

"We would like to see more investment in women's healthcare R&D that currently accounts for only 4%"

06 March 2023 | Opinion | By Anusha Ashwin

Lindsay Davis, Founder, FemTech Association of Asia, is striving to ensure that the femtech industry in the Asian regions can grow exponentially and at the same time women who have been long deprived of quality healthcare, get their due share of attention. Lindsay shares a few trends that her association has noticed in APAC countries and gives a status update on the femtech industry.

How is the femtech industry evolving in Asia? Can you share a few market trends and future growth predictions?

Though women's health has historically been under-researched, underserved and underfunded, the femtech industry in Asia is rapidly gaining momentum. In March 2022, Asia Nikkei reported that Asia is home to just 14 per cent of the world's femtech companies, but is set to make the most of the boom. FemTech Analytics predicts that by 2026 the Asia-Pacific region will see the world's fastest growth in women's health apps. FemTech is building momentum and the FemTech Association of Asia is leading the ecosystem across nine countries in Asia through thought leadership, programming, amplification, and community-building.

For example, in Q1 2023, FemTech Association of Asia has partnered with the Women's Health Innovation Series – Asia to bring the largest women's health and FemTech conference to Southeast Asia. This event will bring together key sector leaders, provide a platform for knowledge share, and will showcase innovation and investment opportunities across Asia. We will be exploring trends at the conference such as the positioning of FemTech as part of overall women's wellness integrated into day-to-day life with a preventative approach; and the strategic pivot of more FemTech solutions from targeting a B2C audience to B2B, recognising that more companies are prioritising employee benefits – including women's health needs and demands. We are confident that both trends mean further integration of women's health solutions, which FemTech companies can support with easy integration, cost-effective solutions and with the expansion of FemTech businesses across Asia, with relevant localisation.

What are the driving factors in femtech and which Asian countries do you see more femtech companies coming up?

The driving factors for FemTech in Asia are public awareness about women's healthcare needs; awareness of the commercial opportunities; entrepreneurs founding FemTech companies; and investors funding these companies. We also encourage further integration of women's health (and technology) into educational curriculums to inspire the next generation of founders. In Q4 2022, 50 per cent of new FemTech Association of Asia member companies were founded in Indonesia. In January 2023, we accepted almost 40 per cent of our members from Singapore and 25 per cent from Hong Kong. We are excited to see founder engagement across multiple markets, along with the many new businesses launching over the past 12 months in Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam – and we can expect the same for 2023.

How do you see Singaporean women making a mark in the femtech industry?

Singapore has claimed its place as a hub for the FemTech industry, currently hosting over half of Southeast Asia's FemTech businesses - and serving as the headquarters of FemTech Association of Asia. Awareness of FemTech is high in Singapore, although awareness of specific companies providing women's health services is not as common. For instance, according to our 2022 Consumer Survey for Singapore, only ~1/4 of FemTech brands named by participants are Asia- based (with 75 per cent of these headquartered in Singapore). Led by consumer demand for more affordable solutions to complement the trusted healthcare system in Singapore, FemTech businesses offer readily accessible, convenient, and cost-effective digital healthcare solutions. The most prevalent FemTech categories in Singapore include: menstrual care and sexual health. Underserved categories include: menopause, chronic illness, and mental health. Women in Singapore are open to a variety of digital healthcare solutions and have the budget to spend, however, they are looking for solutions that are good value for money and integrate easily into day-to-day life. FemTech is a key contributor to the future of women's healthcare in Singapore.

What kind of challenges do women entrepreneurs have to face and overcome in the femtech vertical?

Women's health globally has historically been under-researched, underserved and underfunded. We would like to see more investment in women's healthcare research and development, which currently accounts for only 4 per cent of overall R&D funding, according to Accenture. With technology bringing more economical solutions; FemTech brands building broader ecosystems; and remote access, at-home delivery and telehealth becoming the norm, women are starting to find solutions that work for their particular needs. FemTech Association of Asia and our members are doing a great job of building awareness of women's healthcare needs and educating consumers - and investors. Even with investor awareness, however, the funding of FemTech businesses is a challenge. In 2022, DealStreetAsia reported that there were no female decision makers at 77 per cent of SE Asia-headquartered venture firms. Over 80 per cent of FemTech Founders in the FemTech Association of Asia are female. If we compare to the USA where female founders secured only 2 per cent of venture capital in 2021 as Bloomberg stated, we can assume Asia has a similar statistic. According to a 2020 Harvard Business Review article that still holds true, gender bias is present in fundraising, so we continue to support more diversity among investors.

Anusha Ashwin