital; Abigail Chen, MyBento.co; Clair Deevy, Facebook; Chiqui Escareal-Go, Mansmith & Fielders; and Rorian Pratyaksa, Woobiz.

# Foreword

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E-commerce in Southeast Asia is thriving. Since 2015, the market has tripled in size, and it is expected to triple again. In this research, IFC shows that this growth could be even higher if we invest in women entrepreneurs on e-commerce platforms.

The report 'Women and E-commerce in Southeast Asia' was developed in partnership with the European Commission, with funding from the Umbrella Fund for Gender Equality, and with data from one of Southeast Asia's largest platforms, Lazada. It is the first in the region to show the extent of women's participation in e-commerce and how online platforms can benefit women business owners. One of its key findings is that if the gap in sales between female and male vendors was closed, an additional \$280 billion could be added to the value of the Southeast Asian e-commerce market between 2025 and 2030 - a gain that would continue to accumulate in future decades. In other words, for every year that gender gaps go unaddressed, just under US\$46 billion in market value is lost.

How do we get there? Women entrepreneurs are already active participants in e-commerce. On the Lazada platform, about a third of businesses in Indonesia and two-thirds of business in the Philippines are women-owned. This itself is noteworthy, indicating that e-commerce is supporting women's entry to and success in the digital economy as well as helping women-owned businesses compete in sectors like electronics, where they are typically underrepresented.

However, widespread differences between men and women in digital and financial inclusion continue to hold back women entrepreneurs. The COVID-19 pandemic has also hit hard. In Philippines, for instance, the sales numbers of women-owned businesses had been higher than those of their male counterparts but, due to COVID-19, fell to just 79 percent of those of men.

E-commerce firms are well-positioned to reverse this trend and to set women entrepreneurs up for success in an industry that will increasingly define business in the region and around the world. They can do this by targeting women-owned businesses for training, by increasing women's participation in high-value segments such as electronics, and by encouraging better uptake of emerging fintech offerings to close gaps in financing and start-up capital.

There is little doubt that the ability to compete online will increasingly define whether a company succeeds or fails - a trend which has only been accelerated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring that women are well-placed to compete online will not only strengthen businesses but also drive development. I hope this data-driven research inspires e-commerce platforms and companies across the tech sector to invest in women and to grow an inclusive digital economy.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SvF', written in a cursive style.

**Stephanie von Friedeburg**

Senior Vice President, Operations, IFC

# Foreword

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From day one, Lazada has prioritized building an inclusive and supportive workplace that embraces diversity. As an e-commerce platform deeply rooted in Southeast Asia, we have been investing heavily in building the infrastructure for a local e-commerce ecosystem that is sustainable. Women's voices and active participation have been essential to the success of Lazada. With women making up 40 percent of our strong employee base, we have long been dedicated to empowering women beyond mentorship and nurturing talent within the company. We support women across our wider ecosystem, such as our sellers and female delivery staff in our courier fleet to achieve success.

With online shopping in Southeast Asia forecasted by Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company to reach \$309 billion by 2025, Lazada is contributing to this growth, currently serving more than 100 million active consumers annually across 6 markets. Lazada has transitioned beyond an online transactional marketplace. It is a go-to lifestyle destination that provides shoppertainment, a combination of commerce and entertainment with payments and logistics solutions.

Lazada serves as a platform to help sellers accelerate their journeys as retail entrepreneurs. It also enables smaller business owners to take control of the way they build their businesses and improve customer communication efforts in a way that is innovative and cost-efficient. With the steady acceleration and growth of e-commerce in Southeast Asia, there is an increasing number of women business owners who have turned to the digital economy to seek new career paths. There are many reasons for this, including the convenience of starting a home business, low barriers to entry, and ease of registering a store on the Lazada platform. Lazada also provides a wide range of seller support services, solutions, and training to help a business grow and be sustainable. As a result, many women have taken control of their careers by making the switch and becoming retail entrepreneurs.

Over the past nine years our platform has learned a great deal from our partners. We now represent a space where sellers can find interesting and unique ways to leverage the Lazada platform to engage customers. Sellers can depend on us to help them build a niche customer following. It is our privilege to provide equal opportunities to everyone to start their own careers while simultaneously uplifting the lives of people around them. We have witnessed many women become self-employed as business leaders and sellers on Lazada across Southeast Asia, and we are fortunate to be a part of the journey helping many women who have stepped out of traditional roles to shine on e-commerce.

This report comes at a critical time, as COVID-19 has disproportionately affected women globally. We are taking a step in the right direction, as we identify opportunities to further expand women's equality and support economic empowerment through e-commerce. Lazada is committed to do more for you.

I hope this report will inspire hope and encourage action among more women and businesses in the community. We at Lazada will continue to be an enabler and a dedicated partner to hold the hands of those who are working to achieve their dreams.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chun Li', written in a cursive style.

**Chun Li**

Chief Executive Officer, Lazada Group



*Bringing women's sales to parity with men's by 2025 would add over \$280 billion to the value of the regional e-commerce market by 2030.*

A woman with dark hair, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt, is seen from the side, looking at a red tablet. She is in a clothing store, with a rack of clothes and a hat on a stand visible in the background. The scene is brightly lit, likely from a window.

## Executive Summary

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The rapid digital transformation underway in Southeast Asia has the potential to have an equally transformative impact on women entrepreneurs. Although Southeast Asia boasts a higher incidence of women entrepreneurs compared to men, women-owned (WO) businesses tend to be smaller, have lower average sales, and have fewer employees (World Bank 2019).

The exponential growth of e-commerce in Southeast Asia presents an opportunity to close gender gaps by opening more markets to WO businesses. E-commerce in Southeast Asia tripled in size between 2015-2020, growing to a value of \$105 billion. Similar trends could lead to another tripling—to \$309 billion by 2025—a milestone which the COVID-19 pandemic may have accelerated by raising demand for online shopping (Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company 2020).

Yet, advances in disruptive technologies do not always translate into advances in gender equality, and to date there is limited research that has addressed women's participation or success on e-commerce platforms. This

report seeks to close this knowledge gap with the first large-scale, sex-disaggregated analysis of e-commerce sellers in Southeast Asia and to shed light on the following key questions:

1. How are women entrepreneurs participating and performing in e-commerce?
2. What are the opportunities and challenges for women entrepreneurs selling on e-commerce platforms?
3. Is there a business case for e-commerce platforms to invest in women entrepreneurs?

To answer these questions, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with sellers, as well as global and regional e-commerce experts; undertook surveys of representative samples of men and women sellers in Indonesia and the Philippines; and conducted an analysis of data from Lazada, one of the region's largest e-commerce platforms.

## Findings and Recommendations:

This study found that by closing gender gaps by 2025, the e-commerce sector could add over \$280 billion to the total value of the sector in Southeast Asia between 2025 and 2030, providing a powerful business case for e-commerce companies. Achieving this growth will require that more women start selling online and that their sales perform as well as men's sales on the platform. Below are key findings on how women are currently engaging in digital commerce and how best to put women at the center of the e-commerce sector in future.

### 1. How Are Women Entrepreneurs Participating and Performing in E-commerce?

- 1.1. **WO and men-owned (MO) businesses report different motivations for turning to e-commerce.** While men and women reported that Lazada helped them grow their business, more men joined to start a new business, whereas, more women joined to grow an existing one, or to find a better way to sell online. Women were more likely to report "flexibility," "reaching personal goals," and "meeting basic needs," as the top benefits of selling online. This suggests that many women are using e-commerce to overcome challenges such as care responsibilities that often present barriers to economic participation.
- 1.2. **Women entrepreneurs are actively participating in e-commerce but require support to grow.** In Indonesia, women sellers on Lazada's platform owned one third of businesses. In the Philippines, women sellers owned two thirds of businesses. As in the broader economy, WO businesses on the platform had fewer employees than MO businesses.
- 1.3. **COVID-19 has reversed or reduced the initial successes of WO firms.** In 2019, prior to the pandemic, women were outselling men in terms

of gross merchandise value (GMV). That year, women had an average GMV of 106 percent and 164 percent of MO businesses in the Philippines and in Indonesia, respectively. However, between the second and third quarter of 2019 and 2020, prior to and during the pandemic, women's GMV dropped by 27 percent in the Philippines and 44 percent in Indonesia. Reversing this trend will be key to ensuring that women can compete in the digital economy following the pandemic.

### 2. What Are the Opportunities and Challenges for Women Entrepreneurs Selling on E-commerce Platforms?

- 2.1. **Women are leveraging e-commerce to enter sectors where they have been historically underrepresented.** The electronics category accounts for the largest component of total sales on Lazada and women sold more than men in this category, on average, since 2019, despite shifts in consumer spending during the pandemic. This indicates that women performed at the same level or better in high-value segments. Research has found that sector switching is one key path for women to close earnings gaps, suggesting that e-commerce can boost income generation for women entrepreneurs in the long-term.
- 2.2. **Women face financing gaps that e-commerce platforms are well positioned to address through emerging fintech offerings.** WO businesses were more likely to have started with personal savings and were less likely to have received a formal loan or external financing from investors. After start-up, WO businesses were more likely to report that financing through Lazada benefited their business in the last year. However, those leveraging platform financing represent a small minority of men and women, suggesting that targeted financing represents a key opportunity for e-commerce platforms to grow their user base while also closing gender gaps.



**2.3. Women entrepreneurs are more likely to value training and business support.** Men and women had similar responses to questions regarding the ease of using platform features as well as success along the seller journey from registration to product delivery or returns. However, when asked about Lazada services that they found most helpful in the last 12 months, women rated training, engagement with the Lazada Partner Support Center, and interactions with company account managers higher than men. E-commerce firms could support women entrepreneurs by using their platforms to provide additional training to women entrepreneurs and by encouraging them to sell high-value products that will help them compete online.

### **3. What Is the Business Case for Supporting Women Entrepreneurs in E-commerce?**

**3.1. Closing gender gaps in sales performance on e-commerce platforms by 2025 could yield an additional \$280 billion in platform revenues by 2030.** If the status quo remains, the value of the Southeast Asia e-commerce market is expected to reach \$491 billion in 2030. Women's sales have been more severely impacted by the pandemic than those of men. However, if women's GMV were to reach parity with men in 2025, then \$280 billion of additional market value would accrue between 2025 and 2030. In other words, for every year that gender gaps remain unaddressed, the sector loses over \$46 billion of potential value.

Women's success in e-commerce prior to the pandemic suggests that reversing COVID-19 related drops in sales and bringing the GMV of WO and MO businesses to parity is an achievable goal.

**3.2. Attracting more women customers will also be key to e-commerce growth.** While this study focuses on e-commerce sellers, emerging evidence shows that targeting women customers will also be key to growth. New sex-disaggregated data from the Kantar COVID-19 Barometer Survey shows that the pandemic led customers to shop more on e-commerce platforms and that women were more likely than men to have discovered a new online store where they will continue to shop after the pandemic (Kantar 2020). Women sellers may be able to better reach new women customers.

**3.3. Platforms are well-positioned to support women entrepreneurs.** From digital access to business skills, women entrepreneurs across the region face disproportionate barriers to success. This study highlights concrete opportunities for e-commerce companies to support WO businesses. Selected actions include:

- Collect and tag sex-disaggregated data for sellers that will enable ongoing analysis and leverage that information to provide targeted support to WO businesses;
- Ensure that women entrepreneurs are aware of and can access emerging fintech offerings, such as in-platform loans, to address the existing financing gaps;
- Build on the early training successes by adding more materials and expanding outreach to WO businesses; and
- Incentivize women sellers to use paid platform features such as product advertisements and to participate in high-value segments to ensure they can compete and succeed on the platform.

# The Case for Gender Equality in E-commerce

IFC's new research 'Women and e-commerce in Southeast Asia' shows that if women's sales reached parity with men's in 2025, the value of the regional e-commerce market could increase by

# \$280 Billion

between 2025-2030.

In other words, companies lose out on just over **\$46 Billion** for each year of delayed action on gender equality.

## Where are we?

Women are active participants in e-commerce. On the Lazada platform, women own:



Indonesia

1/3 of businesses



Philippines

2/3 of businesses

E-commerce platforms can provide the support needed to help women entrepreneurs grow and thrive.

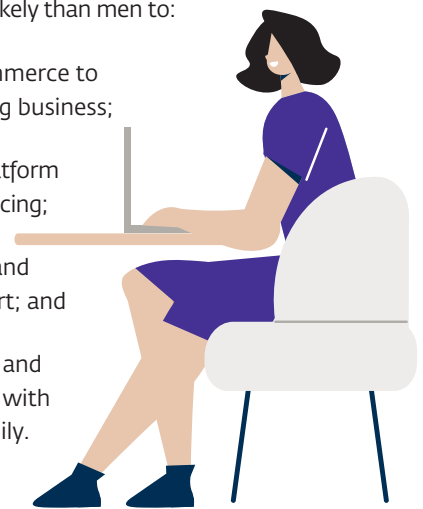


## E-commerce is helping women succeed in the digital economy.



Women were more likely than men to:

- 1 Come to e-commerce to grow an existing business;
- 2 Benefit from platform sponsored financing;
- 3 Value training and business support; and
- 4 Value flexibility and additional time with friends and family.



## Covid-19 Disproportionately Impacted Women

During the pandemic, women's sales dropped by

### Philippines

# ↓ 27%

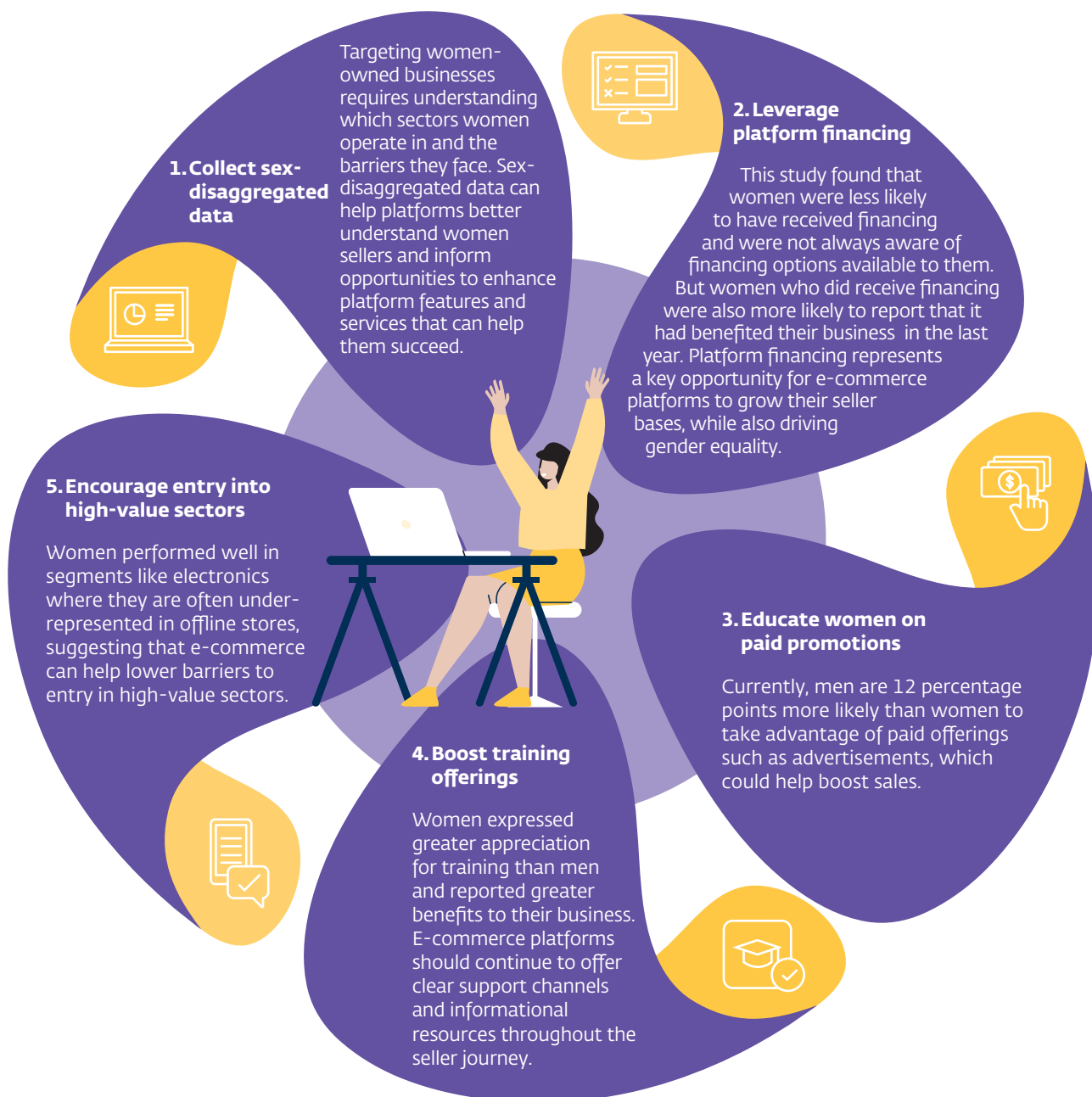
### Indonesia

# ↓ 44%



Reversing this trend will be key to ensuring women can compete in the digital economy following the pandemic.

## How do we get to gender parity in E-commerce?



Boosting women's success on e-commerce will require providing additional training, expanded financing options and support for their entry into higher value sectors





# 1. Introduction and Approach

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## 1.1 Background

An increasing body of evidence shows that advances in disruptive technology do not automatically translate into advances in gender equality. Women still face substantial gaps in access to the internet and mobile phones, which limits their ability to work in tech-enabled jobs or to compete as entrepreneurs. At the same time, when women do leverage technology, these tools can often serve as catalysts to overcoming longstanding gender gaps. Understanding how women are, or are not, currently using disruptive technologies is essential for them to become equal participants in an increasingly digitalized economy.

One part of the digital economy which has yet to be sufficiently analyzed is e-commerce—a sector that was globally valued at \$26 trillion in 2018 and which is poised for continued growth, particularly in emerging economies (UNCTAD 2018). E-commerce may represent an opportunity for women entrepreneurs to expand access to markets and enter male-dominated sectors; however, it is unclear to what extent women are held back by existing gender gaps in digital and financial inclusion. Supporting the ability of WO businesses to actively compete in the sector will set the stage for women to realize the full benefits of this burgeoning market opportunity.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Research

While a robust body of evidence demonstrates how supporting gender equality can drive economic development, this study uniquely contributes to the knowledge base of women in e-commerce in Southeast Asia. IFC sought a deeper understanding on how to boost opportunities for women in emerging markets and wanted to help close the knowledge gap on women in e-commerce by shedding light on the following key questions:

1. How are women entrepreneurs participating and performing in e-commerce?
2. What are the opportunities and challenges for women entrepreneurs selling on e-commerce platforms?
3. Is there a business case for e-commerce platforms to invest in women entrepreneurs?

This report also provides concrete recommendations to e-commerce companies on how they can reap the benefits of a more inclusive seller base as they scale regionally and globally, as well as to development actors seeking to create a positive impact by improving access to jobs and assets in Southeast Asia and beyond. This study focuses on two Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia and the Philippines, whose population size and uptake of digital technologies make strategic markets for e-commerce.

This study was undertaken as part of Digital2Equal initiative launched in 2018 in partnership with the European Commission that brought together 17 leading technology companies operating across the online marketplace to boost opportunities for women in emerging markets (Box 1.1). Additional funding was provided by the Umbrella Fund for Gender Equality. This study uses data from e-commerce platform and Digital2Equal member, Lazada Group.

## 1.3 Methodology

This study used a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to provide insights into how women- and men-owned businesses engage in e-commerce in Indonesia and the Philippines.

This report leverages data and insights from sellers on Lazada, one of Southeast Asia's largest e-commerce platforms, which currently serves over 100 million annual active users. The company operates in six countries and has three major business lines: (1) a marketplace, which connects sellers with consumers, (2) a payment service, which facilitates digital and cash transactions, and (3) a logistics service, which enables the delivery of packages from sellers to consumers. Analysis for this research focused on the Lazada marketplace.

Key research components include:

- A sex-disaggregated mapping of e-commerce platform sellers in Indonesia and the Philippines;
- A representative survey of WO and MO businesses covering motivations, pathways and barriers to success in e-commerce;
- Lazada platform data covering seller characteristics such as category, sales performance, and use of platform tools and services; and
- In-depth interviews with experts on e-commerce in each country and with the leaders of WO businesses on the Lazada platform.

The data used in the report encompasses seller data prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the Lazada platform covers the first quarter of 2019 through the third quarter of 2020. The seller surveys were conducted from May to September 2020. Portions of the analysis, particularly seller and platform sales information include commercially sensitive data that could not be published in absolute values. Thus, some graphs present the sales of WO businesses as a proportion of men's. Together, these methods capture the experiences of female and male e-commerce entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia and highlight the business case for e-commerce companies to take specific actions to help WO businesses thrive on their platforms. The methodology is described in greater detail in Appendix A.

### **Box 1.1 Digital2Equal**

In partnership with the European Commission, IFC launched the Digital2Equal initiative to use the power of evolving technologies and business to create opportunities for all. Digital2Equal brings together 17 leading technology companies operating across the online marketplace, each of whom have made time-bound commitments to addressing gender gaps on their platforms. In addition, IFC collaborated with select members to conduct research, including this report, to better understand the impacts of disruptive technology on women. The Umbrella Fund for Gender Equality (UFGE) also contributed funding to this report.





## Box 1.2 Key Definitions

**Average order value:** The average total of every order placed with a merchant over a defined period of time.

**E-commerce:** The act of electronically buying or selling products using an online marketplace platform service provider.

**Female participation in ownership:** The share of female owners of limited liability companies registered in the last four years, as a proportion of the total number of company owners in the economy, in the calendar year.

**Financial inclusion:** The share of individuals and firms that use financial services.

**Fintech:** Technology-enabled innovations in financial services that could result in new business models, applications, processes, or products with an associated material effect on the provision of financial services.

**Gross merchandise value (GMV):** The total monetary value of sales conducted over a marketplace or platform over a specified timeframe.

**Microenterprise:** See Micro, small and medium size enterprises.

**Micro, small, and medium size enterprises (MSMEs):** A firm with less than ten employees and annual sales of under \$100,000 is considered a microenterprise. A firm with between 10 and 49 employees and with sales between \$100,000 and \$3 million is considered a small business. A firm with between 50 and 300 employees and sales between \$3 million and \$15 million is considered a medium-sized enterprise (IFC 2011).

**Platform:** A business that creates value by facilitating exchange between two or more participants. Marketplace platforms typically do not make or own the goods and services being exchanged (Fernandez Vidal 2020).

**Product sponsorship:** A paid promotional advertising feature that highlights products to customers.

**Shoppertainment:** An approach to retail marketing that combines shopping and entertainment.

**Small and medium size enterprises (SMEs):** See Micro, small and medium size enterprises.

**Social commerce:** The activity of buying or selling products and services using social media channels such as Facebook or WhatsApp to communicate with customers.

**Super platform:** An online service provider that provides services across more than one sector to fuel the growth of an ecosystem. Super platforms are large players that have grown beyond their initial core business (ex. the combination of an e-commerce and payments offering) (Fernandez Vidal 2020).

**Woman-operated business:** A firm is counted as woman-operated if any of the following conditions apply: one or more women own between 20 and 50 percent of shares in the firm, and one or more women participates in business decisions.

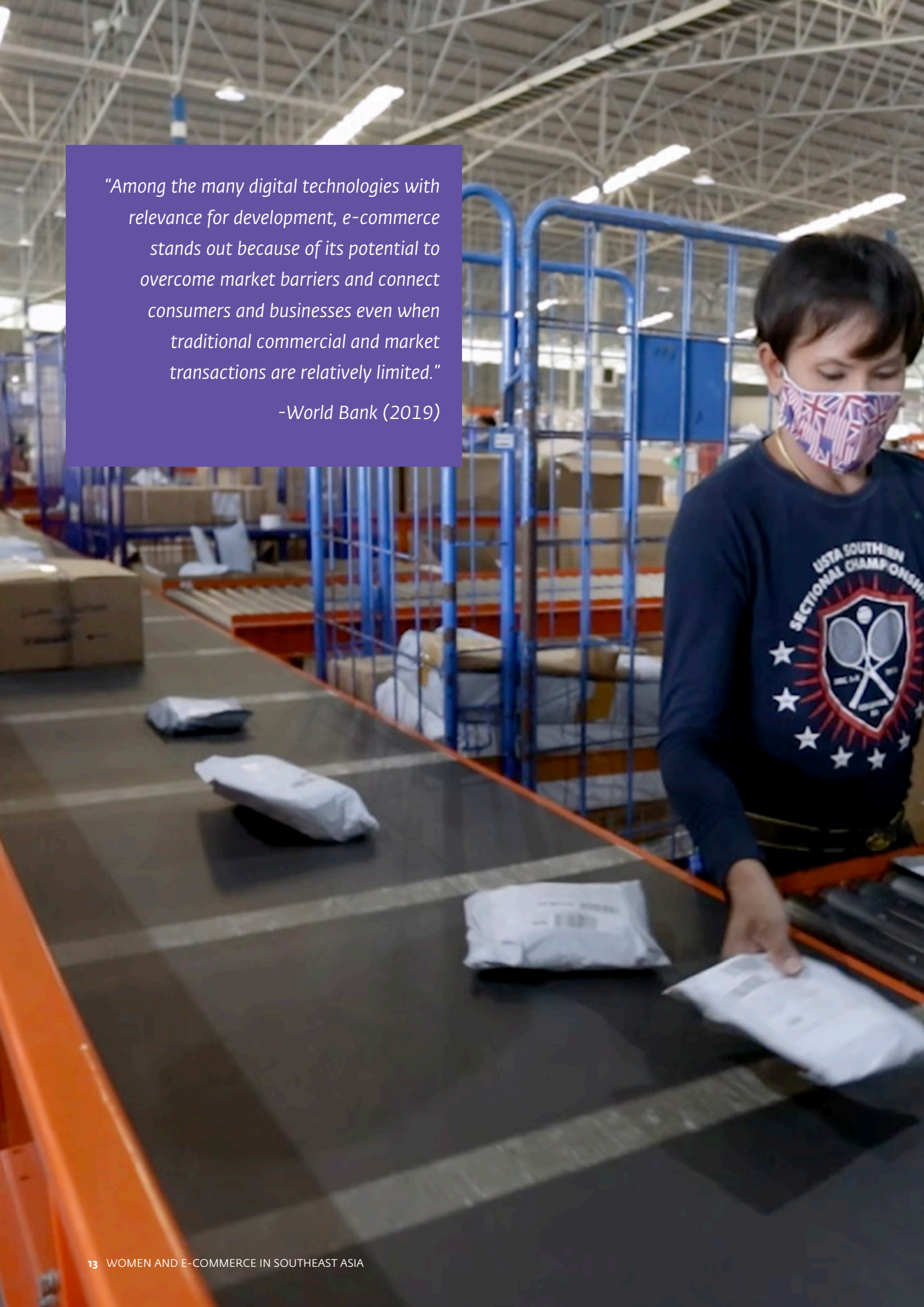
**Woman-owned business:** A firm is counted as woman-owned if any of the following conditions apply:

- one or more women own at least 51 percent of shares in the firm, or at least 20 percent of shares in the firm are owned by a woman or women, and one or more women hold the positions of Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, President, or Vice President; or
- at least 20 percent of shares are owned by a woman or women, and at least 30 percent of the board of directors is composed of women, where a board exists.

All entities that do not meet this definition are considered MO businesses.

*“Among the many digital technologies with relevance for development, e-commerce stands out because of its potential to overcome market barriers and connect consumers and businesses even when traditional commercial and market transactions are relatively limited.”*

*-World Bank (2019)*



A person in a dark blue long-sleeved shirt is moving a stack of cardboard boxes on a conveyor belt in a large warehouse. The warehouse has a high ceiling with a complex metal truss structure and several long fluorescent light fixtures. The background shows more boxes and the industrial environment.

## 2. The E-commerce Context in Southeast Asia

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The rapid expansion of e-commerce over the last two decades has made it a defining feature of the modern economy and a powerful engine for economic development. In many ways, advances in e-commerce platforms in Southeast Asia are redefining the sector, building on a population with high internet access and use rates. This has led to the rise of so-called “super platforms” that integrate multiple services, from payments to delivery. However, WO businesses come to the sector with substantial disadvantages, including gaps in connectivity and access to finance. These disadvantages have deepened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This section explores the current state of e-commerce and women’s economic participation in Southeast Asia.

## 2.1 Global E-commerce

In 2018, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) valued total global e-commerce at nearly \$26 trillion (UNCTAD 2018),<sup>1</sup> making e-commerce a powerful driver of economic development that can have a catalytic effect well beyond its immediate users.

- For sellers, e-commerce offers access to new markets, particularly for small businesses with a limited geographic footprint, and it encourages business to support the adoption of digital technologies (van Weslum 2016).
- For consumers, e-commerce provides access to a wider marketplace, often marked by greater value, choice, and convenience.
- For markets, e-commerce can drive employment as an indirect result of business growth in sellers and related services, such as logistics.

The World Bank finds that “Among the many digital technologies with relevance for development, e-commerce stands out because of its potential to overcome market barriers and [its ability to] connect consumers and businesses, even when traditional commercial and market transactions are relatively limited” (Luo, Wang and Zhang 2019).

*“We estimate that by 2022, online commerce will directly or indirectly support about 26 million jobs [in Indonesia].”*

*McKinsey, Digital Archipelago, 2018  
(Kaushik Das 2018)*

One striking example of the large-scale potential of e-commerce comes from China, where “Taobao Villages,” communities driven by selling on the e-commerce platform of the same name, experienced increased employment, lower migration, greater firm productivity, and higher infrastructure development (Luo, Wang and Zhang 2019).

## 2.2 E-commerce in Southeast Asia

The UNCTAD E-commerce Index 2020 uses four key factors to measure a country’s readiness to support online shopping: account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile money provider, the portion of the population using the internet, postal reliability,

### Box 2.1 Taobao Villages

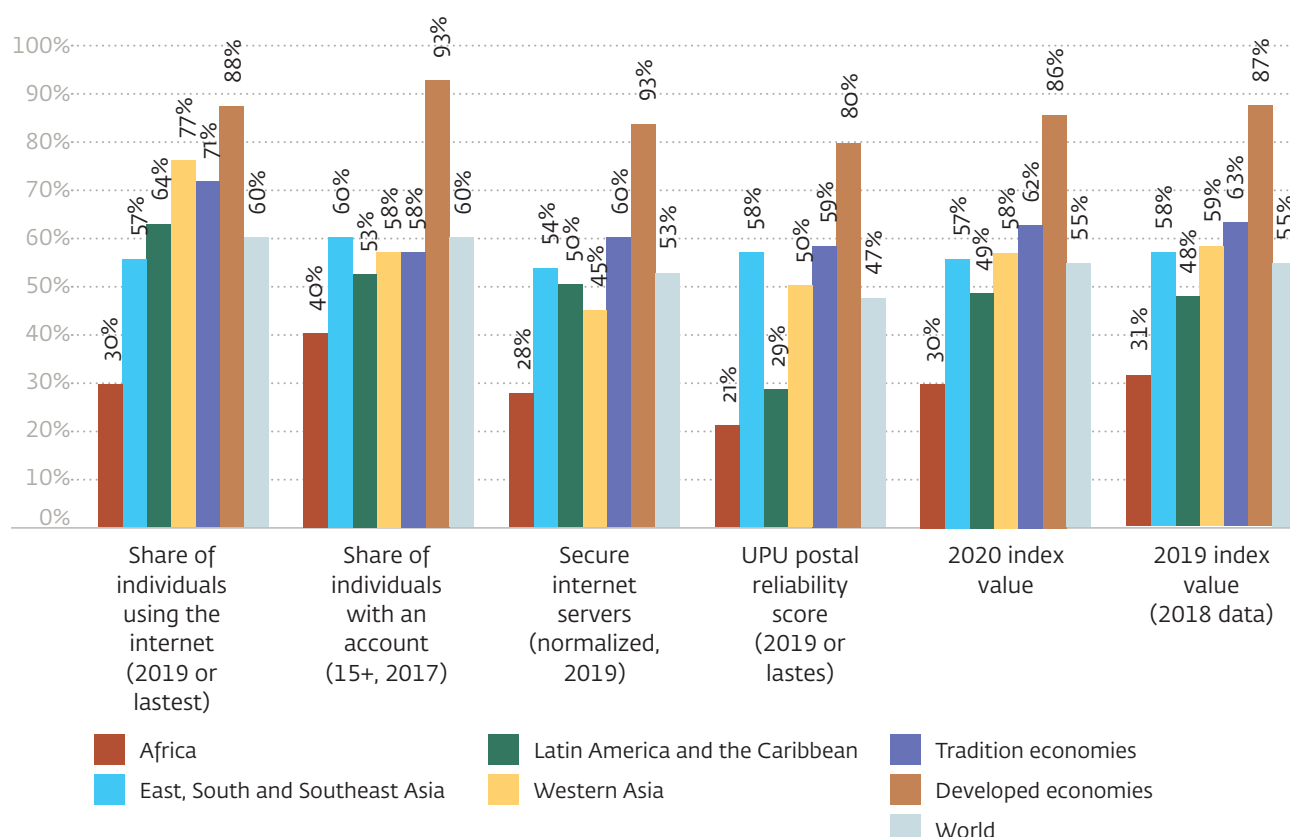
**Challenge:** In 2018, a World Bank study sought to better understand the complex issue of generational poverty in China’s rural communities and whether e-commerce could present a means of addressing shortfalls in infrastructure and education, while stimulating entrepreneurship and job creation. Working with consumer-to-consumer platform Taobao, researchers analyzed clusters of villages with high levels of usage of the platform to better understand what draws people in rural communities to sell online and what these communities gain from participating in online entrepreneurship.

**Approach:** To provide an in-depth look at the operational capacity and limitations of online sellers in rural communities, a survey was conducted in 80 villages across eight provinces. This survey considered a range of parameters including but not limited to age, gender, education level, social status, and access to relevant devices.

**Results:** The study found that e-commerce did indeed stimulate economic activity and contributed to jobs in rural communities which reduced poverty levels. Through simplified registration and store management tools, e-commerce significantly lowered the capital requirements for starting and maintaining a business, with flexible working hours, making it particularly appealing to women. But it also shed light on the foundational attributes of an enabling environment for e-commerce—beyond internet access and connectivity—to a market that is ready to realize the gains from e-commerce. This requires a strong policy orientation to improve infrastructure, logistics, and entrepreneurial skills.

<sup>1</sup> This figure refers to the value of business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) sales on e-commerce.

**Table 2.1 UNCTAD B2C E-commerce Index by Region, 2020**



Source: UNCTAD

and prevalence of secure internet servers. In the 2020 Index, Southeast Asia, which is ranked together with East and South Asia, scored 58 on these factors, just above the world average of 55. All ten of the top developing economies listed in the Index are from Asia. However, there is substantial variation between markets, and much of Southeast Asia is more advanced than the rest of the region (UNCTAD 2020) (Table 2.1).

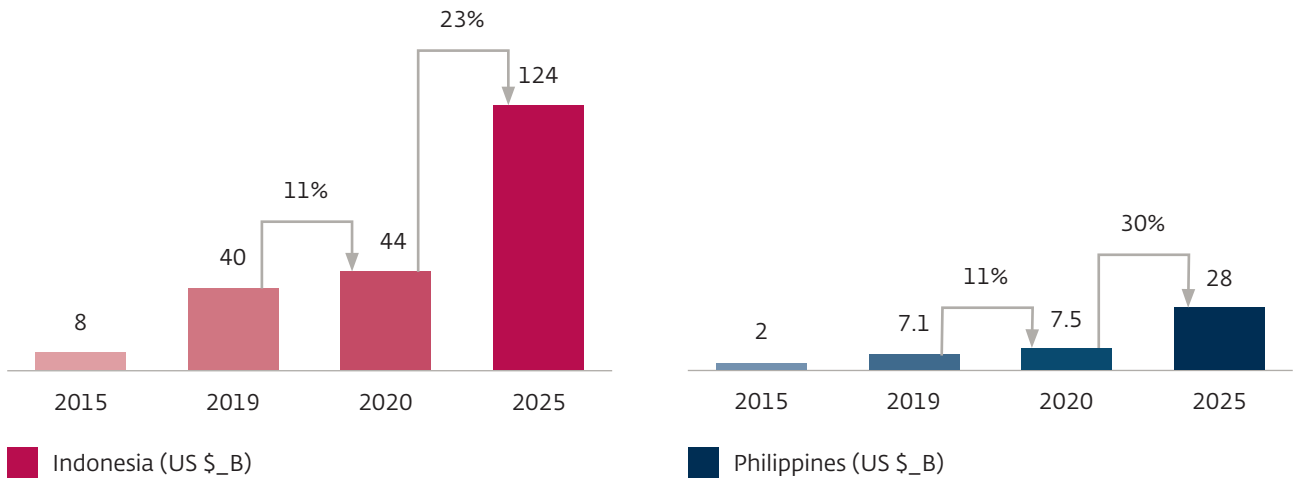
The six largest economies in Southeast Asia—Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam—are among the world’s fastest growing economies and have the highest daily rates of internet usage, making the climate ripe for e-commerce growth.<sup>2</sup> Seventy percent of the region’s population, or 400 million users, are online and are contributing to exponential growth in the internet economy, which tripled to \$105 billion in GMV between 2015 and

*“Today’s customer is looking for much more than a shopping experience, they also want an entertainment experience. This means content like gaming and live streaming, which allow the customer to better engage with the product and see how it fits into their lifestyle, take on an increased level of importance.”*

*Monika Rudijono,  
Chief Marketing Officer, Lazada Indonesia*

<sup>2</sup> Internet users in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia spend an average of 4 hours a day on the Internet and those in Thailand spend 5 hours on the Internet daily, compared to a global average of 3 hours and 13 minutes.

Figure 2.1 Growth in the Internet Economy in Southeast Asia, 2015-2025



Source: Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company 2020

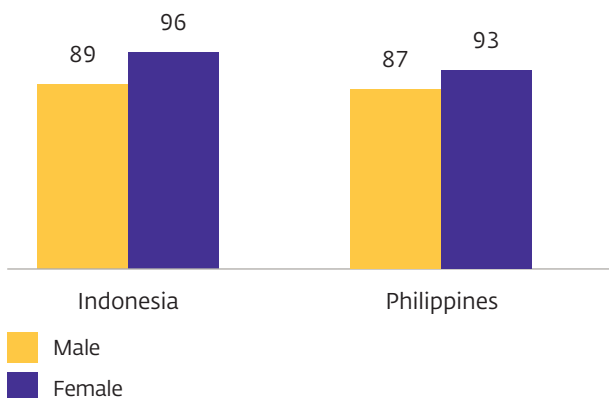
2020, and GMV is expected to triple again between 2020 and 2025 (Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company 2020). In recent years, the e-commerce ecosystem in Southeast Asia has experienced exceptional growth, driven by platforms such as Bukalapak, Shopee and Tokopedia, in addition to Lazada.

Indonesia is the largest and fastest growing internet economy in the region. Currently valued at \$44 billion and growing by an estimated 23 percent per year, Indonesia's internet economy is expected to reach \$124 billion by 2025 (Statista 2020). The internet economy in the Philippines is smaller by comparison, accounting for just 2.1 percent of

the country's GDP in 2019 (Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company 2020). However, the internet economy in the Philippines is expected to grow at an even faster pace of 30 percent per year, reaching \$28 billion by 2025 (Statista 2020) (Figure 2.1).

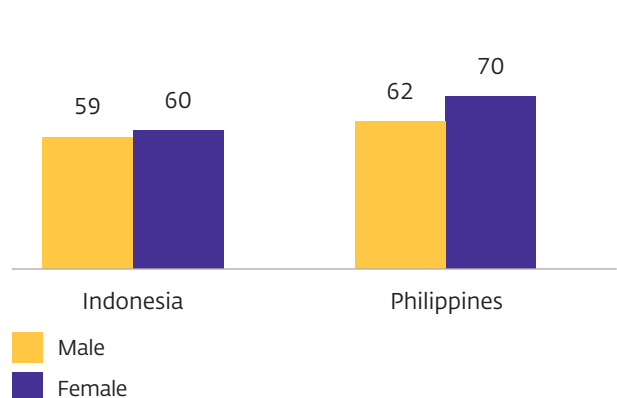
Notwithstanding, there are some hurdles. Sellers in both Indonesia and the Philippines operate in a challenging environment for delivery logistics, transporting packages across a vast archipelago of disperse islands. Further, the majority of e-commerce and internet use is concentrated in urban regions, exacerbating the rural-urban divide.

Figure 2.2 Percent of Online Consumers Who Made an E-commerce Purchase Since the Start of the Pandemic



Source: Kantar (2020)

Figure 2.3 Consumers Who Will Continue to Shop at a Newly Discovered Store Post Pandemic



Source: Kantar (2020)

*“We have certainly seen a strong digital transformation in response to the pandemic. Online shopping has shifted from being merely an alternative sales channel to the main sales channel.”*

*Ferry Kusnowo, Chief Customer Officer,  
Lazada Indonesia*

In addition to fast-paced growth, e-commerce in the region is also characterized by two dimensions—the dominance of super platforms and the rise of “shoppertainment” (Goodridge 2020). Super platforms offer MSMEs many benefits including support for customer service, reputational backing, infrastructure, and a digital ecosystem in which entrepreneurs can focus investment on growing sales on the platform (BFA Global 2018). They also integrate a variety of services such as delivery, payments, and social media that sellers would otherwise have to obtain separately from third parties.

“Shoppertainment” is best defined as a marketing strategy that may include live streams, chats with brand influencers, “unboxing” videos,<sup>3</sup> or gaming features (Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company 2020). This strategy of high customer engagement has evolved in the face of high seller competition and lower average order values compared to other markets (Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company 2020) (Saxena 2019). While neither feature is unique to Southeast Asia, e-commerce platforms in the region make notable use of both approaches.

*“E-commerce use varies across Southeast Asia, but broadly speaking, it has developed very quickly across the region. What sets Southeast Asia apart from other developing countries is the long period of time consumers spend online. The length of time coupled with the fast pace of development of digital payments positions online sellers to capture and convert more customers.”*

*Xubei Luo, Senior Economist, World Bank*

## 2.3 E-commerce in the COVID-19 Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated growth in the e-commerce sector as more shopping shifted from in-person to on-line. Periodic lockdowns beginning in March 2020, led many shops to suspend or reduce in-person business, but online commerce grew even as social distancing restrictions eased.

The e-commerce sector responded to the surge in new demand with fast innovation around door-to-door delivery, even in difficult contexts. A June 2020 study on changes in e-commerce in Southeast Asia during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic found that while in-person shopping fell by 47 percent, online shopping increased by 30 percent (Yendamuri, Keswakaroon and Lim 2020).

In August 2020, Kantar’s COVID-19 Barometer found that over 80 percent of adults connected to the internet in Indonesia and the Philippines had bought something online since the pandemic began (Kantar 2020) (Figure 2.2).<sup>3</sup>

## 2.4 Women Are More Likely to Continue Shopping Online After the Pandemic

In terms of demand, evidence suggests that the increase in e-commerce activity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic will continue into the future. Among those people shopping online, most expected to continue to patronize online stores after the pandemic (Yendamuri, Keswakaroon and Lim 2020).

In Indonesia, and in the Philippines in particular, over half of the Kantar Barometer respondents reported having discovered a new online store where they will continue to shop post-pandemic (Figure 2.3). While women currently

<sup>3</sup> Data was collected from Kantar’s online consumer panels database, which provides insights on consumers and shoppers across a variety of sectors. The sample size consisted of 500 men and women from Indonesia and the Philippines.

## Box 2.2 The COVID-19 Pandemic Has Disproportionately Impacted Women MSMEs

While the e-commerce sector has been somewhat insulated from the devastating impacts of COVID-19, the pandemic's impact on micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) has not been uniform (Goldstein, Gonzalez Martinez, et al. 2020). A World Bank / Facebook "Data for Good" survey of global business owners with active Facebook business pages showed disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on female entrepreneurs (Facebook n.d.). Further, a May 2020 survey found that 22 percent of WO businesses in Asia and Oceania had closed as a result of COVID-19, compared to 16 percent of MO businesses, but women were less likely to have received any form of financial assistance (World Bank, Facebook 2020).

The pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, in part because they were less prepared to withstand shocks. Before COVID-19, WO firms in emerging markets already accounted for an outsized share of the finance gap of about \$1.48 trillion, which is more than a third of the overall SME finance gap of \$4.5 trillion (SME Finance Forum 2018). On average, WO firms operate with smaller and less-diverse networks than men and have less access to information (IFC 2017). According to interviews conducted by IFC's Banking on Women program during the pandemic, female entrepreneurs have been in financial distress and have not been able to service their bank loans. They have not received proper support from their banks on loan restructuring and as a result have had to tap into their networks to borrow from family and friends to pay employee salaries.

This is compounded by factors such as school and child care center shut-downs, which have resulted in greater care responsibilities and less time for women to devote to their business (World Bank Africa Gender Innovation Lab 2020), (IFC 2020). Additionally, the pandemic has increased women's vulnerability to intimate partner violence and rising levels of gender-based violence online (UNFPA, UN Women, ILO, Quilt.AI 2021). As WO and women-led firms tend to employ more women, closures and the resulting job losses could have a ripple effect and exacerbate gender inequality (Kipnis and Rana 2020). For instance, a global WeConnect survey in the second quarter of 2020 found that 43 percent of entrepreneurs were able to shift to digital models to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic (WeConnect International 2020) (Section 3.7).

Efforts to safeguard opportunities for women entrepreneurs in e-commerce will be an important part of COVID-19 response and recovery.

represent a minority of e-commerce customers, women were more likely than men to intend to continue buying online after the pandemic, suggesting that women will make up an increasingly important share of future growth in consumer spending.

### 2.5 Barriers for Women in E-commerce

According to the World Bank, gender inequality in earnings has substantial economic costs that led to an estimated loss of \$25,367 per person, for the East Asia and Pacific region in 2017 (Wodon, Onagoruwa, et al. 2020). However, total wealth in the region could increase by 16.6 percent if gender equality in earnings could be achieved (Wodon, Onagoruwa, et al. 2020).

In Indonesia and the Philippines, women were significantly less likely than men to participate in the labor force (Table 2.2). For instance, about 50 percent of Indonesian and Filipino women participated in the labor force, compared with 82 percent of men in Indonesia and 73 percent of men in the Philippines. (World Bank n.d.)

When women are working in Southeast Asia, they are often in the informal sector and tend to be involved in small-scale production and distribution of goods and services (OECD and ASEAN 2017). Businesses owned by women in Southeast Asia are generally smaller, have fewer resources, and tend to be concentrated in lower margin sectors such as agriculture, food processing, catering, and beauty (OECD and ASEAN 2017) (Meunier, Krylova and Ramalho 2017).



These gaps in formality and earnings can be traced, in part, to barriers that women entrepreneurs face that impact their ability to effectively participate in e-commerce. The barriers include legal constraints, lack of access to finance, and digital connectivity.

- **Legal Constraints:** The 2021 World Bank Women, Business and the Law Index notes that worldwide, discriminatory laws continue to threaten the economic wellbeing of women entrepreneurs and their ability to compete on an equal basis with men.

Within Southeast Asia, there are substantial differences between countries. For instance, the Philippines scored 78.8 out of 100 and Indonesia scored 64.4 out of 100, indicating that women in Indonesia face a more challenging legal environment than women in the Philippines. For instance, in Indonesia, women are not protected from discrimination in access to credit (World Bank 2021). This could impede the ability of women sellers to secure financing necessary to purchase additional inventory to sell online and grow their businesses.

- **Access to Finance:** Globally, WO small businesses lack access to finance. In 2017, an estimated 33 percent of SMEs and 24 percent of microenterprises had unmet financing needs (Bruhn, et al. 2017). These gaps extend to digital finance tools and services, which are often necessary to compete online. Globally, women were less likely than men to have a financial account or to use online banking, instead relying on cash-on-delivery sales, which limits their customer base (World Economic Forum 2019). Notwithstanding, there were some differences between the global norm and Southeast Asia.

For instance, in 2018, about half of Indonesian women owned a bank account, which was 5 percent higher than men. In the Philippines, 39 percent of women owned a bank account, which was 9 percent higher than men (Demirgüç-Kunt, et al. 2018) (Table 2.2). In both countries women conducted marginally more digital payment transactions than men (International Telecommunication Union 2019) (Table 2.2).

In 2017, more than a third of women in Indonesia and more than a quarter of women in the Philippines received digital payments. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need for online sellers to use digital and cashless payments in compliance with social-distancing protocols. In addition to digital literacy and internet access, use of online financial services is also critical to sellers in the e-commerce sector (Mohiuddin, Aidis and Griffin 2020).

Despite the relatively high levels of account ownership in both countries, women-owned small businesses often had more unmet financing needs than men (OECD and ASEAN 2017). In Indonesia, IFC estimated that 54 percent of WO small businesses without access to formal finance were interested in obtaining a bank loan (IFC 2017).

- **Digital Connectivity:** Globally, women were 26 percent less likely than men to have a smartphone, which limits their access to the internet and makes them feel uneasy using it. (OECD 2018).







Regarding internet use, in Indonesia about 45 percent of women and 50 percent of men used the internet (International Telecommunication Union 2019) (Table 2.2). Across Southeast Asia, the World Wide Web Foundation estimated that the gender gap in internet usage was 11 percent (Iglesias 2020). While e-commerce may represent an easier avenue for women to enter the labor force, barriers to access such as affordability and comfort levels using digital technologies present a significant obstacle to their inclusion on e-commerce platforms.

Closing these gender gaps will improve women's ability to enter, compete, and thrive in the sector. As a result of these constraints, there are fewer WO or women-led business than MO businesses. Once these are addressed on a large scale, women will have more opportunities in the sector.

## 2.6 Opportunities for Women in E-commerce

E-commerce represents an opportunity for women entrepreneurs to increase productivity and enter higher earning sectors, helping them to overcome many of the challenges outlined above. There is still much room

**Table 2.2 Key Country Statistics**

	 <b>Indonesia</b>	 <b>Philippines</b>
Key economic indicators 	Population: 271 million (2019) GDP: \$1.1 trillion (2019) GDP growth: 5.0% GNI per capita: \$4,050 Labor force participation rate: - Women: 53.2% - Men: 81.8%	Population: 108 million (2019) GDP: \$377 billion (2019) GDP growth: 6.0% GNI per capita: \$3,850 Labor force participation rate: - Women: 46.2% - Men: 73.2%
Access to finance 	Own a bank account (2019) Women: 51.4% Men: 46.2 %	Own a bank account (2019) Women: 38.9% Men: 30%
Digital finance 	Made or received digital payments in the past year (2019) - Women: 35.5% - Men: 33.7%	Made or received digital payments in the past year (2017) - Women: 26.7% - Men: 23.4%
Individuals using the Internet 	Individuals using the internet (2019) - Women: 44.9% - Men: 50.5%	Individuals using the internet (2019) - Women: 43% - Men: 43%

Source: World Bank: DataBank and Global Financial Inclusion Databases, and ITU

for growth and key opportunities for women include increased market access and higher levels of flexibility.

- **Increased Market Access:** E-commerce platforms are unique in that they provide instant access to a wider universe of potential buyers in a manner that is more efficient. A reliable ecosystem of services that includes integrated marketing tools, payment capabilities, and logistics services allows sellers to scale faster and reap a higher return on the level of effort invested, thereby increasing productivity.

Many e-commerce platforms provide services that help women overcome gender barriers in fields such as logistics and transportation, that are critical to order fulfillment and last mile delivery. This eases the burden on women entrepreneurs who would not otherwise have the financial and physical capacity to ensure that goods reach customers in a short time period. Thus, women stand to benefit the most from e-commerce platforms given a generally lower level of digital skills and a lower likelihood of independently utilizing such skills in business.

- **Higher Levels of Flexibility:** Selling via e-commerce allows women, who often carry a disproportionate level of care responsibilities, the flexibility to set their own work times and activities. E-commerce gives women entrepreneurs the ability to work from home or on the go at any time.

*"We have seen more women turning to e-commerce platforms to pursue new job opportunities to earn a steady income. Women have become local business entrepreneurs, professional live-streamers and more."*

*Monika Rudijono,  
Chief Marketing Officer, Lazada Indonesia*





*"At Lazada Indonesia, we have seen an increasing trend of businesses led by women on the Lazada platform, showing that with the right knowledge, tools and empowerment, success is achievable. We are proud to be their e-commerce partner, as these women inspire others to also contribute back to their local communities and accelerate growth of the digital economy in Indonesia."*

*Haikal Bkti Anggoro,  
Senior Vice President  
Traffic Operations and Seller Engagement,  
Lazada Indonesia*

### 3. E-commerce Entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia

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Despite the potential to help women entrepreneurs overcome longstanding economic barriers, women's participation in e-commerce in Southeast Asia has remained largely unexplored. This section incorporates key findings from expert interviews, surveys of representative samples of men and women sellers, and platform data from Lazada in Indonesia and the Philippines. Lazada provided data on sales, as measured in GMV, for the first quarter of 2019 through the third quarter of 2020, and thus the analysis covers the period leading up to and including the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides both a long-range view of women's engagement in the sector and insights into how women have been uniquely impacted by recent economic pressures.

The survey sent to Lazada sellers included a series of questions used to identify the characteristics of each firm, including its size, number of years in operation, and whether it fit the definition of a WO business. In this chapter, the terms “men” and “women” describe the gender of ownership, rather than the gender of the respondent. The survey received 1,283 responses which were combined with data from the Lazada platform on each surveyed business covering the first quarter of 2019 to the third quarter of 2020.

The study used the survey data to disaggregate the GMV data by gender and report on the proportion of total GMV accounted for by WO and MO businesses, as well as women’s GMV as a percentage of men’s. This gender mapping was used to generate comparative insights on the sales performance of MO and WO businesses, both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3.1 About Lazada

Founded in 2012, Lazada has a presence in six countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Lazada primarily uses a marketplace model whereby third-party sellers can reach consumers seeking products through the platform. Selling on the Lazada platform gives entrepreneurs access to millions of consumers, commission-free posting on the Lazada Marketplace, end-to-end supply chain logistics, technology infrastructure, digital payments, tracking for shipping and delivery, secure online payment transactions, and access to Lazada support services through the seller center (Zoleta 2019). Sellers also have access to Lazada

University, an educational platform which provides free training on how to run a successful online business and how to be an exceptional seller.

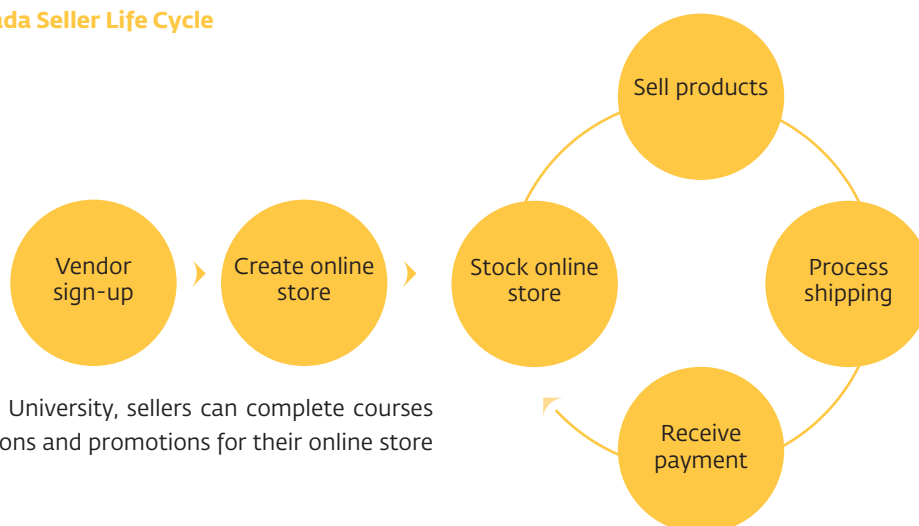
For entrepreneurs, the Lazada seller lifecycle begins when they sign-up to the platform via the website or mobile application. Once the account is established, new sellers create their online store by adding products and then manage the sale of their products, process shipping through one of three shipping options, and receive payments in the bank account registered in their profile (Figure 3.1).

### 3.2 Women are Active Participants in E-commerce

The survey administered during the pandemic found that women comprised one third of sellers on the Lazada platform in Indonesia and two-thirds of sellers in the Philippines (Figure 3.2). Further, 41 percent of firms in Indonesia and 74 percent in Philippines were women-operated, meaning women had senior management roles or sat on boards of directors.

In Indonesia, the proportion of WO business on Lazada compared favorably with women’s entrepreneurship in the national economy, where WO businesses made up only 22 percent of formally registered firms (World Bank n.d.). The relatively high proportion of women in e-commerce indicates that women may be leveraging Lazada and other platforms to take previously informal businesses into the formal economy. In contrast, in the Philippines, women were widely found to be in ownership roles, both in the national economy and on Lazada. This is in line with the country’s relatively high enabling environment for women’s participation in business activities (World Bank 2021).

Figure 3.1 Lazada Seller Life Cycle



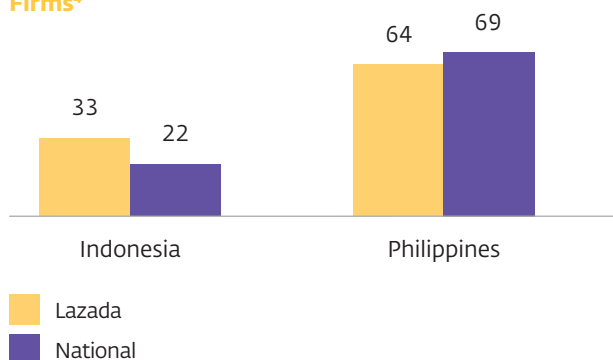
Through Lazada University, sellers can complete courses on sales, operations and promotions for their online store at any time.

### 3.3 WO Businesses in the Philippines Are More Likely to be Microenterprises

Globally, women are more likely to be concentrated in microenterprises, which are measured in terms of revenue and number of employees (OECD and ASEAN 2017). However, this pattern diverges in the two countries studied. In Indonesia, less than one third of sellers were microenterprises, and MO and WO businesses were equally likely to be in this category (Figure 3.3).<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, in the Philippines, most of the sellers were microenterprises and a larger proportion (70 percent) of WO businesses fell into this category relative to MO businesses (60 percent). In both countries, MO businesses had more employees than WO businesses (Figure 3.4).<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 3.2 Women-Owned Firms as a Share of All Firms<sup>4</sup>**

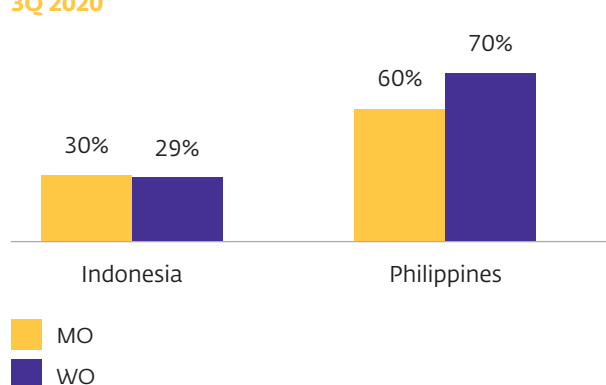


### 3.4 Women Are More Likely to Use Social Commerce Than Men

In addition to selling on Lazada, WO businesses were more likely to use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp to sell their inventory to customers separately from their sales on Lazada (Figure 3.5). This may reflect the journey of women from informal businesses with limited digitalization, to users of more formal platforms as they grow.

Since social platforms require less familiarity with tools such as business software, this ease of use may have greater appeal to novice digital entrepreneurs who are just entering the market, hence social commerce may act as a gateway to the formal e-commerce platforms. Further research is needed to understand the extent to which sales via social platforms prepare sellers to subsequently expand their channels to include platforms like Lazada (Box 3.1).

**Figure 3.3 Businesses That Are Microenterprises, 3Q 2020**



*"I tend to first introduce products on Instagram and link buyers to the marketplace to buy them. It has helped to boost the reach of my products."*

*Woman Seller, Indonesia*

<sup>4</sup> Female participation in ownership was collected from the World Bank Enterprise Survey database for Indonesia (2015) and the Philippines (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Based on platform GMV data from fourth quarter 2019 to third quarter and Indonesia's MSME definitions.

<sup>6</sup> Based on self-reported business assets at the time of the survey, as per the Philippines' MSME definition.

### Box 3.1 Women and Social Media in Commerce

For many entrepreneurs, e-commerce platforms do not represent their first forays into online sales. Forthcoming research from the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) conducted in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan found that platforms such as WhatsApp – initially designed for communications rather than as tools for commerce—are enabling a new, more informal, type of online commerce. They are no longer being used just for marketing and attracting clients. Instead, they are being used to negotiate and communicate throughout the entire transaction process.

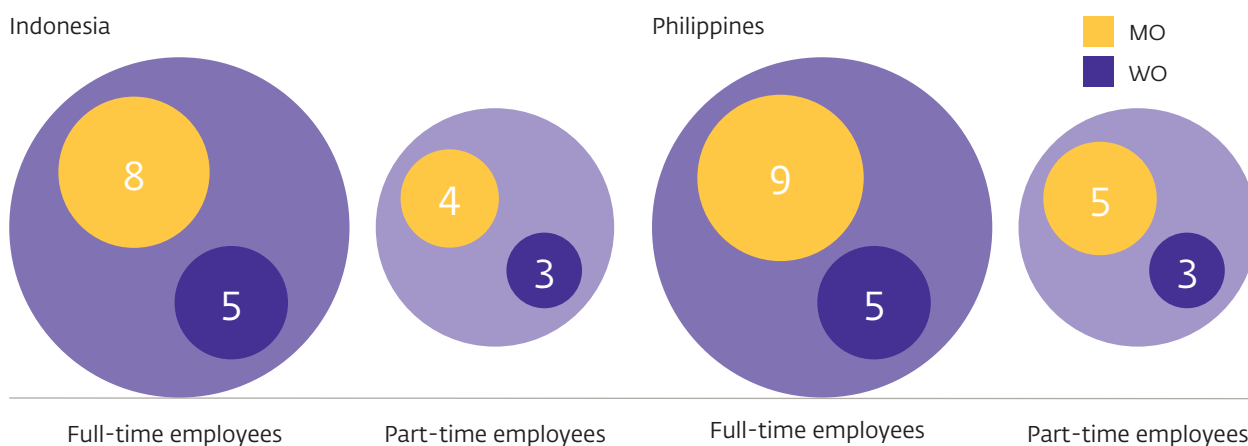
CGAP’s research finds that women are particularly well represented in this new approach to using social media. The research identified several different types of entrepreneurs:

- **Digital newcomers** usually have a minimal level of traditional skill but are new to social media altogether.
- **Unexpected social sellers** are adept at navigating social media platforms but begin (and then expand) sales in response to opportunity, rather than with intention.
- **Supplemental social sellers** are the most advanced of the entrepreneurial types because they conduct this informal online commerce to supplement incomes from brick and mortar businesses.
- **Experimenting youth** leverage family funds and their own social media savvy to earn money while they complete their education or work towards careers.
- **Affluent entrepreneurs** are higher-income and educated, running larger businesses with the ability to handle risk.
- **Established converts** are older women with work or business experience, financial independence and high levels of skill and confidence.

This extension of social commerce also leads to more opportunities for digital financial services as sellers become increasingly comfortable using digital tools and face increasing financing needs as their businesses grow. The private sector should explore how to better leverage sellers’ income and experiences on informal social channels to expand financial inclusion.

This textbox draws on data from CGAP’s forthcoming focus note which examines the contours of this extension to social commerce and the types of the women who are pioneering it.

Figure 3.4. Average Number of Employees per Business





### 3.5 More Women Join E-commerce Platforms to Grow Businesses and Access New Markets

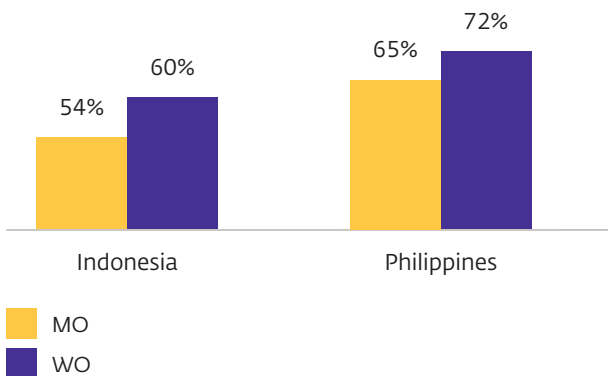
When asked why they joined Lazada, 47 percent of men, compared to 40 percent of women reported that they joined to start a new business; whereas, 44 percent of women, compared to 29 percent of men, were looking for a better way to sell online (Figure 3.6).

A similar portion of both groups, 43 percent of women and 46 percent of men, sought to start selling online for the first time. This suggests that two distinct populations of women entrepreneurs are joining the platform—a more experienced and digitally savvy group looking to optimize

their online experience, and a second group of those looking to start or digitalize businesses. Given that women across the region experience substantial gaps in digital inclusion, this reinforces the finding that e-commerce can offer a pathway for women to better participate in the benefits of the digital economy.

Women also reported comparatively high benefits of accessing new or expanded markets. Slightly more women than men responded that increasing profitability was a key motivation, and 60 percent of women responded that starting a new business or line of business was a benefit of doing business on Lazada. This reinforces the finding that many sellers operate multiple storefronts or across verticals.

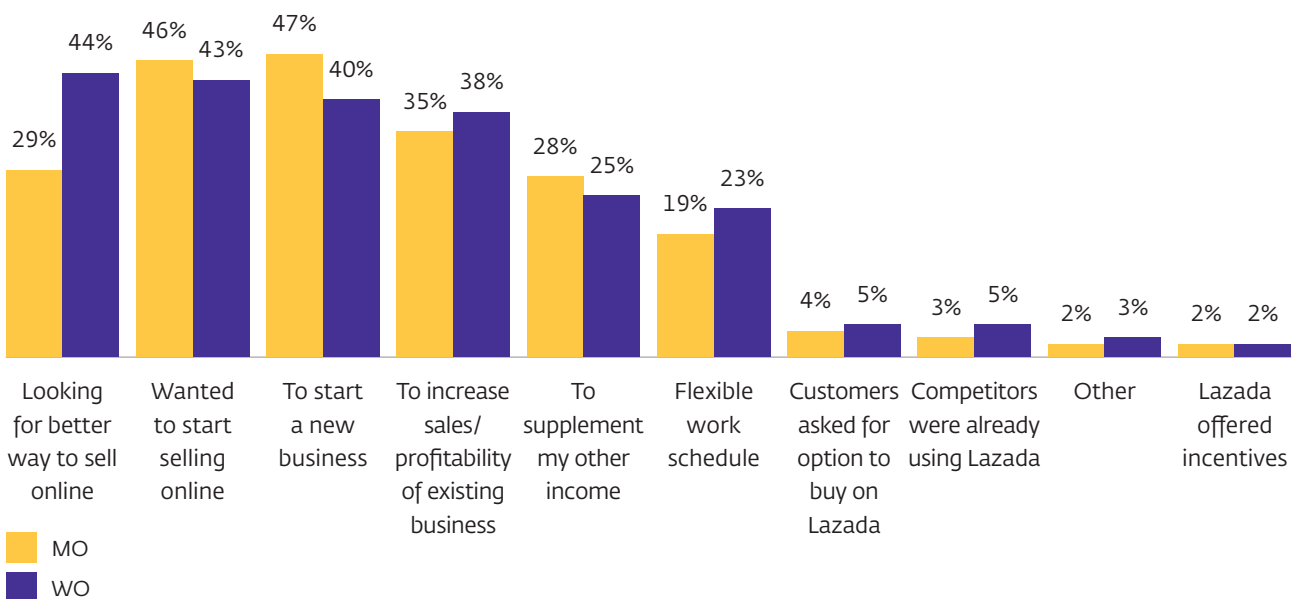
**Figure 3.5. Use of Social Commerce in Conjunction with Lazada**



*"I never imagined that my first pay-out of PHP7,000 (about \$150) would increase to PHP50,000 (about \$1,000) per week."*

*Woman Seller, Philippines*

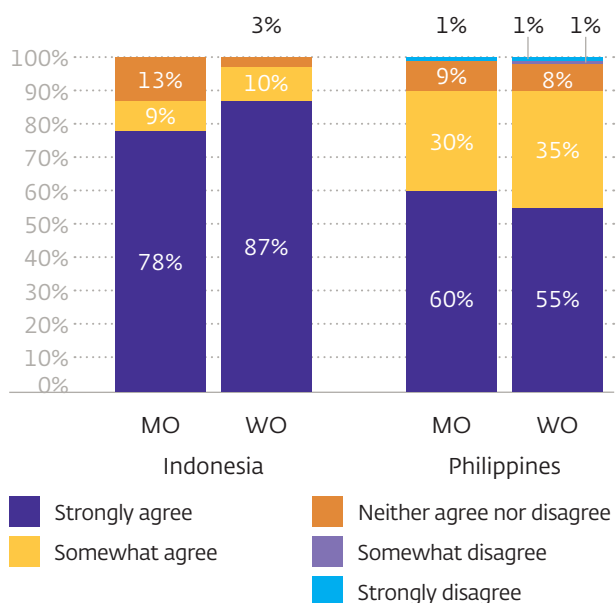
**Figure 3.6. Reasons for Starting to Sell on Lazada**



The opportunity to sell to new or bigger groups also came out strongly in interviews. As one-woman entrepreneur in Indonesia said, “If you sell online, then you can sell all over Indonesia and even to Malaysia. If you sell offline, only certain people have the chance to pass by and visit the store every day.” Another seller noted the benefit of the cash on delivery option, “I realized that there were a lot of people who didn’t have a bank account, especially housewives and those living in rural areas. So, I opened a store on Lazada, especially for those who want to pay cash on delivery.”

In addition to differences between WO and MO firms, variations emerged between respondents across the two markets (Figure 3.7). The survey asked sellers to rate their level of agreement with the statement: “Lazada has helped me grow my business.” The proportion who responded “strongly agree” was much higher overall in Indonesia than in the Philippines, especially among WO businesses. Male entrepreneurs in the Philippines were more likely to agree than women, indicating an opportunity to provide additional support to women entrepreneurs in the Philippines, who also account for a smaller percentage of GMV in that market.

**Figure 3.7. Level of Agreement: Lazada Helped Me Grow My Business**



### 3.6 Women Perform at the Same Level or Better in High-value Segments

The World Bank found that sector selection accounts for a portion of women’s underperformance as entrepreneurs, and that shifting into male-dominated sectors can boost women’s performance (Goldstein, Gonzalez Martinez and Papineni 2019). Further, since the average selling price of products in each category affects the total GMV, attention to the categories where men or women sellers feature more prominently is important to identify areas of opportunity for women to close the gender gap.

E-commerce sellers on Lazada were active in a range of product categories, and when comparing the presence of women sellers in each of the product categories and the value generated, some interesting results were identified.

In Indonesia, when looking at women’s average GMV as a percentage of men’s in four different product categories and comparing the same period prior to and during the pandemic, women’s average GMV fell relative to men’s in all product categories (Figure 3.8).

Electronics is the highest-value product category, and one in which Indonesian women had achieved higher average GMV than men, both before and during the pandemic. WO businesses similarly outperformed men in fashion, which was the category where women’s average GMV dropped the least relative to that of MO businesses during the pandemic. In fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and general merchandise, women’s average GMV dropped below men’s during the pandemic.

*“[E-commerce] can help entrepreneurs like myself to scale an online business in a sustainable manner. In addition to growing my company, my goal is to also enable local communities, such as rural villages, to drive their economy.”*

*Hanna Suhardi, Owner of Shopping Shoes, (Store on Lazada Indonesia)*

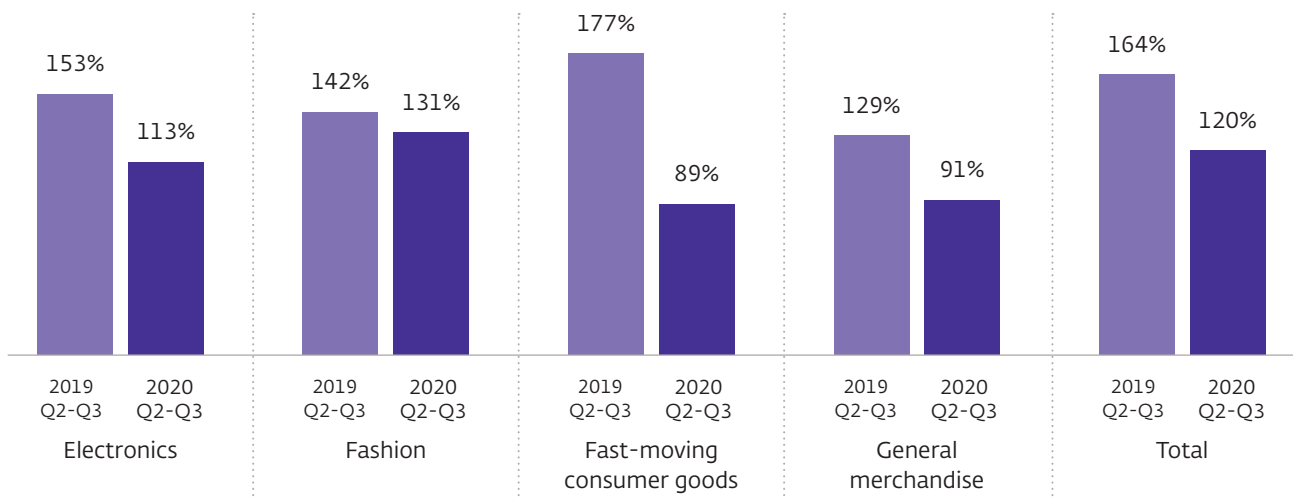
*“Women [in China] who sell online tend to feature prominently in categories such as clothing, shoes and handicrafts. These tend to be quite labor intensive and are also highly competitive when sold locally.”*

*Xubei Luo, Senior Economist, World Bank*

In the Philippines, women’s average GMV dropped relative to men’s in the electronics and general merchandise categories but rose in FMCG and fashion during the pandemic (Figure 3.9). Women’s relatively weak performance in the high value categories of electronics and general merchandise accounted for the overall decline in women’s average GMV relative to men’s during the pandemic in the Philippines. Regaining women’s leading position in these categories is critical for WO businesses to grow beyond microenterprise status.

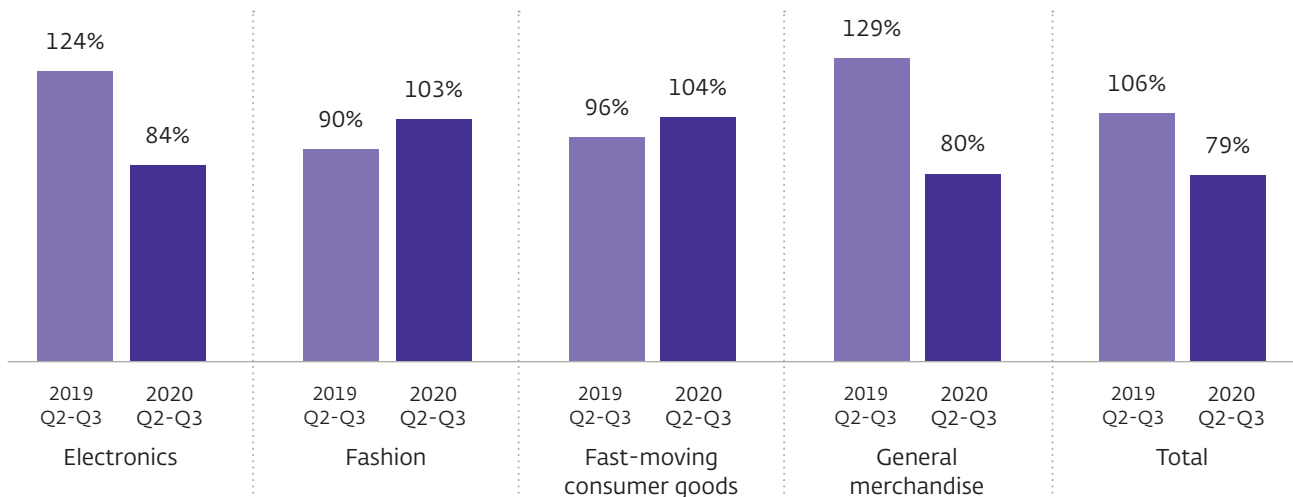
These results indicate that the pre-pandemic success women had in product categories such as electronics and general merchandise dropped during the pandemic. The electronics category is particularly notable because it accounts for the largest component of total GMV on Lazada for both men- and women-owned businesses, and because it is the category in which women’s average GMV declined by 40 percentage points relative to men’s during the pandemic in both Indonesia (Figure 3.8) and the Philippines (Figure 3.9). This finding supports the

**Figure 3.8 Indonesia: Average Women’s GMV as a Percentage of Men’s by Product Category**



Portions of the analysis, particularly seller and platform sales information include commercially sensitive data that could not be published in absolute values. Thus, graphs present the sales of WO businesses as a proportion of men’s. Instances where the calculations exceed 100 percent, indicate that women’s sales exceed that of men-owned businesses. The total column reflects the weighted average GMV of WO, as a proportion of MO businesses in the two countries studied. Additionally, many sellers were found to be operating across multiple categories. While this means that some sellers may have been counted multiple times in calculations of GMV in specific categories, they are counted only once in the calculation for total GMV.

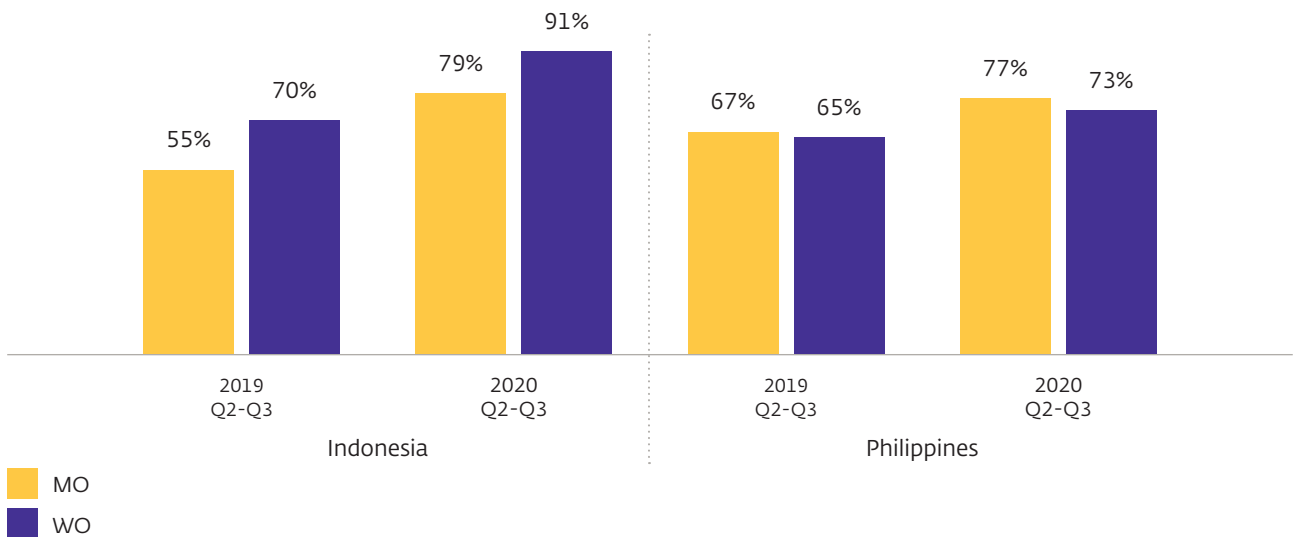
**Figure 3.9. Philippines: Average Women’s GMV as a Percentage of Men’s by Product Category**



"E-commerce in the Philippines used to be very promotional and discount based. Over time, we have seen a shift, especially in categories such as electronics, where there is low variability. Customers are much more engaged and willing to try new things. They also know what they want and browse more efficiently to look for specific items."

Carlos Barrera, Chief Operations Officer, Lazada Philippines

Figure 3.10 Percentage of Sellers Active in More than One Product Category



view that women perform at the same level or better in higher value segments and that there is a business case in encouraging them to sell in high-value categories.

There is evidence that the pandemic led e-commerce sellers to expand into new categories. This trend was seen among both WO and MO businesses during the pandemic (Figure 3.10). This finding suggests that more sellers expanded into new sales categories as a diversification strategy to cope with the pandemic.

### 3.7 The Pandemic has Reversed or Reduced Women's Success in E-commerce

During the pandemic, more WO businesses in the Philippines started selling on the Lazada marketplace, increasing the share of WO businesses on the platform from 60 percent before the pandemic to 66 percent during the pandemic (Figure 3.11). However, as new WO businesses joined the platform, the average GMV of

Figure 3.11 Change in the Share of WO and MO Businesses, Prior To and During the Pandemic

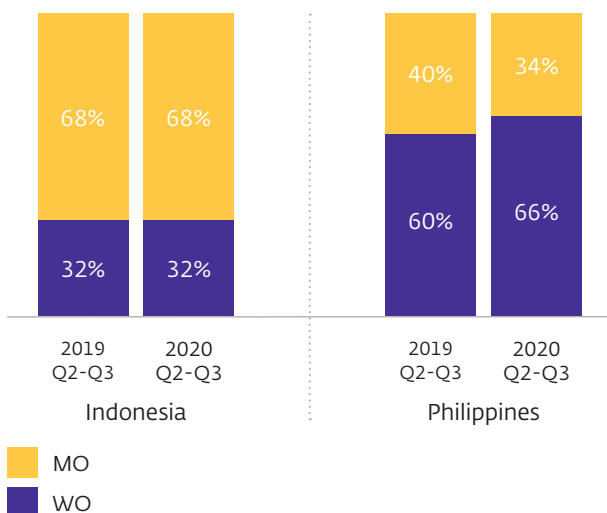
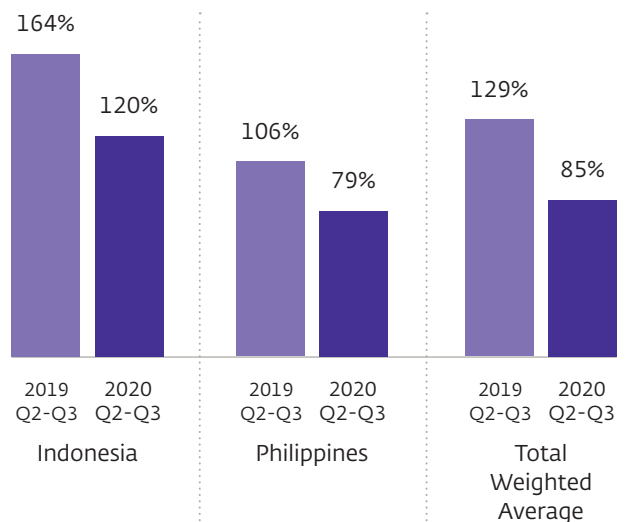


Figure 3.12 Average Individual Women's GMV as a Proportion of Men's



The total reflects average GMV for all MO and WO businesses surveyed in both countries.

women's businesses dropped from 106 percent of men's before the pandemic, to 79 percent of men's during the pandemic (Figure 3.12).

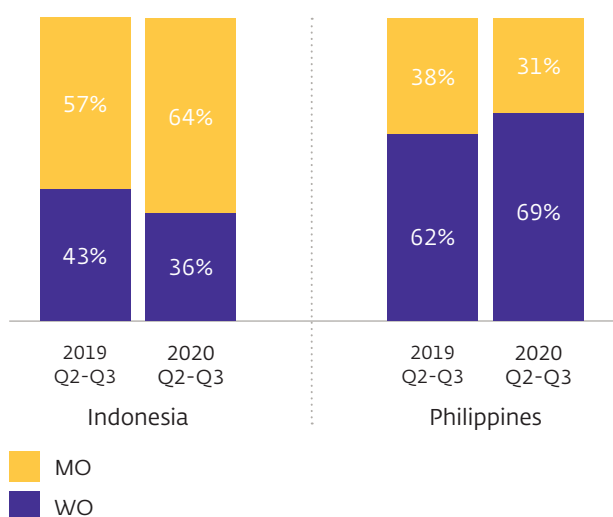
In contrast, the share of women sellers in Indonesia remained unchanged before and during the pandemic (Figure 3.11), but women's average GMV dropped from 164 percent to 120 percent of men's during the pandemic (Figure 3.12).

The decrease in average women's GMV relative to men's in both Indonesia and Philippines is consistent with an increasing body of evidence showing how the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately and negatively impacted women entrepreneurs (Box 2.2). Given the relatively high share of WO microenterprises active in Lazada Philippines (Figure 3.3), it is clear that supporting WO businesses to regain parity or surpass men's GMV is crucial for the growth of e-commerce in the Philippines.

The pandemic carried different implications for women on e-commerce platforms in Indonesia, where only 33 percent of businesses on Lazada were women-owned (Figure 3.2). While WO businesses in Indonesia were larger than in the Philippines and tended to outperform men's average GMV, the drop in women's average GMV, relative to men's, reduced women's share of total GMV on Lazada Indonesia from 43 percent before the pandemic to 36 percent during the pandemic (Figure 3.13).

Thus, attracting and onboarding more women entrepreneurs appears to be a key element to achieve gender parity on e-commerce platforms in Indonesia.

**Figure 3.13: Comparison of GMV Before and During the Pandemic**



Comparing GMV performance during the same period prior to and during the pandemic, the Philippines and Indonesia show opposite trends, driven by their different shares of WO and MO businesses on Lazada (Figure 3.13). While the Philippines had the highest national percentage (69 percent) of firms with female participation in ownership it also had the region's smallest digital economy valued at \$7.5 billion in 2020, compared to Indonesia's \$44 billion (Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company 2020). Given the size of Indonesia's market and the success of some WO e-commerce businesses in that market, closing the gender gap in e-commerce participation in Indonesia is likely to have a bigger impact on the regional e-commerce market.

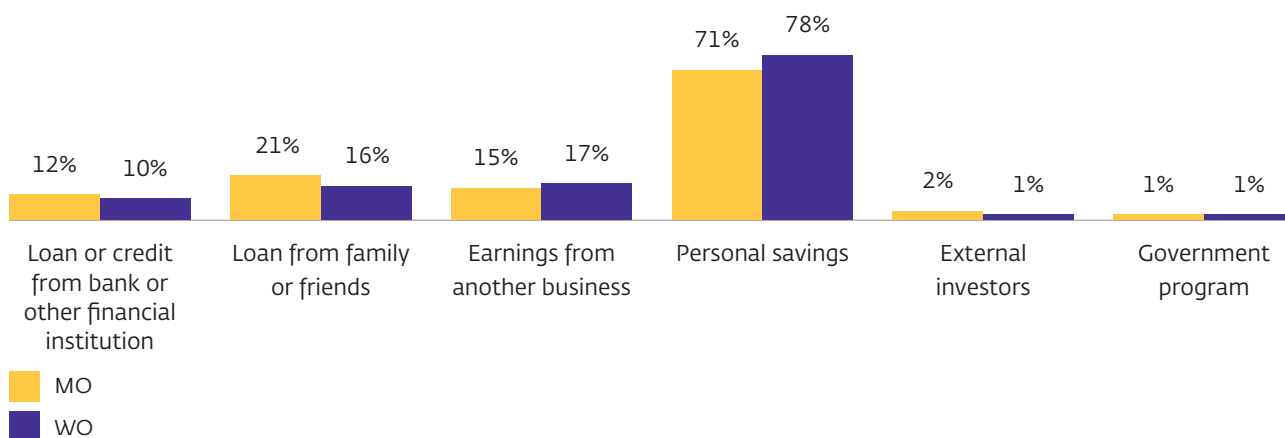
These findings corroborate emerging research that shows how the pandemic had a stronger impact on WO businesses—and this trend is seen across sectors and regions (See Box 2.2). In the case of e-commerce sellers, the COVID-19 impact was likely due to a combination of sector selection, reduced ability to adapt through finance or digital solutions, and the disproportionate effects of increased care needs. More importantly, the comparatively high revenues of WO businesses in the pre-pandemic period, suggests that the trend is reversible. However, making the reversal will require a concerted effort from public and private sector actors. This is discussed further in the recommendations found in section 5.

### 3.8 WO Businesses Are More Likely to Rely on Personal Savings for Start-up and Growth Capital

*Start-up Capital:* The financing challenges that women entrepreneurs face offline carry over into how they finance and grow their businesses online. Prior to the pandemic, the global financing gap for WO firms in emerging markets stood at \$1.48 trillion (SME Finance Forum 2018). Clair Deevy, Director for Public Policy at WhatsApp described the need for financing options, "Governments are obviously making a lot of investments around financial inclusion and bringing women on board, but I think it needs to be bigger than just getting people connected to the system. We also have to start looking at how to get women more credit and more access to finance."

The survey undertaken for this study asked women and men sellers about sources of start-up finance for their business and found that in both countries an overwhelming number of both women (78 percent) and men (71 percent) relied on personal savings to start their

**Figure 3.14. Sources of Start-up Finance**



businesses (Figure 3.14). While obtaining a loan was not a significant source of start-up finance for either men or women, men were slightly (2 percent) more likely to receive a loan from a bank or other financial institution.

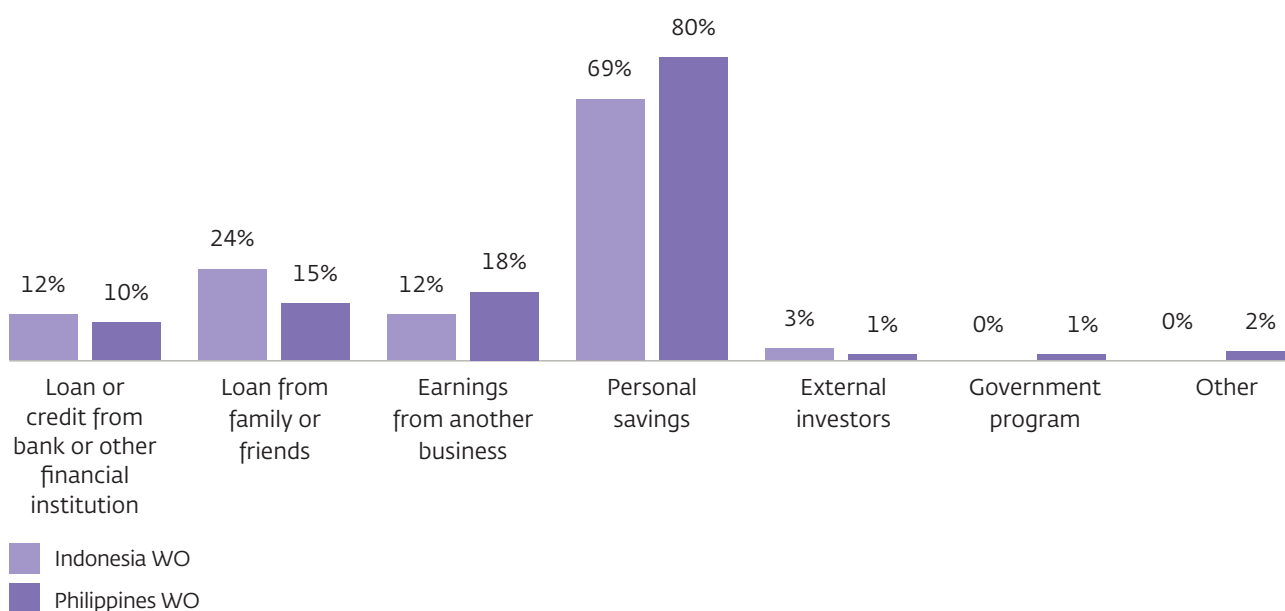
When comparing WO businesses between the two countries, the study found that women in the Philippines were particularly reliant on personal savings for start-up finance, whereas women in Indonesia were more likely to have received a start-up loan from a bank or financial institution or a loan from family or friends (Figure 3.15).

However, several women sellers interviewed in Indonesia expressed an aversion to taking any kind of loans,

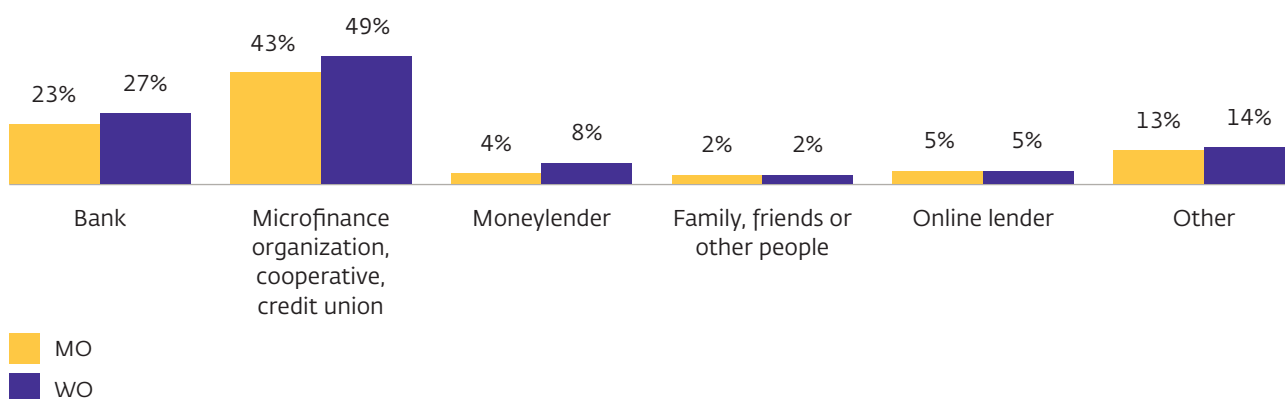
especially from formal sources. As a woman vender in Indonesia noted, “Taking a loan from a formal source is scary because it’s risky. It’s better for me to negotiate with my suppliers or take loans from my family and friends than to take a loan from a bank.”

*Working Capital:* After start-up, the most prominent source of funding in both countries among both women and men was a microfinance organization, cooperative, or credit union. More WO than MO businesses reported using these funding sources (Figure 3.16). Approximately a quarter received a loan from a bank, and 6 percent more WO than MO businesses received financing from a microfinance organization, cooperative or credit union. Women were

**Figure 3.15. Start-up Finance Among Women-owned Businesses, by Country**



**Figure 3.16 Sources of Finance After Start-up**



also more likely than men to report using a moneylender, indicating an unmet financing need that is being fulfilled by high-interest, possibly predatory, personal loans.

To meet their financing needs after start-up, WO businesses in Indonesia reported greater use of formal finance through both microfinance organizations and banks compared to their counterparts in the Philippines (Figure 3.17). WO businesses in the Philippines, however, reported greater use of moneylenders.

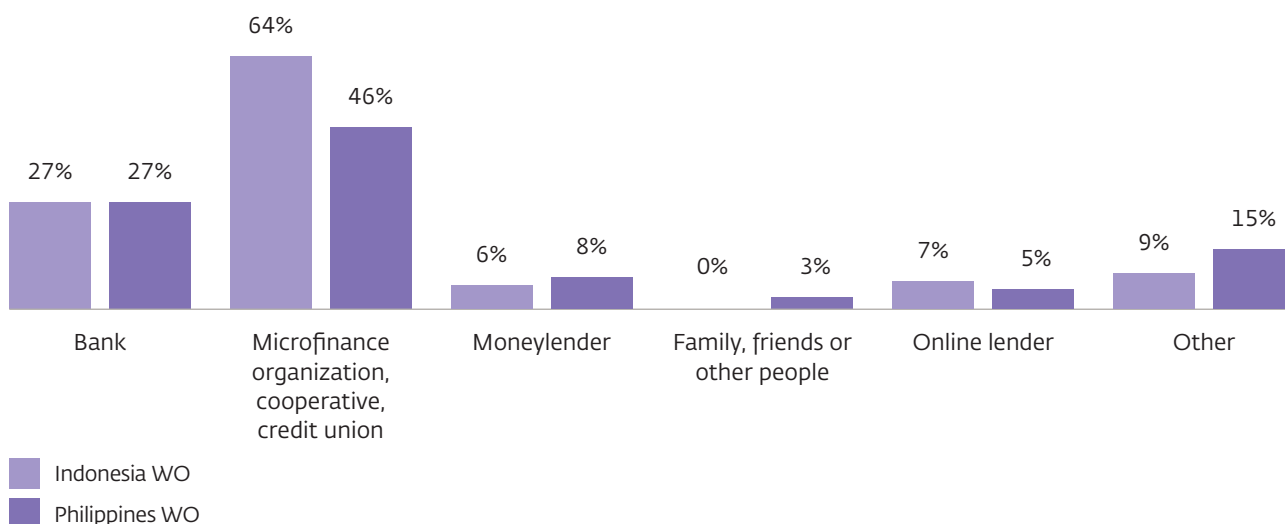
The gaps in financing reflect the wider market context. Women in the two countries are more financially included than men. Additionally, women in Indonesia are more financially included than women in the Philippines, as evidenced by the size of the population with a bank account (Demirgüç-Kunt, et al. 2018).

### 3.9 Women-owned Businesses are More Likely to Carry Insurance

Sellers who protect themselves and their businesses through a range of insurance products may be positioning themselves for a greater likelihood of success on e-commerce platforms. Being insured could also reflect a business' willingness to formalize and protect income streams as they grow and scale, an attribute that is attractive to many financiers.

WO businesses in both Indonesia and the Philippines were more likely to have some type of insurance coverage than MO businesses (Figure 3.18). However, coverage differences between women and men varied by product. Women were more likely to have life insurance than men; whereas, men were more likely to have home

**Figure 3.17. Finance After Start-up Among Women-owned Businesses, by Country**



insurance (Figure 3.19). Health insurance coverage was very low among both WO and MO businesses (8 percent). While women entrepreneurs on Lazada have obtained insurance coverage more often than men, the survey did not distinguish between public and private insurance schemes. These higher-than-average findings for WO businesses may indicate that the women selling on e-commerce platforms are more financially sophisticated than the market as a whole.

### 3.10 Women and Men Have Similar Experiences in the Seller Journey

Women in Southeast Asia face technological barriers to success in the internet economy, such as lower rates of access to the internet and lower device ownership compared to men and thus, have relatively lower technological literacy and confidence. To understand the extent to which these gender differences affect WO e-commerce businesses, the survey measured the level

Figure 3.18. Share of Insured, by Country

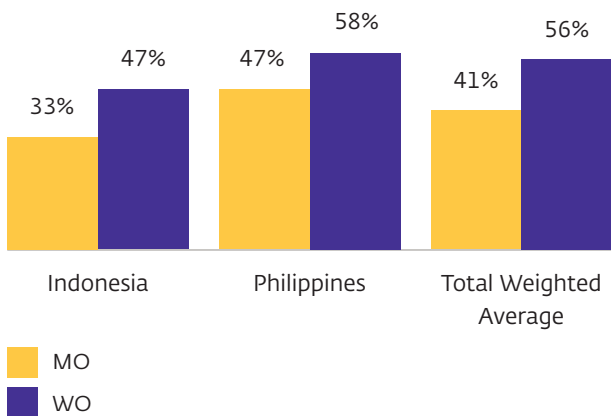


Figure 3.19. Types of Insurance Coverage Held by Business Owners

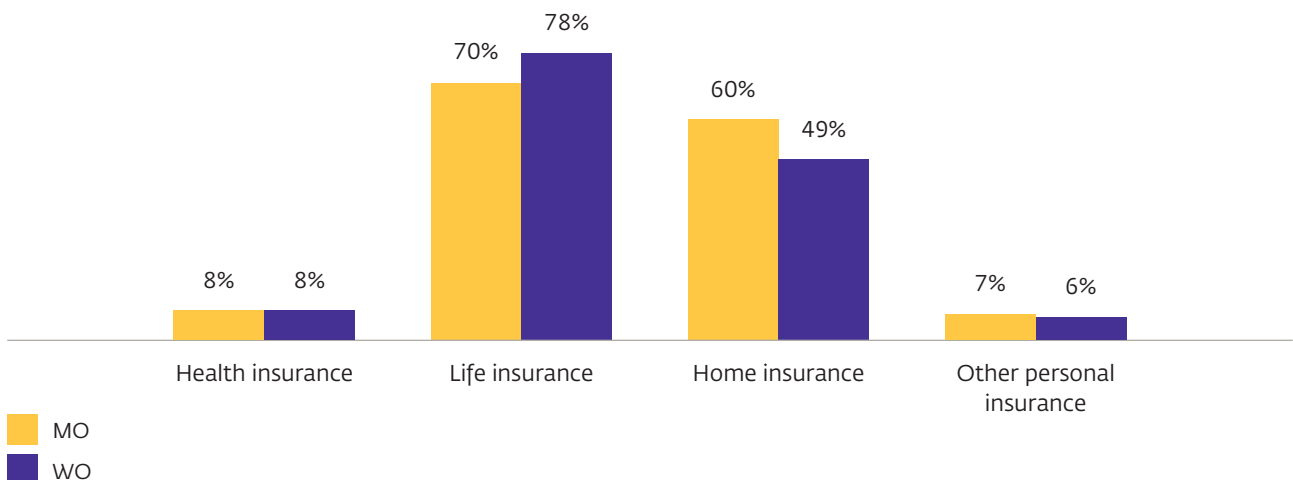


Figure 3.20 Steps in the Seller Journey

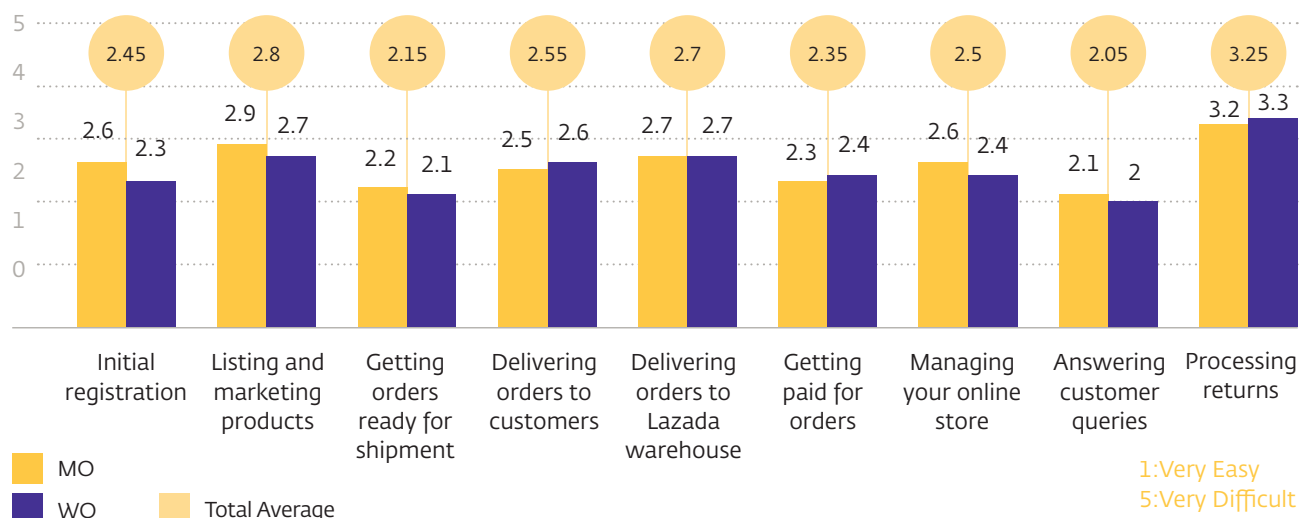


### Steps in the Seller Journey

- 1 Initial registration
- 2 Listing and marketing products
- 3 Preparing item(s) for shipment
- 4 Delivering orders to Lazada warehouse
- 5 Managing seller's online store
- 6 Answering customer queries
- 7 Receiving payment
- 8 Delivering orders to customers
- 9 Processing returns



**Figure 3.21. Rating the Level of Difficulty Across the Seller Journey**



of difficulty sellers encountered during each step of the seller journey, which starts with registration and ends with product delivery to a customer. Each seller was asked to rate each step of the seller journey on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being “very easy” and 5 being “very difficult.”

Overall, both WO and MO businesses expressed ease throughout the seller journey, generally scoring between 2 and 3, corresponding to “somewhat easy” or “neither easy nor difficult,” respectively. It is important to recognize that respondents are all active users on the platform. Those who have greater difficulty in the seller journey are more likely to have dropped off the platform. While the opportunity to digitalize a business was a key motivation for both women and men, the relative lack of difficulty across the seller journey indicates that even new digital entrepreneurs on the platform have a relatively high degree of digital literacy.

Those who expressed challenges with the seller journey seemed to be those who were new to e-commerce. One woman seller explained: “Registering as a seller and opening an online store was a bit of a hassle for someone like me, who had just started to learn about online selling and had never been in another marketplace. I went straight to Lazada, but I had to fill out all sort of things. I felt discouraged and I did not want to continue anymore.”

Women on the platform reported a slightly greater level of difficulty than men delivering orders to customers, getting paid for orders, and processing returns (Figure 3.21). Men reported slightly greater difficulty with initial registration, listing and marketing products, getting an order ready

for shipment, managing the online store, and answering customer queries (Figure 3.21).

These findings suggest that there is a need for e-commerce platforms to expand online training and support programs, especially those that target micro and newly digitalized businesses.

### 3.11 Women Entrepreneurs Are More Likely to Value Training and Business Support

The survey asked sellers about Lazada’s services that they found most helpful in the last 12 months. Networking opportunities were more favored by men, but women valued all forms of training and support at higher rates than men (Figure 3.22). WO businesses valued training the highest (49 percent) followed by direct engagement through the Partner Support Center (40 percent) and then interactions with the Lazada account manager (29 percent) (Figure 3.22).<sup>7</sup> One-woman seller from Indonesia explained why training is a key benefit on the Lazada platform, “Lazada is good at providing education to sellers. Based on what I have seen and experienced, Lazada is the only marketplace where sellers are growing fast, and good training is being provided. They also always challenge the sellers to provide good products and services.”

The strength of this finding is likely a reflection of women’s lack of business skills but it is also a strong signal that they are seizing the opportunities offered by e-commerce platforms to close the knowledge gaps and to position themselves to compete in the future.

<sup>7</sup> The Lazada Partner Support Center is an online portal where sellers can find answers to common questions, online tutorials, or contact a support agent.

*“My house was far from my workplace and my little one was still a baby. In the end, I decided to resign from my full-time job. But I was used to working, so ultimately I started selling online.”*

*Woman Seller, Indonesia*

### 3.12 Women Benefit More from the Flexibility of Online Sales

When asked how selling online has impacted their lives, women were more likely than men to highlight benefits linked with meeting basic needs and the flexibility of selling online, in addition to other intangible benefits.

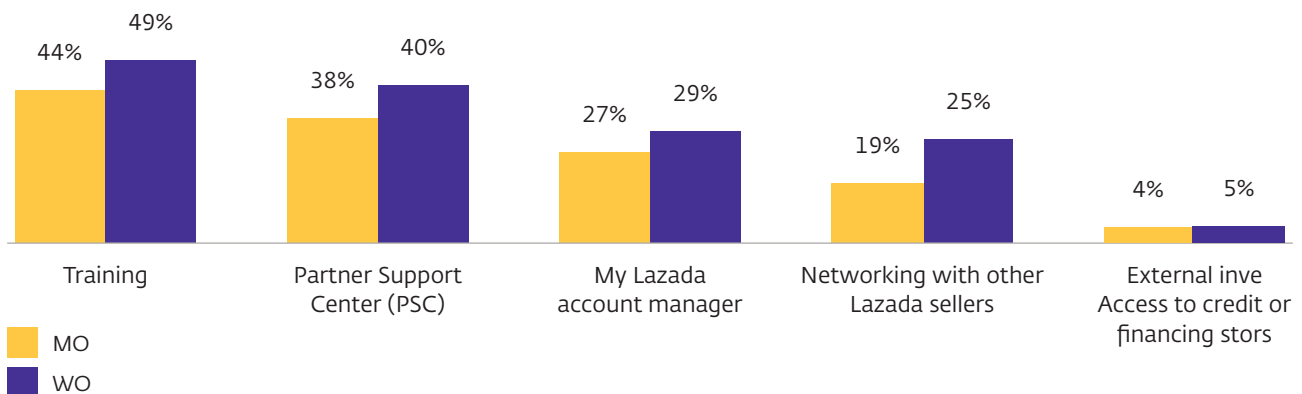
More women than men reported that selling online helped them “reach personal goals and fulfil their potential.” Women also cited “greater enjoyment spending time with family and friends” more frequently than men (Figure 3.23).

Substantially more women (52 percent) than men (41 percent) reported that Lazada provided them with a flexible work schedule (Figure 3.24). Work flexibility can be particularly beneficial to traditionally disadvantaged or underserved socioeconomic groups, such as women, and those living in remote areas.

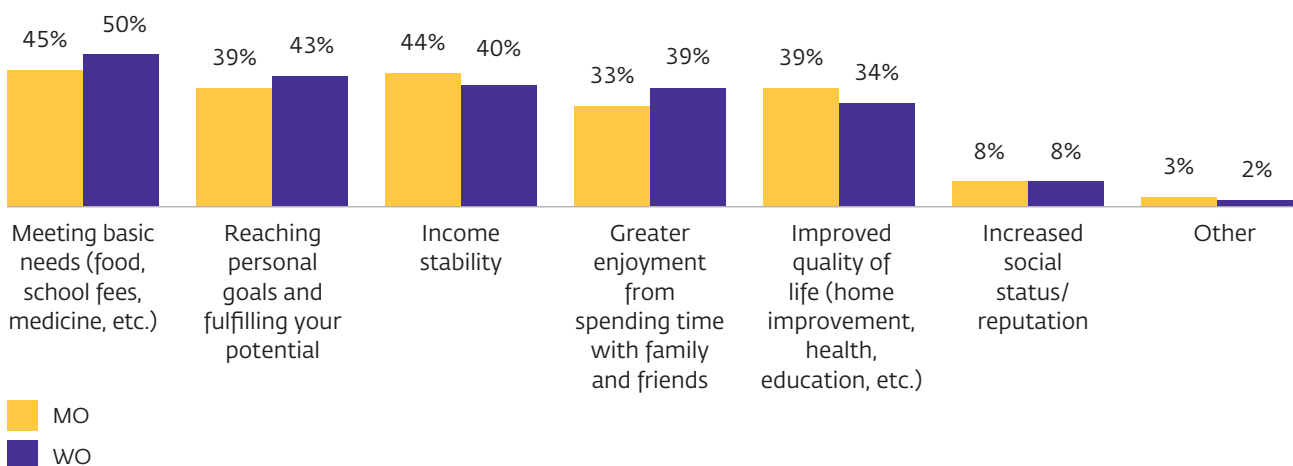
A 2019 World Bank study in China found that participation in e-commerce is positively associated with improvements in household welfare, especially benefiting the most underserved groups (World Bank n.d.). Further, Women’s World Banking notes, “The flexible nature of e-commerce can help women access economic opportunities on their own terms” (Women’s World Banking 2021).

Abigail Chen, the founder of Philippines based start-ups like MyBento.co and Homie.ph further explained the larger payoffs of empowering more women as follows, “For example, women with families can manage their stores and care for their children. That’s a big advantage for someone like a young mom who doesn’t quite have the mobility to work out of the home full-time.”

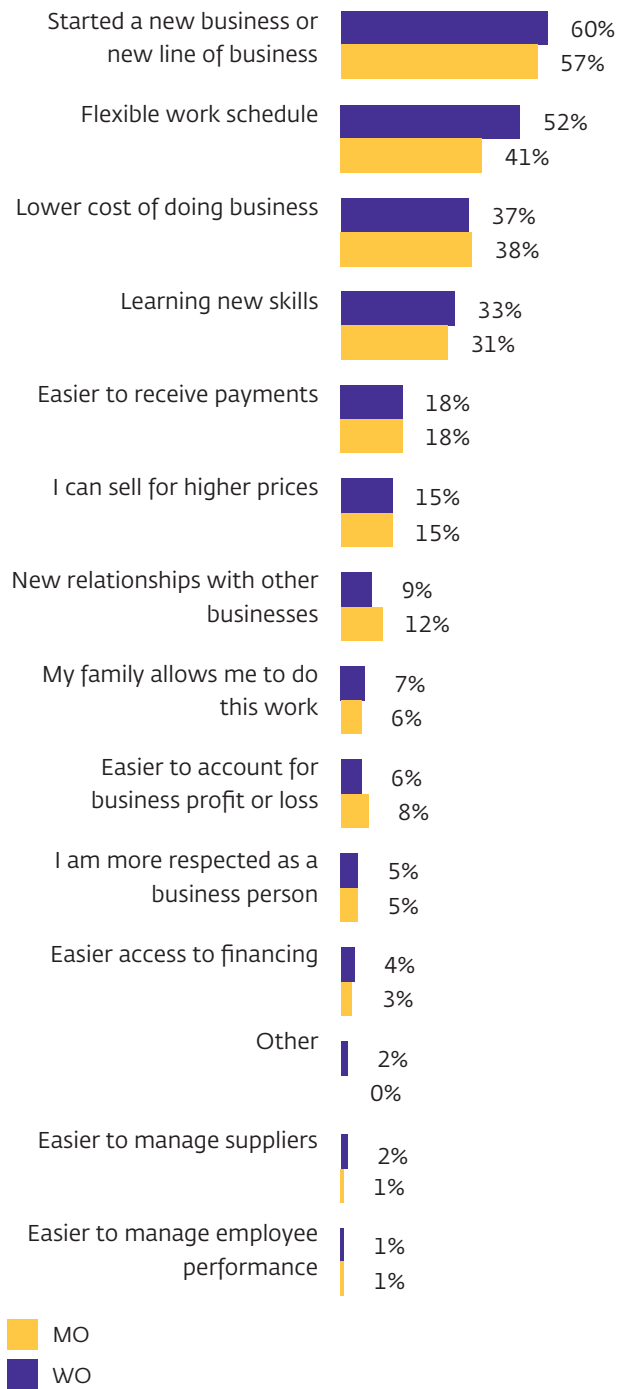
**Figure 3.22. Benefit of Lazada Services to Seller Business in the Last 12 Months**



**Figure 3.23. Perceived Impact of Selling Online**



**Figure 3.24. Benefits of Doing Business on Lazada**



*“Online selling is flexible. Even when I’m outside, I can still do the job because I have my mobile phone in my hand and I bring my laptop along. I can still get orders as long as I’m mobile. In contrast, with an offline store, you have to close when you want to go somewhere, unless you have an employee. Online is liberating—you can still reply or receive orders on the move.”*  
 Woman Seller, Indonesia







## 4. The Business Case for Closing Gender Gaps in E-commerce

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Despite women's success in e-commerce in recent years, gaps still exist between men and women sellers and the success of WO firms has been eroded by the pandemic. In Indonesia, women as a group accounted for only 36 percent of seller GMV during the pandemic (Figure 4.1) and the average individual WO firm's GMV fell from 164 percent of men's GMV before the pandemic to 120 percent during the pandemic (Figure 4.2). In the Philippines, the pandemic increased the proportion of WO firms by six percentage points, but reduced sales of the average individual WO firm to only 79 percent of men's, compared to 106 percent prior to the pandemic.

Looking at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the two countries together, women's total average GMV fell from 129 percent of men's GMV before the pandemic to 85 percent of GMV during the pandemic (Figure 4.2). This 15-percentage-point gap in average GMV must be closed for e-commerce to realize its full economic and human development potential.

Bringing women's sales to parity with men's by 2025 would add over \$280 billion to the regional e-commerce market by 2030.

Given the market variations, two different strategies are presented to close the gender gap in GMV in the two countries. In countries like Indonesia, where men outnumber women sellers but where WO businesses show relatively strong performance, efforts should focus on onboarding more women entrepreneurs onto e-commerce platforms. In countries like the Philippines, where women are already active participants but are largely concentrated in the microenterprise segment, rather than in higher-earning businesses, closing the gender gap will require finding ways to increase women's sales and their ability to compete on e-commerce platforms. Implementing these strategies would translate into greater entrepreneurship.

To estimate the total impact of closing gender gaps in Southeast Asia, the research team applied the gender gap in average GMV to growth forecasts for the regional e-commerce sector and calculated two possible scenarios. The first scenario maintains the status quo, with no action taken to close gender gaps and the second scenario calculates the impact of closing gender gaps in GMV by 2025.

In the status quo scenario, women's contribution to the total projected value of Southeast Asia's \$62 billion e-commerce market is \$26.35 billion, with MO businesses accounting for \$35.65 billion<sup>8</sup> (Table 4.1). With no action

taken on gender gaps, the regional e-commerce market is expected to develop at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 23 percent (Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company 2020), yielding a value of \$491.41 billion for the total e-commerce market in Southeast Asia by 2030.

However, addressing gender gaps and achieving parity in earnings on e-commerce platforms could enhance the sector's value even further. In the second scenario, if women's GMV were to reach parity with men in 2025, then additional gains of \$280.36 billion would accrue from 2025 to 2030 (Table 4.1). These gains were calculated by taking the current anticipated growth rate for regional e-commerce and estimating how future growth would be impacted if women's GMV were to reach parity with that of men. As the size of the e-commerce market grows over time, the value of closing the gender gap increases proportionately. Table 4.1 breaks down yearly calculations in more detail.

These calculations serve to illustrate the scope of the potential gain for investing in women in e-commerce. In this instance, \$280.36 billion equates to an average of \$46.73 billion a year that is lost to inaction on gender equality; however, it could be captured by investing in women entrepreneurs.

Figure 4.1 All Women's GMV As a Proportion of Country GMV, Q2 and Q3 2020

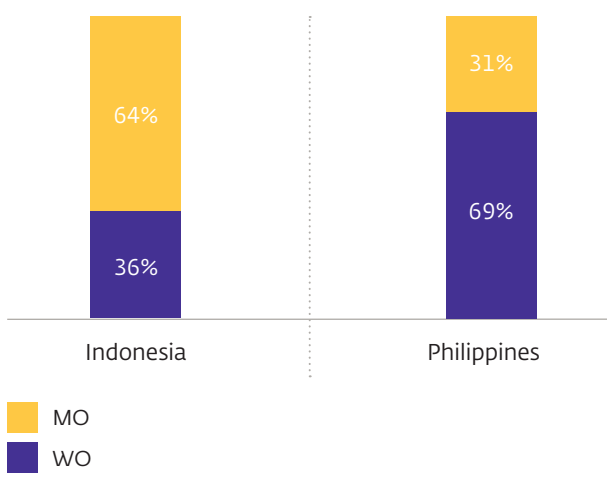
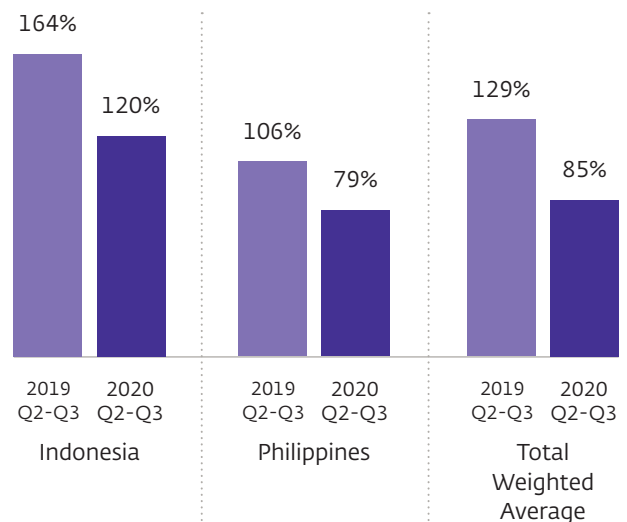


Figure 4.2 Average Individual Women's GMV as a Proportion of Men's



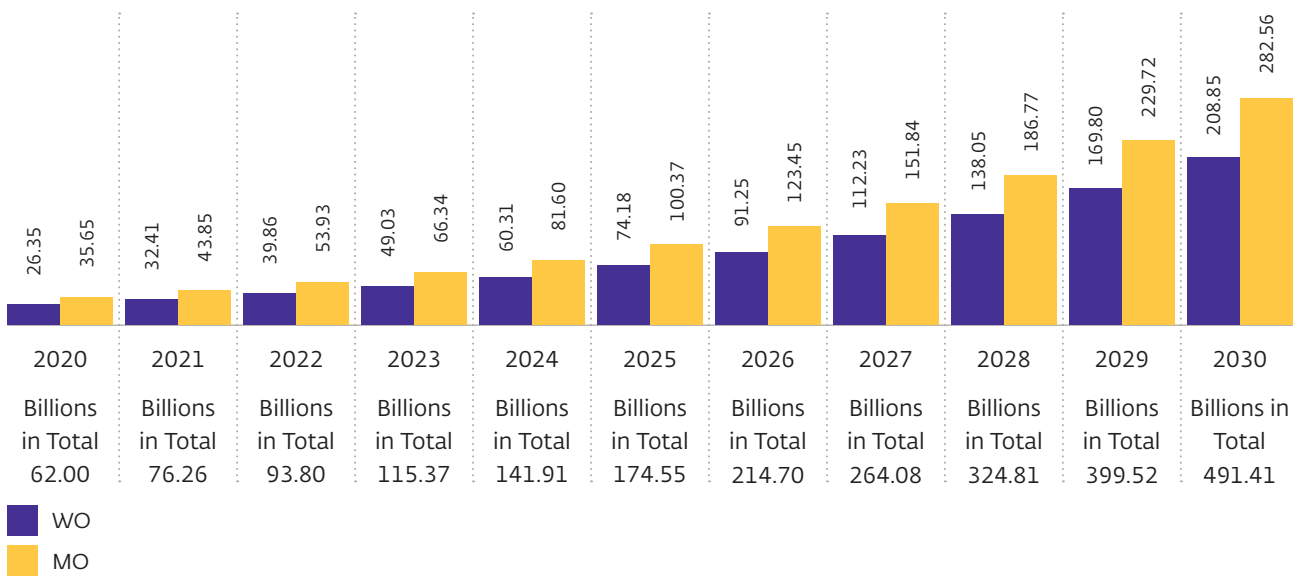
The total column reflects the total weighted average GMV for WO businesses as a proportion of MO businesses, in both countries.

<sup>8</sup> The findings indicate that during the pandemic the average GMV earned by women-owned businesses was 85 percent of that earned by men-owned businesses. Extrapolating this to the broader region, where the value of the e-commerce market was \$62 billion in 2020, women's share of GMV earned in Southeast Asia accounts for 85 percent of half of \$62 billion or \$26.35 billion, with MO businesses accounting for remainder of \$35.65 billion.

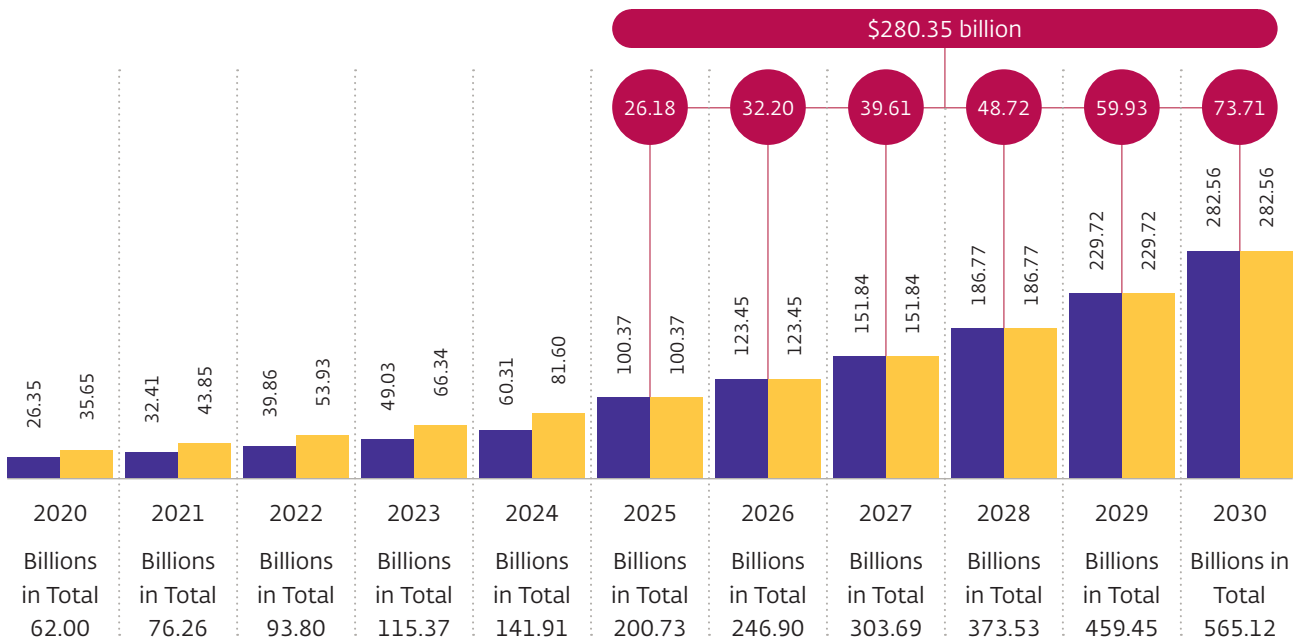
Finally, these figures are both simplified and to some extent, conservative. They do not consider nuances, such as the increasing rates of digitalization linked with the pandemic or the increased entrance of women customers into the e-commerce market. Closing the gender gap in

GMV earned by women and men by 2025 would mean not only greater opportunities for women's entrepreneurship and income generation, but also growth in the overall market size for Lazada and other e-commerce platforms.

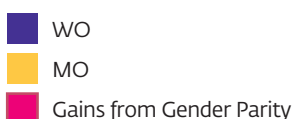
**Table 4.1 Gains from Closing the Gender Gap**



1. Gender gap remains in 2030



2. Gender gap is closed in 2025





*"E-commerce penetration is still quite low in the Philippines and as a result, there is more than enough room for healthy competition. In fact, it's the growth of the industry that is going to help the platforms operating within it to grow. It is similar to the popular saying 'A rising tide will lift all boats'."*

*Ray Alimurung,  
CEO, Lazada Philippines*





## 5. Recommendations for Growing Women's Participation as E-commerce Sellers

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This study found that by addressing gender gaps, the e-commerce sector could add over \$280 billion to the total value of the sector in Southeast Asia by 2030. Thus, e-commerce companies have a vested interest in ensuring that women entrepreneurs join platforms and thrive on them. The findings indicate that women and men come to e-commerce with different motivations, tend to be concentrated in different sectors and have been impacted dissimilarly by the COVID-19 global pandemic. These strong gender differences emphasize a need for continued analysis across the sector and markets.

Achieving gender parity in the representation of e-commerce sellers—and the resulting benefits for the overall market size for e-commerce—will require a concerted effort among an ecosystem of players. Below are recommendations for e-commerce platforms, investors, and policymakers.

## 5.1 E-commerce Platforms

- 1- Collect sex-disaggregated data on sellers.** Like Lazada, other e-commerce platforms may not be collecting data on the demographics of its sellers, including gender. Yet, this data forms the basis to better understand the seller base and will help to assess opportunities to enhance platform features and services that can help sellers succeed. Where privacy regulations allow, platforms should ask sellers to report their gender at the time of registration and ask sellers to verify or update this information at least annually. For larger businesses, sex-disaggregated data should be captured not only for the person managing the account, but also for other individuals in leadership positions.
- 2- Monitor seller preferences and performance by gender, taking note of gender gaps.** Once a platform has collected data on seller gender, periodic monitoring of seller performance by gender, in addition to the platform services they opt into, will indicate any gender gaps and opportunities to provide additional support to address them. If routine collection of this data is not possible, work-arounds such as periodic surveys or seller forums can provide avenues for feedback.
- 3- Target women with loans or other financing options.** This study found that women were less likely to have received financing because they were not always aware of financing options available to them, or they perceived that loans were too risky. Moreover, women were more likely to turn to moneylenders for capital, indicating a continuing unmet need for financing. Use of moneylenders indicates a willingness to take financing risks but also a tendency to gravitate towards financing products with lower requirements and/or quicker disbursements.

Platform sponsored financing, particularly unsecured lending, represents a key opportunity for e-commerce platforms to grow their seller bases, while also driving gender equality. Platforms should be intentional in how they communicate about such offerings to sellers, ensuring that the messaging resonates with both men and women.

While the gender gap in insurance access was not consistent across markets, there remains a strong need for insurance among both men and women, suggesting that e-commerce platforms could collaborate with financial service partners to increase access to insurance by aggregating a potential customer base, particularly in areas like commercial insurance.

- 4- Increase training and networking for women.** Women expressed greater appreciation for training than men and reported greater benefits to their business. Lazada and other e-commerce platforms should continue to provide training opportunities to sellers beyond the onboarding phase. Clear support channels and informational resources should be offered throughout the seller journey, in addition to peer-to-peer networking opportunities through initiatives like Lazada Club and Lazada Star. These peer mentoring and support networks can also be tailored specifically to women, providing avenues where they can seek and provide support and share advice with each other.
- 5- Increase the ease of registration for less experienced sellers.** Lazada offers local language user manuals and training videos for new seller registration support. Lazada should continue to offer these and seek to maximize user-friendliness of these materials for less experienced sellers. Lazada should also continue to expand the languages in which these materials are available.
- 6- Ensure that advertisements recruiting potential sellers are designed to appeal to both women and men.** This study found differences in what motivates women and men to join e-commerce platforms, as well as differences in barriers and benefits to selling on e-commerce. Findings such as women's higher interest in training and business support provide a starting point for ensuring messages are appealing to both women and men.

## 5.2 Investors

- 1- Provide financing options that are conducive to MSMEs operating in the digital economy.** Many MSMEs in Southeast Asia face difficulty

accessing financing, which constrains their ability to grow. Expanding access to finance through strategic partnerships with both traditional and alternative finance platforms could foster growth among MSMEs in the digital economy. Targeted financial products can be developed to support the often inventory-bound and shorter-term financing needs of online entrepreneurs. Such financing mechanisms can also leverage the vast amounts of data generated by e-commerce platforms to assess the performance of sellers and their growth potential.

- 2- **Promote uptake of financial products among women and other underserved groups.** Women are less likely to receive financing due to constraints such as limited collateral and gender discrimination inherent in some of the formal and customary laws that govern property rights (World Bank 2021). Investors' approach to designing products that address such barriers, should be customer centered.

This study found that women entrepreneurs were just as likely as men to explore financing from banks after start-up. However, gender gaps were more obvious at the start-up stage where women were more dependent on personal savings when launching their businesses. There is an opportunity for investors to address this through financing options that are accessible and appealing to this target population of women-owned start-ups, giving them the opportunity and support they need to thrive and boost economic empowerment.

- 3- **Set up SMEs for success through holistic financing approaches that also build entrepreneurial capacity.** Recognizing the skills and human capital needs of smaller businesses, investors have an opportunity to address these shortfalls by supporting entrepreneurs' pursuit of additional training and skills development.
- 4- **Encourage the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data.** Investors are in a unique position to incentivize the collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated data and gaps, by making such information a standard in their appraisal processes. Such an approach would

not only reinforce the importance of diversity to seekers of financing, but prompt equally mindful shifts in hiring practices.

## 5.3 Policymakers and Development Actors

- 1- **Support policies that expand internet access and reduce cost of access.** Increased digital connectivity is a catalyst for economic growth and job creation, particularly in the digital economy. Though internet connectivity is comparatively high in Southeast Asia, expansion should continue to reach those who are disconnected by improving broadband connections, which in turn, reduces consumer costs for access (Ruddy c 2013). Investments are needed for improving performance by modernizing the region's underdeveloped digital infrastructure, such as data centers and network capabilities (Xie 2020).
- 2- **Promote an enabling environment for MSMEs to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic.** MSMEs are the largest employer in Southeast Asia and account for an average of 41 percent of GDP across the region (ADB 2020). MSMEs are already characteristically more vulnerable to economic shocks, and they have also been disproportionately affected by public health restrictions and lockdowns. This study found that WO businesses were more negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic compared to MO businesses. Policies that support MSMEs to weather the COVID-19 storm in the immediate term and that provide an enabling environment in the medium-to-long-term can foster greater efficiency, improved performance, and growth for all businesses, and for women-led companies in particular.
- 3- **Expand financial inclusion among underserved groups, including women.** The World Bank found a strong correlation between access to bank accounts, lending products and the share of women-led businesses in a country (World Bank 2020). Despite notable progress in recent years increasing women's financial inclusion, 49 percent of women in Indonesia and 61 percent of women in the Philippines do not own a bank account. Further expanding

*“Peer learning opportunities can help reinforce training. Stakeholders can come together to roll out such initiatives to encourage experience sharing for e-commerce merchants in similar areas.”*

*Xubei Luo,  
Senior Economist, World Bank*

financial services to women through agent banking, mobile banking, e-money, and fintech services that extend the reach of the financial system are important for providing women with greater access to the digital economy.

Expanding financial services to women provides them with economic stability, financial independence and greater access to the digital economy. This includes creating an enabling environment for innovation and adoption of digital financial services, by collaborating with banks, mobile network operators, and other stakeholders to support the development of robust digital payments ecosystems that give sellers more options for quicker and safer cashless transactions. Leveraging women leaders in policy dialogue regarding the financial needs of women and investing in financial capacity-building are just two of many policy options for increasing women's financial inclusion (Schmidt 2016).

- 4- Collaborate with platforms to understand and address gaps.** Understanding gender gaps is key to closing them. Future research should continue to leverage private sector data to generate insights on gender gaps and to inform policies and programs to address them.
- 5- Address legal constraints that hold women back.** While the World Bank's 2021 Women, Business and the Law report notes improvements in the Southeast Asia region's inclusion of women over the last 50 years, it also reveals large variations in performance across the region and additional opportunities for growth (World Bank 2021). While countries

in the region have implemented many of the best practice approaches regarding equal rights in marriage, other indicators such as protections in the workplace, entrepreneurship, assets, and pensions continue to fall short of global averages. Policy stakeholders should prioritize these areas and work closely with civil society organizations (CSOs) and development actors to enhance understanding of women's barriers to economic inclusion through data.

- 6- Address logistics constraints.** Many Southeast Asian markets face logistics challenges transporting packages across a vast archipelago of disperse islands due to poor transportation and communication networks. In addition to investments in physical infrastructure, formal Government policies that address supply chain issues to foster faster and more cost-efficient goods distribution, would also significantly reduce complications in last mile delivery.
- 7- Support the growth of tech ecosystems.** World Bank research on the digital economy landscape in Southeast Asia emphasizes the need to reconsider traditional approaches to learning so that it mirrors the region's high demand for technical and managerial skills (World Bank 2019). In addition to enhanced training in digital skills, policymakers should ensure that education systems are well-equipped to teach the "soft skills" necessary for adapting more seamlessly to technological changes. To realize the full benefits of such programs, governments and other stakeholders should ensure that women's inclusion is prioritized from the outset, drawing on the support of the private sector to enhance their commercial viability.





*Evan Marie Arellano is a Lazada seller in the Philippines. She owns Sundals, a company that sells locally handcrafted footwear that sources 70 percent of its raw materials from local micro-communities.*



## 6. Appendix A – Methodology

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### 6.1 Overview

This study design involved a mixed methods approach comprised of a literature review, a quantitative survey, an analysis of Lazada platform data, and in-depth interviews with women sellers, as well as interviews with Lazada staff and external experts.

## 6.2 Quantitative data

*Online survey:* All sellers currently active on Lazada in Indonesia and the Philippines were invited via e-mail to participate in an online survey to be self-completed. Three reminders were sent to help boost response rates. Due to initial low response in Indonesia, an incentive of IDR 100,000 (about \$7) was introduced after fieldwork had started. The table below shows the achieved samples and fieldwork dates by country.

Country	Achieved sample	Fieldwork dates
<b>Indonesia</b>	369	May 7 to September 7, 2020
<b>The Philippines</b>	1166	May 7 to June 28, 2020

Figure A.1 Sample and Dates

*Platform data:* Lazada provided the research team with two extracts of platform data as follows:

- Disaggregated data by seller for those who participated in the online survey. This dataset contained individual level data on GMV by quarter and product category, as well as information on activation date, and other related variables. Not all survey participants could be matched to the platform data due to inconsistencies in the seller IDs. The number of matched sellers that provided the basis for the analysis are shown below.
- Aggregated data on mean and total GMV by quarter and product category for all sellers on the Lazada platform in the two countries.

Both datasets covered the period first quarter 2019 to third quarter 2020.

The disaggregated dataset was used for detailed analysis of GMV among the sellers who participated in the survey. The aggregated dataset was used for weighting purposes in order to improve the representativeness of the sample of sellers. Seller and platform GMV data was commercially sensitive and could not be published in absolute values.

Thus, for the purposes of this report, the research team presents differences in GMV between WO and MO businesses as percentages of total GMV.

Country	Number of matched survey participants
<b>Indonesia</b>	335
<b>The Philippines</b>	948

Figure A.2 Number of Matched Survey Participants

## 6.3 Weighting

The survey respondents were compared to the overall platform data with respect to the distribution of GMV by product category. With respect to product categories, the distribution of GMV among survey respondents and sellers overall varied between the five category groups and between the countries. The final weights were adjusted for the distribution of GMV across product category within each country. The final weighting factor ranged between 0.0009 and 2.2842.

## 6.4 Qualitative components

As mentioned above, the qualitative components included in-depth interviews with different groups of sellers and stakeholders. The duration of each interview ranged between 30 and 60 minutes.

- Interviews with Women Sellers:** The research team interviewed women sellers running their businesses on Lazada in both Indonesia and the Philippines. The sellers in Indonesia were recruited based on the responses to the quantitative survey, while those from the Philippines were recruited from a list provided by Lazada.
- Interviews with Lazada Staff and External Experts:** The research team conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with several stakeholders, both internal and external to Lazada. Internal stakeholders included roles such as country Chief



Commercial Officers, Chief Operating Officers, Chief Marketing Officers, and Chief Executive Officers. External stakeholders involved sector experts from the two countries, such as founders and senior executives of other digital ventures, as well as women’s business councils.

Country	Type	No. of interviews
<b>Indonesia</b>	Internal stakeholder	2
	External stakeholder	3
	Lazada seller	6
<b>Philippines</b>	Internal stakeholder	2
	External stakeholder	2
	Lazada seller	6

Figure A.1 Number of Interviews by Type





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**STAY HOME  
STAY SAFE**

THANK YOU

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May 2021



*Creating Markets, Creating Opportunities*