

Understanding the power of SMALL BUSINESSES

I wanted to order some food from a local café, so I Googled to find their phone number. The search result took me by shock, it said that the café was “permanently closed.”

Scrumptious was a favourite local café, where I often went to relish a hearty breakfast over veggie omelette, toast, and coffee. My daughter loved their froyo (frozen yoghurt). Scrumptious is one of the thousands of small businesses that have closed down during this pandemic. Small businesses around the world have taken a hit during these challenging times.

As citizens and consumers, it is our responsibility to support small businesses wherever we live because they are the backbone of an economy! Nowadays when I go grocery shopping, I try to buy locally produced fruits and vegetables. When I order food online for delivery or takeout, I opt for a local restaurant instead of a nationwide chain. No, I do not exclusively order from local restaurants, because the national chains are just everywhere!

Sometimes, it is a matter of convenience. At other times, it is a matter of price, to be honest. A cup of coffee at a local restaurant costs more than it does at a national coffee chain for obvious reasons. Having said that, I personally think that a cappuccino at a local café tastes so much better. I think it is because these independent businesses are so passionate about what they do that they go the extra mile to ensure customer satisfaction. Not just coffee, the menu at a local restaurant is unique to it, you will not find the exact same menu or taste anywhere else.

Small businesses contribute to the growth of local communities. Unlike big corporations, they are not driven by the profit maximisation mantra. I increasingly

feel the need to spend my money at independent businesses, especially after what I have witnessed during this pandemic.

No matter where you live, you have small businesses in your area, which are using locally sourced materials, ingredients, and craftsmanship to make a difference.

How many times do you consider buying an outfit from an independent dress boutique in lieu of dress or dress materials imported from neighbouring countries? On my last trip to Dhaka, I went to Banani Super Market and found out to my dismay

employments we create directly change lives,” said Haniem Maria Chowdhury, owner of Tahoor, a Bangladeshi clothing brand that aims to meet the fashion needs of modern Muslim women through their modest-elegant apparel.

“If people knew small entrepreneurs’ stories, the countless hours they put into their businesses, and how these businesses directly impact the economy, they would appreciate us,” she added. “Thankfully, some people do understand and appreciate us, which is why I stand where I am today.”



that in some stores, they only sold imported dress materials. “No, no, we only sell Indian and Pakistani 3-piece sets,” one shopkeeper said to me in a tone of pride, as if selling locally-made 3-piece sets would hurt the status of his business. I felt that a change in this sort of mind-set was more than necessary. However, to see this change, we must first give the local entrepreneurs a chance.

“Those of us who are in manufacturing, we use local resources, from raw materials to human resources, to make our products. Through our work, we touch lives. The

Haniem feels that Bangladeshis need to be educated on the importance of purchasing Bangladeshi-made products.

A country’s overall economy is benefited when it has thriving small businesses, especially businesses that use local resources. When you spend your money on the products and services produced by a small business, that money goes right back into the economy, generating GDP (gross domestic product). Here in the US, the world’s largest economy, around 50 percent of the nation’s GDP is generated by small businesses.



Small businesses hire local people to work for them. These businesses create jobs for locals. For instance, Haniem M Chowdhury, who started her business from her drawing room in Dhaka, now gives pay checks to nearly 75 people.

Small businesses also often know their customers by name, there is a personal relationship, a trust factor between the two parties.

Azhar Uddin, 67, who lives in Uttara, prefers local bazaars over air-conditioned superstores. “I have been buying fish from the same fish trader for the last 15 years. There are times when I do not have enough cash on me to pay him right away, but he sells me the fish anyway.

“I return home with the fish and later on, go back to the bazaar to pay him. Sometimes, I place order for certain types of fish, which he would personally obtain for me from the wholesale market,” he added. Asked why he feels it important to choose a small fish trader over a chain superstore, he said, “When I purchase fish from a small fishmonger, I know that the money directly benefits him, his family, and his business.”

Independent businesses need our support because these businesses directly feed families, help people move out of poverty and financial hardship, and help create a strong middle class. A small business is also the reflection of a person’s entrepreneurial spirit, which we consumers need to fuel through our support.

I knew the owner of Scrumptious by her first name, Maduri, an Indian-American woman, who immigrated to the US when she was a child. I will miss Scrumptious, its ambience, its shabby chic décor, its savoury omelette, and cappuccino. I never want to see another successful small business close its doors like this!

We the consumers can help small businesses in our respective communities to thrive and survive. We should consider it our responsibility to fuel the entrepreneurial spirit of the local people, for these are the dreamers who are willing to push themselves to the limits to achieve big goals and bring changes.

By Wara Karim
Photo: Tahoor

