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SEPTEMBER 25, 2026



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By Nepal Digest - September 25, 2026 - Nepal

Lemi Tamang's career began with a private argument over whether makeup could count as serious work. She wanted to be an artist; her mother initially saw makeup as too uncertain a path. Tamang responded not by waiting for permission, but by quietly taking bridal clients, building a portfolio online and proving that demand existed. From a small studio she rented at nineteen to assignments in Mumbai, Dubai and Milan, and later to building Pastel Beauty and Bisou, her journey captures the transformation of Nepal's beauty industry from service work into a creator-led business ecosystem.

Tamang's public identity is now broad enough to include makeup artist, entrepreneur, beauty creator and brand founder, but the sequence matters. The businesses did not come first. They grew out of years spent working directly with faces, products and clients, learning what consumers struggled to find and what professional artists needed from the products they used.

That foundation separates her from creators who launch products simply because they have an audience. Tamang's influence was built around a trade before it became a marketing asset. Her career demonstrates how technical skill, social media and entrepreneurship can compound when each stage grows naturally from the previous one.

Art Before Makeup

Tamang has described herself as artistic from a young age. She entered art competitions, worked obsessively on creative projects and developed the habit of treating visual work seriously even before it had any commercial value. Makeup eventually became another medium through which colour, form and transformation could be explored.

This is an important distinction because professional makeup is often underestimated as superficial service work. At its best, it involves the same kinds of decisions found in other visual disciplines: proportion, colour theory, texture, lighting and the

relationship between a face and the environment in which it will be seen.

Tamang's later career repeatedly returned to that artistic understanding. Even as she became a business owner, she remained closely involved in product creation because she approached cosmetics from the perspective of someone who had spent years using them professionally.

Working Before She Had Approval

The first major obstacle came at home. In a 2025 interview with Kathmandu Post, Tamang recalled that her mother initially disapproved of her desire to work in makeup. Rather than abandoning the interest, she began taking bridal clients while her mother was away in Solukhumbu and posted the results on social media.

The work attracted attention quickly enough to become difficult to dismiss. Tamang was not making an abstract argument about whether makeup could become a profession; she was showing that people were willing to pay for her skill. That practical proof eventually changed her mother's position.

This pattern—create first, explain later—became one of the recurring characteristics of Tamang's career. When she felt blocked by expectations or by the limitations of a local market, she

tended to test another route rather than wait for the existing system to validate her.

A Studio at Nineteen

At nineteen, Tamang rented a photo studio and began working professionally, charging around Rs 9,000 for a makeup session according to her later account. For someone that young, the move required more than technical confidence. Renting a space meant taking on overhead, attracting enough clients to justify the cost and presenting herself as a professional rather than a hobbyist.

Beauty work depends heavily on trust. A bridal client is often preparing for one of the most photographed days of her life, with little room for the artist to fail. Every successful appointment therefore becomes both income and reputation.

Social media amplified that reputation. Instead of relying only on client referrals, Tamang could turn finished looks into a public portfolio. Each post showed potential customers what she could do and helped the next booking arrive.

Teaching as a Sign of Authority

As demand grew, Tamang began offering makeup classes. She has said the classes filled quickly, demonstrating that her audience was not interested only in hiring her; people wanted to learn the technique itself. This is a meaningful transition in any craft career.

A service provider earns by doing the work. A teacher earns by transferring the skill. The second role requires a different kind of authority because students expect not just a result but an explanation of how the result was achieved.

For Tamang, education also expanded the scale of her influence before she had a product company. A single client might experience one makeup look; a trained student could take parts of Tamang's approach into her own work with many others.

Why Nepal Began to Feel Too Small

Early success created a new problem: Tamang felt she was becoming stagnant. Nepal's beauty and fashion industries were developing, but the commercial ecosystem was still limited compared with larger regional markets. She decided to test herself in Mumbai, one of South Asia's most competitive centres for advertising, fashion and entertainment.

The move was not presented to her family as a dramatic career migration. She initially described it as a trip, partly because she did not know whether it would work. Once in Mumbai, she discovered that local success did not automatically translate into acceptance elsewhere.

Her portfolio was dominated by bridal work, while agencies expected a different visual language suited to fashion and

commercial campaigns. She faced rejection repeatedly.

The Mumbai Rejections

Tamang's account of Mumbai is useful because it strips away the mythology that social-media success opens every door. She arrived without powerful contacts and found that an audience in Nepal meant little to agencies evaluating whether her portfolio fit their market.

A photographer eventually gave her a chance to create stronger fashion-oriented work. That opportunity helped her build the kind of portfolio that the industry expected. The agency that had previously rejected her later accepted her.

The lesson was not simply perseverance. Tamang had to recognise that her existing work, however successful in one market, was not enough for another. She adapted the portfolio rather than assuming the market was wrong to reject it.

Learning a Larger Beauty Industry

Mumbai exposed Tamang to a denser network of photographers, models, production companies, fashion professionals and commercial campaigns. In Nepal, one artist may need to perform several roles around a shoot because the industry is small. In a larger market, creative labour is more specialised and competition is much more intense.

This environment forced Tamang to think beyond bridal makeup. She began working in contexts where a look had to serve a brand, camera and creative direction rather than only the preferences of one client.

Her later work included major commercial assignments, and an earlier Annapurna Express interview identified campaigns for Pantene and Faces Canada among the projects she was proud of. She also named actress Disha Patani as a memorable client.

From Mumbai to a More International Career

Tamang's work later extended beyond India to cities including Dubai and Milan. These experiences gave her access to different beauty markets and standards, widening the reference points she would eventually bring into product development.

International work can be particularly important for a makeup artist because cosmetics behave differently across climates, skin tones, production environments and fashion cultures. An artist who travels encounters products and consumer expectations that may not be readily available in Nepal.

That exposure appears to have strengthened Tamang's ambition to build brands rather than remain only a professional using other companies' products.

Instagram Changes the Beauty Profession

Tamang's rise coincided with Instagram becoming one of the most important portfolios in the global beauty industry. The platform changed how clients discovered artists and how artists demonstrated technique. A person in Kathmandu could now follow the same international trends as someone in London or Mumbai almost instantly.

This created opportunity and pressure at the same time. Artists had access to more inspiration, but clients also arrived with global expectations. The local industry could no longer develop in isolation.

Tamang adapted naturally because she understood that finished work had to succeed twice: on the client's face and on the screen. Makeup that looks beautiful in person may behave differently under photography, video or harsh lighting.

Influence Grows Around the Craft

As her audience expanded, Tamang became a beauty influencer in addition to a working artist. The distinction matters because the two roles create different kinds of trust. A client trusts the artist to perform a service; a follower trusts the creator's recommendations about products and technique.

That second form of trust can become commercially powerful. Beauty brands depend heavily on demonstrations because cosmetics are difficult to evaluate from packaging alone. A respected artist can show how a product behaves rather than merely describing it.

Tamang eventually realised she could move from recommending products to developing products herself.

Building Pastel Beauty

Pastel Beauty marked the most important business transition in Tamang's career. The artist who had spent years working with international cosmetics began developing a brand for Nepali consumers. Pastel launched in the early 2020s, with lip products among its initial offerings.

The first launch sold rapidly, with early reporting describing the lipsticks selling out within roughly a week. That response demonstrated the commercial value of the audience Tamang had spent years building. Followers were willing not only to watch her work but to buy something carrying her name.

This is the threshold many influencers try to cross. An audience generates attention; a product converts part of that attention into an owned business.

Why Product Ownership Changes the Career

Sponsored content depends on another company's marketing budget. A creator may be paid well, but the campaign ends and the product belongs to someone else. A beauty brand creates a different kind of asset.

The founder has to take responsibility for formulation, manufacturing, inventory, pricing, packaging, import rules, distribution and customer complaints. The risk is higher, but so is the possibility of building something that has value independent of social-media reach.

Tamang's move into cosmetics therefore required a new professional identity. She was no longer only the person demonstrating makeup. She was responsible for what was inside the package.

The Manufacturing Problem

In her 2025 Kathmandu Post interview, Tamang described manufacturing as one of the most difficult parts of building a beauty brand. An early relationship with a manufacturer in Italy looked promising, but she eventually became uncomfortable with how little control she had over parts of the process.

For a founder whose reputation depends on product quality, that lack of control is dangerous. Consumers do not blame an overseas manufacturer if a cosmetic product performs poorly; they blame the name printed on the packaging.

Tamang's response was to become more involved in product development and to search for manufacturing relationships she could trust. This is the unglamorous side of creator entrepreneurship: the work moves from photoshoots into supply chains.

Import Rules and the Reality of Building in Nepal

Cosmetics are regulated products, which means importing and selling them involves requirements far beyond branding. Tamang has discussed the logistical difficulty of bringing products into Nepal and navigating government rules. These constraints can be especially challenging for small domestic companies competing with global brands that already have established distribution networks.

The difficulty also explains why locally oriented beauty entrepreneurship matters. Nepali consumers often face higher prices, limited shade availability and inconsistent access to international products. A founder who understands the market from inside can identify gaps large international companies

overlook.

Pastel Beauty was built partly around that logic: create products informed by the needs and spending power of Nepali customers rather than simply importing a foreign concept unchanged.

Bisou and a Younger Consumer

Tamang later launched Bisou by Pastel Beauty, a sister brand designed with a younger audience in mind. She has spoken about the large number of teenagers who follow her and about wanting products that could be purchased without luxury-level budgets.

The distinction shows growing sophistication as a founder. Rather than forcing one brand to speak to every consumer, she created another identity aimed at a different price and age segment. That is a classic business strategy being executed inside a creator-led company.

She has also emphasised cruelty-free and vegan positioning for the line, aligning the brand with ethical concerns increasingly important to younger beauty buyers.

The Price Question

Accessibility is difficult in Nepal because the market is small and importing ingredients or finished products can be expensive. A founder may want to lower prices, but scale is often what allows

international brands to manufacture cheaply. Domestic companies do not automatically have that advantage.

Tamang has said she intentionally kept Bisou pricing focused on Nepali consumers, including younger followers spending pocket money. This positions affordability not as a side effect but as part of the brand identity.

Whether that balance remains sustainable depends on manufacturing and distribution efficiency. A beauty company cannot remain accessible if low prices consistently destroy its margins.

The Difference Between Influencer Brand and Real Brand

Many creator-led businesses launch strongly because followers are curious. The harder test comes later, when the product has to earn repeat purchases from people who would still buy it even if the founder stopped posting for a month.

This is the stage at which a celebrity product either becomes a real consumer brand or remains merchandise. Quality, availability and customer service matter more than launch-day excitement.

Tamang's professional background gives her one advantage: she has spent years evaluating products through actual client work. That does not guarantee business success, but it gives her a

technical perspective that pure influencer brands may lack.

Beauty as a Career for Young Nepalis

Tamang's journey also reflects a broader transformation in how Nepal understands beauty work. A young woman pursuing makeup professionally once had to justify whether it was a serious career at all. Today, the sector includes studios, academies, creators, salons, brands and international assignments.

Social media accelerated that professionalisation by making demand visible. Artists could show work, students could find teachers and customers could compare providers without relying exclusively on personal referrals.

Tamang's story sits near the centre of that change because she moved through several stages of the industry as they developed.

What Her Mother's Doubt Came to Represent

The early conflict with her mother now reads differently because of what followed. The concern was not necessarily hostility to creativity; it reflected the uncertainty surrounding a profession that had no obvious path. Parents often evaluate careers through stability, and makeup did not look stable.

Tamang changed the argument by creating evidence. Clients arrived, classes filled and international opportunities followed. Eventually the career no longer needed to be defended theoretically.

This is one reason her story resonates with young creatives. The lesson is not simply to ignore family advice. It is that unconventional careers become easier to defend when passion is accompanied by professional discipline.

From Artist to Entrepreneur

It is tempting to describe Tamang's development as leaving artistry behind for business, but the two remain connected. Her brand-building depends on years of product knowledge, and her credibility as a founder is strengthened by the fact that she still understands the working artist's perspective.

The challenge is keeping that connection alive as the business grows. Founders can become consumed by operations, marketing and finance, leaving less time for the craft that originally created the brand.

Tamang's long-term strength may depend on remaining close enough to makeup to understand how consumer needs are changing.

Building on Her Own Terms

The strongest theme running through Lemi Tamang's career is self-direction. She took bridal clients before receiving full approval, moved to Mumbai without a guaranteed network and turned professional recognition into a product company rather than remaining only an influencer.

Each step increased risk as well as opportunity. A client appointment can go badly; an international move can fail; a product launch can leave unsold inventory. The visible glamour of beauty entrepreneurship sits on top of those less visible uncertainties.

What makes Tamang's career notable is not that every decision worked immediately. It is that rejection repeatedly became information rather than a final verdict.

The Harder Test: Repeat Customers

The next phase of Tamang's entrepreneurial story will be determined less by launch-day excitement than by repeat purchase. Cosmetics succeed when customers finish a product and choose to buy it again, not merely when fans purchase once because they admire the founder.

This means the brand eventually has to become larger than Lemi herself. Packaging, shade consistency, stock availability and

customer support must work even when the founder is not personally explaining the product online.

If Pastel Beauty and Bisou can make that transition, Tamang's most important achievement may not be building an influencer brand at all. It may be helping establish a Nepali beauty company that consumers judge on product performance first and celebrity association second.

Why Her Story Matters Beyond Beauty

Tamang's career is also a case study in how creative professionals can move from skill to ownership. The sequence—learn a craft, build trust, identify a market gap and then create a product—can apply far beyond cosmetics.

For younger Nepali creators, that model offers a more durable ambition than influence alone. Followers are useful, but the ability to turn knowledge into something owned creates greater control over the future.

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Bisou eventually have to compete on the same terms as established brands: consistency, performance, availability and price.

This also requires the businesses to become larger than Lemi herself. Packaging, shade consistency, stock availability and customer support must work even when the founder is not personally explaining the product online. If the companies can make that transition, the strongest achievement may be building a Nepali beauty brand that consumers judge primarily on product quality rather than celebrity association.

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Followers are useful, but the ability to turn knowledge into something owned creates greater control over the future.

Tamang's journey shows what that transition looks like in practice, including the parts that rarely appear in polished campaign photographs: rejection, manufacturing problems, regulations and the responsibility of putting your own name on a product.

Lemi Tamang began by trying to prove that makeup could be a career. Years later, she is dealing with a much larger question: whether an artist's name can become a durable beauty company. That journey—from a hidden bridal booking to products designed for Nepali consumers—is the clearest measure of how much the industry, and her place inside it, has changed.

Originally published by Nepal Digest - <https://nepaldigest.com/lemi-tamang-makeup-pastel-beauty-story/>