



#TECHNOLOGY

# Online vs offline shopping in Bangladesh: A look into a post pandemic debate

With the rapid rise of technology, the hectic schedules of our lives compounded with COVID-19, the popularity of online shopping has been soaring through the roof. To cater to that demand, more and more online shopping places have been popping up, especially on social media platforms such as Facebook.

At the start of the pandemic, many speculated that shopping styles will be changed forever, as more people will transition to shopping online. But with the pandemic waning out, will in-store shopping become the preferred choice again? Does online shopping pose a threat to brick-and-mortar retail stores?

## Why is online shopping so popular?

With a greater amount of Internet access, people becoming busier in their lives, and the ever-increasing traffic jams, online shopping is growing to be the preferred mode of shopping for a lot of people.

Rimi, a university student in Dhaka, points out the convenience of online shopping, saying that browsing through the products is far less time and energy consuming than going through multiple physical stores.

Indeed, the search cost involved with searching for products and information is quite low in contrast to its brick-and-mortar counterpart. There is no need to beat the horrendous traffic, browse multiple stores, sometimes located quite far away from each other to find the desired products when shopping online. With a few taps, customers can look at multiple pieces and place orders at any time of the day, and even pay electronically for the products.

From the perspective of business owners, setting up an online business is easier as it requires lower capital, and many costs like store rent, utility bills, etc. can be avoided. Businesses can be operated from the convenience of home. Tasneem Rahman, the owner of The Clothing Basket, a Facebook-based clothing store said, "Having a store would increase a number of fixed costs for me. Whether I'm having good sales or not, I would have to bear the costs. That would make it very difficult for me to

sustain in the market."

She further mentions that the pandemic has propelled the growth of her sales upward.

## So, is in-store shopping slowly dying?

The soaring growth of online sales might have you believe that shopping physically for commodities is soon to become a thing of the past, but that is far from the truth. Despite COVID risks still being there, many people still opt for brick-and-mortar stores to get purchase products.

Prothom, a student of BRAC University in Dhaka, notes the tangibility and the trialability aspect of in-store shopping.

"I prefer offline shopping as I get to see

deal of delight and joy to a wide range of people. The terms "retail therapy" and "comfort buys" are generated from these feelings of happiness that shopping can add to someone's mood. This is why, to get that ultimate shopping experience, many people choose to buy offline.

Nabila and Zaheer expressed that they prefer walking in stores and seeing things, all of it contributing to a beautiful experience. Another case in point: Eid and wedding shopping with family members and friends. The joy of shopping together for festive occasions such as these brings real happiness and unforgettable memories for many.

also been accused of defrauding people online. They have been accused of sending defective products, providing false descriptions of the products online, colour mismatching between photos and actual items, providing cheaper, lower quality products, etc. Prothom points out that most of the time, the prices are set higher than standard physical market prices.

Another drawback of small online shops is the lack of return and refund policies. A lot of places lack return policies if customers are dissatisfied. It is also harder to receive compensation for receiving defective items. There have been many instances where shops had to be publicly called out on social media due to their lack of cooperation and subsequent rude behaviour with customers with complaints.

## Post-pandemic shopping behaviour

With COVID-19 slowly becoming weaker and vaccination rates going upwards, more people are reverting back to in-store shopping, letting go of their fears. There has not been a radical shift as many had expected, but online shopping will still experience the growth it has been experiencing.

In Bangladesh, instead of being in competing positions, online shopping has emerged as a complementary offering to brick and mortar stores, providing folks with more accessibility and options. Especially with many stores providing countrywide delivery services, residents of various districts are able to order things that might not have been accessible and available in their respective regions.

Overall, it can be said that brick and mortar stores are not going away anytime soon and if online stores focus more on building trust, they can widen their customer base. Whatever your preferred mode of shopping might be, one thing is for sure, that you as a customer end up as the winner as you end with more variety and accessibility in shopping.



the products myself, know how they exactly look like and what material it is."

A similar sentiment was echoed by Oishi, a student at the Bangladesh University of Professionals.

Offline shopping is also opted for by customers depending on the type of products being bought. Mantaka, a student of the University of Dhaka, mentioned, "As gadgets are fragile, they can be easily damaged while shipping if not handled/packed properly. Besides, you have to check if it works smoothly in front of the seller/shopkeeper in case something goes wrong."

Shopping, as we all know brings a great

## Why do some people prefer shopping offline over online?

In Bangladesh, offline shopping still reigns supreme in the minds of a lot of people, especially the older generations who are not well versed with the Internet. Their aversion is also generated from the distrust that has risen from the latest revelations of fraud surrounding a lot of e-retailers. In recent times, some big e-commerce websites have been exposed because of their fraudulent activities and taking away large sums of money from customers without delivering promised products.

Small Facebook-based shops have

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