

Black Friday: US shoppers choose online shopping over mall

REUTERS, New York

The Thanksgiving Day and Black Friday kickoff of the US holiday shopping season showed the increasing preference for online purchases, as more Americans opted to stay home and use their smartphones while sales and traffic at brick-and-mortar stores declined.

The ongoing shift to online shopping has forced retailers across the country to invest heavily in boosting their e-commerce businesses, and also highlights the impact of early holiday promotions and year-round deals on consumer spending.

The weekend also redefined the importance of Black Friday. For the past few years, Black Friday was believed to be waning in importance, but it is now turning into a day when shoppers do not necessarily flock to stores but spend heavily online.

Bill Park, a partner at Deloitte & Touche LP, said online sales are starting to complement in-store shopping over the weekend, and for shoppers and retailers the two platforms are starting to converge.

This is happening more and more as retailers like Walmart Inc and Amazon.com Inc sell both online and through stores, making



REUTERS

A Lord and Taylor store is pictured during Black Friday shopping in New York City on Friday.

winning the transaction more important than where it occurs, retail consultants and analysts said.

Online sales rose more than 23 percent, crossing \$6 billion on Black Friday, according to data from Adobe Analytics, which tracks transactions at 80 of the top 100 US retailers. On Thanksgiving, it estimated sales grew 28 percent to \$3.7 billion.

Preliminary data from analytics firm RetailNext showed net sales at brick-and-mortar stores fell 4 to 7 percent over the two days, while traffic fell 5 to 9 percent, continuing

the trend of recent years. No data was yet available for actual spending in stores.

In 2017, brick-and-mortar sales were down 8.9 percent for the weekend year-over-year, and shopper traffic fell 4.4 percent. In 2016, store sales were down 4.2 percent and traffic was down 4.4 percent, according to RetailNext.

The decrease in store foot traffic is a little greater than it has been in years past, though still within expectations, RetailNext spokesperson Ray Hartjen said.

Data from retail research firm

ShopperTrak also showed that visits to stores fell a combined 1 percent during Thanksgiving and Black Friday compared with the same days in 2017.

Brian Field, senior director of advisory services at ShopperTrak, said online sales have eroded traffic from retailers over the years, "but what we have noticed is that the decline is starting to flatten out ... Overall it's been consistent with where it's been over the last few years."

In 2017, visits to physical stores on Thanksgiving Day and Black Friday were down 1.6 percent, according to the firm.

"This decline feels pretty good to me. I think retail is in for a good season," Field said.

Retail consultants have said spending patterns over the weekend are not as indicative of the entire season as they were a few years ago the tendency now is to spread shopping over November and December.

The National Retail Federation forecast US holiday retail sales in November and December will increase between 4.3 and 4.8 percent over 2017, for a total of \$717.45 billion to \$720.89 billion. That compares with an average annual increase of 3.9 percent over the past five years.



BANGLADESH BRAND FORUM

Oobah Butler, a famous director and a writer at Vice, a Canadian-American print magazine focused on arts, culture, and news topics, hands over a crest to the members of one of the winning teams at the second edition of Digital Marketing Award organised by Bangladesh Brand Forum at the Le Méridien Dhaka on Saturday. Story on B1

Utilisation back on slow lane

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But in fiscal 2016-17 the amount more than doubled thanks to Russia's commitment to Rooppur nuclear power plant project. In fiscal 2016-17, foreign aid commitment stood at \$17.96 billion.

Last fiscal year the country received foreign aid commitment of \$14.86 billion, with China and India accounting for \$4.35 billion and \$4.5 billion respectively.

Thanks to the huge amount of aid commitment, unused foreign aid in the pipeline stood at \$46.79 billion at the end of October. On June 30 it was \$44.51 billion.

78 digital campaigns recognised

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The highest number of awards—4 gold—for a single campaign were won by X for their campaign Robi Bijoy Itihas.

Asiatic Mindshare Ltd, a concern of Asiatic 360, won Grand Prix, Magnito Digital won two while Content Matters Ltd, O&Z Solutions, Robi 10 Minute School, Roebuck Communications and Starcom Bangladesh won a Grand Prix award each.

Pickaboo and Silver Water Technologies Bangladesh Limited, and Analyzen and Mindshare also won two other Grand Prix awards jointly.

Furthermore, Coca-Cola Nikhoj Shobder Khoje by Grey Advertising Bangladesh won three gold awards, second highest for a single campaign, along with Lux Super Star 2018.

Analyzen won the highest number of awards by a single agency – 15 individual awards and 3 joint awards with Mindshare.



Top officials of the participating lenders and Fair Group are seen at an agreement signing ceremony held recently under which One Bank arranged a term loan of Tk 347 crore for Fair Electronics, a concern of Fair Group, to establish a manufacturing and assembling unit of Samsung branded refrigerator, mobile and other electrical appliances in Narsingdi.

ONE BANK



SBAC BANK

Mostafa Jalal Uddin Ahmed, additional managing director of SBAC Bank, and Santanu Kumar Das, director for business development at Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, exchange documents after signing a deal in Dhaka recently. The bank's employees will get discounts at the hospital.

Egypt says US oil firms show appetite for offshore projects

REUTERS, Rome

Egypt sees increasing interest from US energy companies in developing its offshore oil and natural gas resources and expects them to participate in two bidding rounds due before year-end, Petroleum Minister Tarek El Molla said.

Egypt has emerged as an attractive destination for foreign energy firms following a string of major discoveries in recent years including the giant Zohr offshore field, which holds an estimated 30 trillion cubic feet of gas.

Molla said Egypt wanted to become a regional trading gas hub now it had achieved its goal of self-sufficiency, but would focus on meeting its existing commitments — including a contract to supply Jordan — once exports are resumed.

While declining to name potential bidders, Molla said there was "an increase in appetite from different American companies and we will see this in practical ways when the closing of the bidding rounds and submission of offers."

"This will be the proof that they're interested," he said.

Molla, who met US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Francis Fannon in Cairo last week, said bidding for

exploration and exploitation of gas and oil in offshore concession blocks in the Mediterranean under state-run importer EGAS was due to close on Nov. 29.

A second bidding round for concession areas in the Red Sea is scheduled to open before the end of the year, he added.

Officials and industry sources said last year that Exxon Mobil was considering a foray into Egyptian offshore oil and gas, seeking to replicate rivals' success in the country and boost its reserves.

Molla highlighted the existing operations of US companies including Apache (APA.N), which is currently engaged in onshore exploration and production.

"We'd like to have and attract more companies in the oil and gas sector for the offshore, and I think that with the opening of ... the new frontier area like the Red Sea and what we are talking about now in the bid rounds of EGAS and (state-controlled Egyptian General Petroleum Corp) EGPC, this is all really attracting a lot of attention to American companies," he said.

Molla has said previously that Egypt aimed to attract about \$10 billion in foreign investment in the oil and gas sector in the fiscal year that began in July 2018.

Malaysia says Najib's office ordered changes to 1MDB audit report

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

The office of former Malaysian premier Najib Razak ordered changes to a 2016 audit report of scandal-plagued state fund 1MDB, including removing mention of financier Low Taek Jho's presence at a board meeting, authorities said.

Financier Low has been described as a central player in the alleged corruption and money laundering at 1MDB, according to Malaysian and US authorities investigating the fund. He had no official role in 1MDB, but advised on investments and negotiated deals for the fund, the authorities have said.

Najib, ousted in a May 9 election by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, is facing multiple charges of graft, abuse of power and criminal breach of trust related to 1MDB. He has pleaded not guilty to all the charges and has consistently denied wrongdoing.

In a statement dated Saturday, Malaysia's auditor-general Madinah Mohamad said "several" findings from the audit report submitted in February 2016 to Najib were "dropped and amended."

The audit report before the amendments has been submitted to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and the police for further investigation, Madinah said.

"The former prime minister ordered the deletion of the paragraph containing two versions of the 1MDB financial statement for the year ended 2014 and directed an investigation to be carried out by the enforcement authorities," she said in a statement.

Luxury brands to delight watch connoisseurs

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Typically, people who buy such high-end timepieces get them from abroad, depriving the government of taxes, he said. About 38 percent customs duty is levied on the import of high-end watches, according to Rahman.

"Having a luxury watch is a fashion for many Bangladeshis now. We have a target to hook this segment," said Safayet Chowdhury, general manager of M&S, while addressing a press conference at the boutique yesterday.

Chowdhury is upbeat about the company's business prospects for two reasons:

competitive pricing and rising spending capacity of a section of local customers.

"High-end watches are no longer a luxury but a necessity," said MA Jabbar, managing director of DBL Group, at the store's opening.

They work as choice gifts for many individuals as well corporate houses, he added.

The watches can be purchased with 12 equal monthly instalments at zero interest with credit cards from six banks.

Along with the wrist watches, M&S will sell accessories, such as luxury writing instruments, cufflinks, belts, sunglasses, wallets, briefcases and cardholders.

Robi turns a profit after seven quarters

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During the quarter, Robi's gross revenue was Tk 1,751.85 crore, 25 percent of which came from the data segment. The data revenue soared 31 percent, thanks in part to the roll-out of 4G service in February.

Robi has 4.68 crore active mobile connections, 40 percent of which are using smartphones. More than 60 percent use data.

During the quarter Robi's earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation also increased 31.1 percent to Tk 468.80 crore thanks to the windfall from edotco

stake sell-off.

The EBITDA growth was driven by lower material cost and reduction in the interconnect charges from the second week of August.

The regulator has also introduced a unified floor rate regime under which the floor rates applicable to on-net and off-net voice tariffs were unified at Tk 0.45.

This gave a boost to the average revenue per user, which rose to Tk 122 per month during the quarter from Tk 117 in the previous quarter.



EMBASSY OF DENMARK

Winnie Estrup Petersen, Danish ambassador to Bangladesh, and Ethel Fanny Laursen, business unit director for Technical Industries EMA – AP at Novozymes A/S, attend the launch of BioPrep® Fusion, a sustainable cotton knit pre-treatment process for the textile industry, jointly organised by the embassy and Novozymes A/S at the Edge Gallery in Dhaka recently.



NCC BANK

Md Nurun Newaz Salim, chairman of NCC Bank, presides over the bank's eighth extraordinary general meeting at Police Convention Hall in Dhaka yesterday. The bank's decision to increase its authorised capital from Tk 1,000 crore to Tk 2,000 crore was approved at the meeting. Mosleh Uddin Ahmed, CEO, was present.