

Opportunities and threats of E-commerce in Social Media: Perspective of Bangladeshi female seller

Md. Obaidullah^{1*}, Abdullah Al Zubayer²

^{1*} Department of Public Administration, University of Barishal, Barishal 8200, Bangladesh

² Department of Sociology, University of Barishal, Barishal 8200, Bangladesh

E-mail: buobaidullah@gmail.com, abdullahalzubayer0@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author: buobaidullah@gmail.com

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Abstract: **Objectives:** E-commerce is a new-fangled means of business in the present world. Social media based business derived from it. Both men and women are doing business in Facebook based e-commerce method. This study explores the opportunities and threats of e-commerce for Bangladeshi women on Facebook.

Methods: The study is qualitative-explorative. Data was qualitatively thematic analysed through manual coding. Purposive sampling was used in this study for collecting data. We have collected data from 20 women in Bangladesh from 20th August to 30th August. Among those women, 65% are from urban areas, and the rest are from rural areas.

Findings and Conclusion: The results of the study demonstrate that there are many opportunities and threats of Facebook based e-commerce for Bangladeshi women businesspersons. Women are making maximum profit through minimum investment, as there is no advertisement cost and taxes. In reverse, they face problems like cyberbullying, lack of skill, internet access, and harassment. Lastly, in conclusion, some corrective measures have been mentioned.

Keywords: E-commerce, Social Media, Facebook, Women, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

The age of information and communication technology is a historical period that began in the early 20th century. We cannot think of a single day without social media, mobile, computer, or electronic gadgets. A world without technology is beyond our imagination. ICT is an umbrella term that encompasses the use of computers to communicate, store, and maintain the necessary information, including hardware, software, and networks. ICT technologies are very diverse, and electronic commerce is one such field. E-commerce has now become ingrained in our daily lives. E-commerce means buying and selling products through an electronic medium. The growth of the e-commerce sector in Bangladesh has surpassed all

expectations and dramatically affected economic transition in terms of aggregate investment.

Following the report of Statista, Bangladesh has an internet penetration rate of 18 percent (2017), which is augmenting year-on-year due to government and non-government initiatives. In major cities, social media literacy is still at an all-time high for all age groups, from primary school students to our elderly parents and grandparents. Women are utilizing the advantages of social media through e-commerce business from their home; on the one hand, they can manage to earn by sitting in chairs, on the contrary, their earning makes them empowered and self-dependent. However, technological advancements have pros and cons. Social media opens the door of empowerment; in contrast, excessive use of social media influences our personal life and

privacy. Furthermore, women are the primary victims of cyberbullying and cybercrime on Facebook. Therefore, e-commerce in social media (Facebook) has opportunities and threats for women.

2. Literature Review

2.1 E-commerce and Social Media

Online shopping allows clients to use the internet to purchase a product or service. In Bangladesh, Google Trends shows that "online shopping" is the fourth most searched word [1]. In Bangladesh, online business has become a means of women's empowerment. Zhang et al. explain that social media networks are a key tool in corporate marketing in attracting customers [2]. A business model that allows businesses and individuals to purchase and sell products over the internet is electronic commerce or e-commerce. In the modern technological age, people do not need to go shop or market physically; they just do an order on the internet. Buying and selling products is a matter of clicking a mouse or touching the smartphone's screen.

Almost every possible product and service, including books, music, plane tickets, and financial services such as stock trading and online banking, is available through e-commerce purchases. It can be divided into four parts.

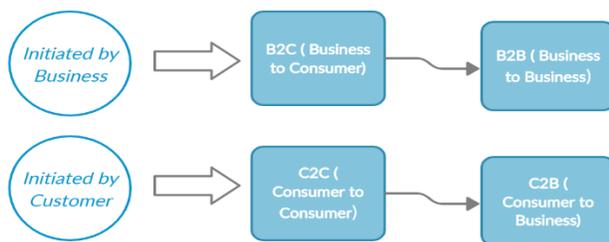


Figure 1: Classification of E-commerce

Nowadays, one of the most important online communication platforms is social media. A group of Internet-based applications, which build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and enable user-generated content, to be created and shared is referred to as social media. [3].

Social medias are hurriedly becoming the part and parcel of our daily life. Not only personal life, but also social, professional and business life. It is also a sole source of customer information and a prime channel of communication, information sharing, and distribution of individual creativity and entertainment [4]. Through using social media algorithms, business organizations are knowing

the personal choices of consumers. It offers various benefits, including its low cost, the low level of IT skills needed to use it, and limited barriers to participation [5]. Most SMEs seem to have embraced Facebook as their marketing platform nowadays [6].

2.2 E-commerce and women

For shaping women's career development, family responsibilities play a crucial role [7]. Women's economic emancipation or women's empowerment, is currently a burning issue all over the world. Gender equality is the fifth goal of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The objective is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls [8]. The rise of the advancement of IT and E-commerce facilitates the economic empowerment of women. [9]

E-commerce has provided women in developing countries like Bangladesh the ability to earn money in addition to serving their roles as homemakers. E-commerce has undeniably become an effective instrument for women's empowerment. Women make up for 80% of Bangladesh's e-entrepreneurs. [10]. Young women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh were quick to jump into action and utilize the opportunity. The principal business challenge a woman entrepreneur faces is the management of her operations and costs. But nowadays, it is easy to communicate with customers through social media. Consumers can give their feedback to the sellers conveniently. 25 million people in Bangladesh are using Facebook for different purposes [11]. Even 37.5 % of the time a day, students are engaged in myriad online activities [12].

Thus, unquestionably, Facebook is an excellent platform for business based networking as well as client hunt. Many research papers are available about e-commerce in Bangladesh and e-commerce in social media. Such as, E-commerce Challenges, Solutions, and Effectiveness Perspective Bangladesh, shows the challenges and effectiveness of e-commerce in Bangladesh [13]. A research delineated the effectiveness of e-business on the empowerment of women [14]. Nevertheless, no one has shown it, concentrating on Facebook, the opportunities and threats facing Bangladeshi women for e-commerce on social media based on seller perspective. As in the age of Information technology, e-commerce in social media is a significant matter of concern. Different organizations consider e-commerce to be a means for women empowerment.

Therefore, it should be studied the opportunities of e-commerce in social media (Facebook) as well as what kind of challenges are confrontational by women during e-commerce. Solutions also need to be identified to ensure women empowerment.

3. Methodology

This research was conducted as part of a more extensive study exploring the opportunities and threats of e-commerce in social media (Facebook): the perspective of Bangladeshi women businesspersons. We have conducted telephone-based and face-to-face in-depth interviews through semi-structured questions.

Purposive sampling was used for collecting data. We have collected data from 20 women in Bangladesh. Among those women, 65% are from urban areas, and the rest of the participants are from rural areas. (Table 1).

The researchers have applied sufficient methods to collect credible and reliable data and to correctly interpret the information with the intention of arrive at accurate decisions and conclusions. The research is exploratory in nature where phone call interviews and face-to-face interviews as case study are used as the research design. Informal discussion and personal observation have been organized into our analysis. We asked the questions of the participants in Bengali. The case study questionnaire was as follows: Socio-demographic details, types of business are done by participants, previous skill about business, impediments behind their e-commerce on Facebook. The study is qualitative-explorative. That was qualitatively thematic analysed through manual coding to achieve the research objectives.

Table 1. Socio-demographic details of the study participants

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage
Age (in years)	18-25	13	65%
	26-35	7	35%
Gender	Female	20	100%
Profession	Housewife	10	50%
	Student	10	50%
Area	Rural	7	35%
	Urban	13	65%

The study is exploratory in nature. Unstructured discussion and personal observation had been arranged in our study. The case study questionnaire was as follows: participants' socio-demographic details, types of business, skills about business, and impediments behind their e-commerce on Facebook. That was qualitatively thematic analysed through manual coding to achieve the research objectives.

Result of study depend on variables. Gender, age, area and profession is the independent variables in our study whereas profit, business growth, empowerment, cyber bullying. Family obstacle, internet access these all are dependent variables (Figure 2).

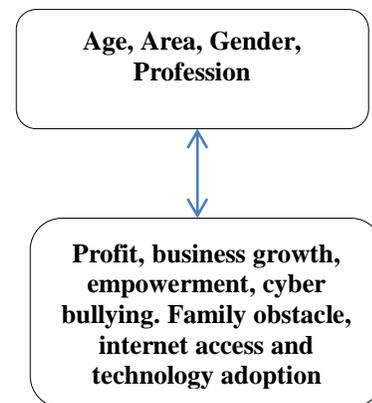


Figure 2. Variables of the study

4. Results and Discussion (Data and Results)

Communication and Online networking:

Communication refers to exchanging data and information from one person to another person, or one group to another group. It could be achieved by speech, writing, or another means. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are now the primary means of contact and networking. Facebook is the most popular social media in the world. With over 2.7 billion monthly active users as of the second quarter of 2020, Facebook is the biggest social network worldwide [13]. It is easy to disseminate information about a particular product to the people through Facebook groups or pages as well as in messages.

Another participant expressed her opinion, "I am from Narayanganj, but I can communicate easily with the people of other districts of our country through Facebook. When I open a group for my business, many people from different districts engage here. For example, there is a popular group on Facebook, namely WE, consisting of more than 1 million members. By the group, it is child play to reach my business product to a large number of people."

Minimum investment, Maximum profit: Social media based e-commerce opens a door for profitable business from home. It is expedient for women. Women's investment is not large in this case, but the benefit is significant. A participant from Rajshahi mentioned, "In the Rajshahi Division, I sell a variety of food products. I primarily offer pizza, burgers, sandwiches, kacchi, and other food products. In reality, I prepare the food item after receiving the order. As a result, there is no risk of losing. She is making the most money for the least amount of money by using this system. By this system, she is gaining maximum profit through minimum investment."

No legal barrier: there is any legal restriction on e-commerce in social media in Bangladesh. Business entrepreneurs do not have to take commercial licenses for their shop. There is no tax imposed by the government, either. A participant stated, "If I want to introduce my business in a conventional approach, I need to take a trade license, but in this social media based e-commerce system there is no trade license, no barrier."

Growth of e-commerce during a pandemic situation: In the pandemic situation of the 20th century, people need not go outside from home to buy or sell products. E-commerce is booming across the globe; as a result, shopping is on the rise online. Online sales have risen by 70 to 80 percent relative to the standard period. It is mentionable, 70% of our participants have started their business in this COVID-19 pandemic situation. As a result, according to the German research institute Statista, the e-commerce market in Bangladesh has surpassed one and a half billion US dollars and is forecast to cross two billion dollars this year and three billion dollars by 2023 [14].

Empowerment of Women: Women's empowerment can be achieved by e-commerce on social media. Economic freedom, greater social independence and acceptability, and a

sense of self-worth are the key indicators of women's empowerment. Women think that e-business is one of the best ways to become an entrepreneur, which in turn empowers them in various social issues [17]. One of the participants expressed her views that, "Verily, this e-commerce in Facebook augmenting our liberation of income from home. Even a conservative woman can also run this kind of business. This business empowered us financially."

Regional Product: Regional products refers to goods, products, or raw material of a specific area or region. Through the business in social media, customers may know and buy different regional products. Like, customers of Chittagong can buy the Kachagolla of Natore; One of the participants from Barisal said, "I am an entrepreneur and member of numerous groups from Facebook. A few days ago, I bought Bogra's Yogurt from a girl who is 22 years old and selling famous food in Bogra. The other participants also narrated about their experience of buying food from different regions."

Women's Social Media E-commerce Threats

Cyber Bullying and Sexual Harassment: Cyberbullying entails sending, releasing, or disseminating negative, harmful, deceptive, or material information about an individual. Women in our country are regular intervals in order to cyberbullying on social media platforms. They received porn links, threats, and slang in their inbox and comment section even when conducting business. In Dhaka, 70% of women are facing cyber harassment. Most of these are victims of sexual harassment, online hacking, cyber pornography, and blackmail [17].

One of the participants showed her grief and added, "It is a piece of cake that we are the victim of cyberbullying and sexual harassment in Facebook, even during our business activities. When I advertise my products, some people are teasing me with different slang. In the comment box, they write obscene and vulgar sentences. I have just to block them, otherwise, nothing to do. There are many on social media." The other participants' showed extreme concern about the existing situation of cyberbullying and sexual harassment on Facebook.

Family is a barrier: Family is another barrier for engaging women e-commerce in social media. In a developing country like Bangladesh, the parents or guardians fix a student's career goals. One of the participants said hopelessly, "While

I was selling flower trees through the Facebook group, my mom was shouting to me. She was telling me that, instead of studying for a government job, what you are doing. Leave this kind of business, read the job preparation book. Nevertheless, I have no wish to go for a government job; I want to be a successful entrepreneur." In contrast, homemaker needed permission from their husband or mother in law for doing her business. A participant expressed her views with sorrow, "my husband said to stop the business. I did not stop but narrowed the business."

Lack of training and experience: Without prior experience and training in this field, there is little chance to achieve the desired goal. If a person does not have any skill or experience in e-commerce or managing social media, how he or she will conduct business on Facebook. A participant reported, "I do not have any experience with e-commerce in social media. However, I was skilled in painting in Punjabi. But If I get the training about this, definitely it would be better for me." Furthermore, other participants also shared that, if they got training, they could make more profit in business.

No government regulation: Some policies are formulated to control and conduct e-commerce in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, there is no specific law regarding e-commerce. However, there is a Digital Commerce Policy Guide 2018 by the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-CAB). The problem is that bad people could follow this system. Weed buyer-seller group, Sex toy selling group, etc are active on Facebook. According to a participant, "While I was scrolling Facebook groups, I saw a group of weed sellers and buyers. This is happening because, on Facebook based e-commerce, government regulation does not exist." The fact remains that there is no tax on selling or buying products from a Facebook page or group. It is a big loss for the government.

Internet access and technology adoption: To get access to the internet in the grassroots area of Bangladesh is very difficult. Most of the people in our country are mobile internet users. But they are unable to get 2G speed in village homes, let alone 3G or 4G. According to Ookla's Speed test Global Index for mobile internet speed Bangladesh ranked 133rd out of 138 countries [19]. One of the participants from the Char area of Jamalpur expressed with sorrow, "I am unable to get a proper network in my village. To communicate with customers, I need to go to the Union

Parishad office. This is a difficult task for a woman. Maybe I could not run my business anymore."

Besides, it is challenging to engage with new technology for rural women. A respondent said, "My aunt wants to start e-commerce on Facebook. But she does not know how to open a Facebook account."

Lack of trust and Risk of Harassment: According to a global survey from the Centre for International Governance Innovation, almost 50% of the respondents say they do not trust online shopping [18]. Nevertheless, the lifeblood of e-commerce is trust. A participant said, "I heard from my friend, she bought a shirt for her husband, which was defective." On the contrary, there is a problem with harassment from the seller side. After giving the order of a product from Facebook, customers are not receiving the product. One of the respondents from Dhaka said, "A person ordered 'handmade ornament' from Khulna. As per my business policy, I sent the product by courier, but the courier office returned the product. Because that person did not take the product from the office."

5. Conclusion and Future Scope

The involvement of women in social media based e-commerce is a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. The mainstream development is quite impossible without the inclusiveness of women. After completing the analysis and finding portion, the study found that e-commerce based on Facebook is the most convenient and comfortable way for women entrepreneurs to run business in Bangladesh.

The opportunities for a Facebook based e-commerce system are clear from the discussion as mentioned earlier. Women can earn independently without any legal constraints from the government of Bangladesh. They do advertise and sell their products free of charge to millions of people. But despite all these advantages, social media based e-commerce has some challenges which are always facing our respondents. The foremost problem researchers have known from respondents that is the cyberbullying and sexual harassment on Facebook. Women are facing this trouble during their business activities. The government should be rigid about cybercrime and bullying. Family is the other constraint of women entrepreneurship. The Guardian of a woman should give freedom to a person about their life goal. Also, as most participants were unskilled in Facebook-based e-commerce, women entrepreneurs can be trained by the government and NGOs.

We know that there is no government regulation and imposed tax on this kind of business; the government needs to beef up this matter. Because devils are following this system and selling banned products, moreover, by levying tax, the government can earn a fair amount of money. It is time the government rethought and reshaped Facebook based e-commerce to ensure the safety of women as well as to clear the road of empowerment through Facebook based e-commerce.

Further work needs to be carried out about opportunities and threats of e-commerce in social media, a perspective on Bangladeshi women consumer.

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Authors Profile

1. **Md. Obaidullah**, Pursuing BSS from Department of Public Administration, University of Barishal. He is highly interested in the Social Research field Especially focus on Governance, Local Government, Development and Sustainable development ,E-Governance as well as Public Policy.

2. **Abdullah Al Zuabyer** has received his BSS from Department of Sociology, University of Barishal. At present, he is taking MSS at the same Department.