Research Paper

A Study on the Profile of Online Consumers in Sylhet and Their Buying Behavior

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ABSTRACT: *Online shopping is a type of e-commerce that is the act or process of purchasing products or services over the Internet. E-commerce has eased and enhanced the lives of individuals and groups. Consumer buying behavior between online shopping and the physical market is not similar. Online shopping has seen noticeable development in Bangladesh in recent years. The potentiality of online business is growing as internet literacy is developing in Bangladesh daily. The locals call Sylhet the second London because of the many Sylheti immigrants from the UK and other foreign countries. Sylhet is technologically advanced because of the technological knowledge sharing of immigrants with local people. This research paper attempts to analyze the profile of consumers, their behavior and level of satisfaction towards online shopping, and the various factors influencing the trend of online shopping in Sylhet City. Using a self-constructed questionnaire, 120 respondents from Sylhet, Bangladesh, are surveyed.*
KEYWORDS: *Demographic Profile, Consumer Buying Behavior, Online Shopping, Sylhet*

I. INTRODUCTION

Online shopping enables consumers to purchase products or services directly from a vendor via the Internet using a web browser or a mobile application. Consumers can locate a product or service by visiting the retailer's website directly or by employing a shopping search engine, which displays the availability and price of the same products or services from multiple online merchants. Now in 2023, users can shop online using a variety of computers and other devices, such as desktop computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones.

Consumer purchasing behavior analyses people, groups, or institutions, the procedures they use to choose, acquire, and utilize goods, services, events, or concepts to fulfill their wants, and the societal effects of these activities. A company's marketing outcome depends on its target consumers' personal and group purchase behaviors.

Sylhet is the land of expatriates. Remarkably, many Sylheti people reside in the UK and other foreign countries. Their up-to-date knowledge of technology products and services enhances the living standard of the people staying in Sylhet, Bangladesh. The young generation is continuously exchanging their knowledge and views through social sites.

The emergence of online purchasing has generated countless options for everyone. The Internet has been the fastest-growing medium over the past decade, and online buying is the fastest-growing e-commerce sector. Moreover, consumers can purchase goods and services anytime and from any location to online shopping. It permits consumers to economize money, time, and hassle while acquiring goods. It provides users the capacity to seek and collect more information and a high degree of openness and convenience. By comparing many websites, consumers can find the same goods at a lesser price. Major factors discouraging consumers from shopping online may include insecure payment, slow delivery, worse product quality, and the risk of misuse of personal information.

II. ONLINE SHOPPING PROCESS

The Internet has become the latest distribution network (Hollensen, 2004). Online shopping has become one of the basic reasons why people use the Internet, along with looking for goods and gathering

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information about them (Joines et al., 2003). Online shopping generally refers to purchasing products or services over the Internet (Close & Kukar-Finney, 2010).

The steps involved in online shopping are outlined below:
⇨ Problem recognition
⇨ Looking for websites or mobile applications
⇨ Exploring websites or mobile applications
⇨ Searching for goods or services
⇨ Examining
⇨ Comparing and assessing
⇨ Purchasing decision
⇨ Payment (If the pre-payment option is selected)
⇨ Receiving and confirming acceptance or return of goods
⇨ Payment (If cash on delivery is selected)

III.   OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is:
⇨ To analyze the demographic characteristics of online shoppers.
⇨ To investigate the experience of consumers with online shopping.
⇨ To explore the purchasing habits of online shoppers.

IV.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Focusing on the purpose of the present study, a survey was performed using a structured questionnaire to collect information on the online shopping behavior of consumers in Sylhet City. The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the respondents' demographic profiles, including gender, age, and occupation. In addition, respondents were asked various questions, including how they knew about online shopping, their experience with online shopping, the types of things they purchase online, and the variables that influence their online shopping behavior. The data was taken by implementing a convenience sampling method and obtaining questionnaire responses via Google survey forms and personal interviews.

V.   REVIEW OF LITERATURE
The Internet has altered many elements of our daily life, including how we interact with banks, read newspapers, and watch television. Even how we purchase and sell goods. This transformation has occurred due to the steady influx of businesses offering new business strategies and innovative formulations (Nicolas, 2010).

Individuals no longer find traditional buying methods enough due to technological advancements. It may be claimed that the Internet has fundamentally altered customers' perceptions of convenience, speed, price, product information, and service. Currently, individuals want simple methods to access brands and retailers. As a result, it has provided marketers with a whole new method for creating customer value and fostering customer connections (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012).

Online shopping is growing in popularity among people, particularly the younger generation. However, for e-marketing to reach the same level of popularity among all age groups, it will need to go a long way. The attitudes of consumers are shifting with time (Bhatt, 2014).

The influence of the Internet on individuals has been significant, particularly in the field of commerce, where consumers are increasingly utilizing the Internet as a novel platform for conducting transactions and procuring products and services. During the nascent phase of e-commerce, the act of purchasing goods and services online was primarily undertaken by individuals with a solid technical background or those with a moderate level of technological literacy (Rahaman, 2014).

Online purchasing is becoming increasingly popular among younger people. People with higher incomes and more outstanding education are increasing their use of e-commerce platforms. People are hesitant to shop online because of security fears. In addition, many are averse to change due to the technological complexity of internet purchasing. Companies engaged in online shopping should prioritize fostering relationships of trust between producers and customers (Kanchan et al., 2015).

The escalating population of internet users and the demonstrated proficiency of developed nations in executing diverse internet-based operations necessitate individuals, commercial establishments, and retailers in developing countries and least developed countries (LDCs), particularly Bangladesh, to adopt a positive outlook towards conducting business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce. This is because the magnitude of B2C e-commerce transactions is consistently increasing annually in the United States and European Union (EU) member states (Uddin & Sultana, 2015).

E-commerce encompasses the process of purchasing goods or services through digital means, including online shopping, whereby consumers can procure products or services directly from a vendor via the Internet. The online shopping concept was first introduced by Michael Aldrich in 1979. The proliferation of e-commerce has prompted traditional retailers to expand their market reach by offering their products on online shopping platforms (Yoganandan & Baskar, 2019).

Sylhet, located in the eastern region of Bangladesh, is home to a significant population that has migrated to various countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The migration of individuals from Sylhet to the United Kingdom represents a noteworthy occurrence within the realm of international migration (Aktar et al., 2019).

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Consumer's Profile Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1.1: Demographic Profile

Demographic Variable	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Age	Upto 20	31	25.8
	21-30	62	51.7
	31-40	22	18.3
	40+	5	4.2
Total		120	100
Demographic Variable	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	42	35
	Female	78	65
	Others	0	0
Total		120	100
Demographic Variable	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Occupation	Student	57	47.5
	Service	26	21.7
	Businessman	22	18.3
	Homemaker	9	7.5
	Unemployed	6	5
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The majority of respondents, accounting for 51.7%, fall within the age range of 21-30, indicating that this age group has a significant presence in online shopping. The next largest group is respondents aged up to 20, comprising 25.8% of the total sample. This suggests that younger individuals also actively participate in online shopping. The age range of 31-40 constitutes 18.3% of the respondents, indicating a moderate engagement with online shopping. The smallest proportion belongs to the 40+ age group, accounting for only 4.2% of the respondents. This data suggests that younger age groups are more likely to engage in online shopping, while the interest wanes among older individuals.

The sample population was predominantly female, constituting 65% of the total respondents, whereas male respondents comprised 35%. None of the participants self-identified as "Other."

Out of the total sample of 120 participants, the most prominent demographic comprises individuals who identify as students, representing 47.5% of the entire population. This implies that students actively participate in online shopping and could substantially impact the broader online consumer market. The respondents who identified as being in public or private service constitute the second-largest demographic, accounting for 21.7% of the sample. Furthermore, it can be observed that 18.3% of the participants in the study are individuals engaged in commerce, suggesting their participation in electronic transactions. The data indicate that a smaller percentage of respondents comprises homemakers (7.5%) and unemployed individuals (5%). Although their engagement in e-commerce may be comparatively limited, it is imperative to consider their distinct requirements and inclinations.

Consumer's Buying Behavior Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1.2: Knew about Online Shopping

Particular	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Knew about Online Shopping	Television and Radio	8	6.7
	Newspapers and Magazines	15	12.5
	Internet	63	52.5
	Family and Friends	34	28.3
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The Internet is the most prevalent source of information about online shopping, with 52.5% of respondents stating that they learned about it through this medium. Family and friends are also influential, as 28.3% of respondents heard about online shopping through word-of-mouth recommendations. Newspapers and magazines accounted for 12.5% of respondents. At the same time, television and radio played a minor role, with only 6.7% of respondents relying on these traditional media outlets for information about online shopping.

Table 1.3: Experience with Online Shopping

Particular	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Experience with Online Shopping	Less than 1 year	21	17.5
	1>3 years	35	29.2
	3>5 years	49	40.8
	More than 5 years	15	12.5
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The results show that most respondents have been engaged in online shopping for a significant period, with 29.2% having experience between 1 and 3 years; and 40.8% having experience between 3 and 5 years. Additionally, 17.5% have been engaged in online shopping for less than a year, while only 12.5% have more than 5 years of experience.

Table 1.4: Types of Products Mostly Purchased Online

Particulars	Total Score	Mean Score	Rank
Groceries and Foods	310	4.84	I
Cosmetics and Healthcare	293	4.43	II
Apparels and Shoes	251	3.98	III
Travel and Hotel Booking	206	3.55	IV
Mobile Accessories	192	3.09	V
Books and Magazines	185	2.64	VI

Source: Primary Data

The result shows the types of products mostly purchased online by using the ranking method based on the mean score. The total score represents the cumulative responses from the respondents. The highest mean score and rank were assigned to "Groceries and Foods," with a total score of 310 and a mean score of 4.84, indicating that it is the most frequently purchased product category online among the respondents. "Cosmetics and Healthcare" ranked second with a mean score of 4.43, followed by "Apparel and Shoes" in the third rank with a mean score of 3.98. "Travel and Hotel Booking" obtained a mean score of 3.55, securing the fourth rank. "Mobile Accessories" received a mean score of 3.09, and "Books and Magazines" had the lowest mean score of 2.64, placing them in the fifth and sixth ranks, respectively. These findings suggest that groceries and foods are highly popular for online purchases.

Consumer's Perception Towards Online Shopping

Table 1.5: Preferable Payment Method

Particular	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Preferable Payment Method	Cash on Delivery	48	40
	Mobile Banking	35	29.2
	Debit Card	25	20.8
	Credit Card	12	10
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The data represents the distribution of preferred payment methods among the respondents in a survey. The sample consisted of 120 individuals who were asked to indicate their preferred payment method. The results indicate that the most significant proportion of respondents (40%) preferred the Cash on Delivery option, followed by Mobile Banking, which 29.2% of the participants favored. Debit Card was the preferred choice for 20.8% of the respondents, while Credit Card was the least favored option, chosen by only 10% of the individuals. These findings suggest that a significant portion of the population still prefers traditional payment methods, such as cash on delivery, while digital payment methods, like mobile banking and debit cards, are also gaining popularity.

Table 1.6: Online Shopping is a Time Savior

Particular	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Online Shopping is a Time Savior	Strongly Disagree	1	0.8
	Disagree	1	0.8
	Neutral	12	10
	Agree	64	51.7
	Strongly Agree	42	36.7
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The data shows the responses from 120 participants who were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "Online Shopping is a Time Savior" using a Likert scale. Most respondents (51.7%) agreed with the statement, with 36.7% strongly agreeing. A smaller percentage of participants (10%) remained neutral, while only a minimal number of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (0.8% each). These results suggest a generally positive perception among the participants regarding online shopping as a time-saving activity.

Table 1.8: Sufficient Product Information is Available

Particular	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Sufficient Product Information is Available	Strongly Disagree	4	3.3
	Disagree	18	15
	Neutral	26	21.7
	Agree	49	40.8
	Strongly Agree	23	19.2
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The data represents the responses of 120 participants who were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "Sufficient Product Information is Available" using a Likert scale. The findings reveal that a significant proportion of respondents (40.8%) agreed with the statement, while 19.2% strongly agreed. On the other hand, 21.7% of participants remained neutral, and a combined 18.3% disagreed with the statement, with 15% disagreeing and 3.3% strongly disagreeing. These results indicate that a considerable number of participants perceive online shopping platforms to provide sufficient product information. However, the presence of neutral and disagreement responses suggests that there is room for improvement in terms of providing comprehensive and informative product details.

Table 1.7: A Diverse Range of Products is Accessible through Online Shopping Platforms

Particular	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
A Diverse Range of Products is Accessible through Online Shopping Platforms	Strongly Disagree	2	1.7
	Disagree	6	5
	Neutral	13	10.8
	Agree	67	55.8
	Strongly Agree	32	26.7
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The provided data presents the responses of 120 participants who were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "A Diverse Range of Products is Accessible through Online Shopping Platforms" using a Likert scale. Most respondents (55.8%) agreed with the statement, with 26.7% strongly agreeing. A smaller percentage of participants (10.8%) remained neutral, while 6.7% disagreed with the statement, with 5% disagreeing and 1.7% strongly disagreeing. These findings indicate that many participants perceive online shopping platforms to offer a diverse range of products.

Table 1.8: Products that are Displayed Online are Accurately Delivered

Particular	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Products that are Displayed Online are Accurately Delivered	Strongly Disagree	3	2.5
	Disagree	18	15
	Neutral	58	48.3
	Agree	32	26.7
	Strongly Agree	9	7.5
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The data reflects the responses of 120 participants who were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "Products that are Displayed Online are Accurately Delivered" using a Likert scale. The results indicate that a majority of participants (48.3%) remained neutral regarding the accuracy of online product delivery. A significant proportion of respondents (26.7%) agreed with the statement, with 7.5% strongly agreeing. However, a considerable number of participants (15%) disagreed with the statement, and 2.5% strongly disagreed. These findings suggest a lack of consensus among the participants regarding the accuracy of product delivery through online platforms.

Table 1.9: Products are Delivered on Time

Particular	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Products are Delivered on Time	Strongly Disagree	4	3.4
	Disagree	16	13.6
	Neutral	34	28.8
	Agree	44	37.3
	Strongly Agree	20	16.9
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The data represents the responses of 120 participants who were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "Products are Delivered on Time" using a Likert scale. The findings indicate that a significant proportion of respondents (37.3%) agreed with the statement, with 16.9% strongly agreeing. A considerable number of participants (28.8%) remained neutral, while a combined 17% disagreed with the statement, with 13.6% disagreeing and 3.4% strongly disagreeing. These results suggest that while a majority of participants have a positive perception of timely product delivery, a notable portion remains uncertain or has experienced delays.

Table 1.10: Defective Products are Easy to Return

Particular	Classifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Defective Products are Easy to Return	Strongly Disagree	18	15.3
	Disagree	44	37.3
	Neutral	32	27.1
	Agree	20	16.1
	Strongly Agree	6	4.2
Total		120	100

Source: Primary Data

The data presented indicates the respondents' perceptions regarding the ease of returning defective products in online shopping using a Likert scale. The majority of respondents expressed disagreement with the statement, with 37.3% disagreeing and 15.3% strongly disagreeing. A substantial portion (27.1%) remained neutral on the issue. Only 16.1% agreed that returning defective products was easy, and a mere 4.2% strongly agreed. These findings suggest that there is a significant level of dissatisfaction among online shoppers when it comes to the return process for defective products.

VII.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

i.   **Improve Awareness:** Online retailers and marketers should focus on raising awareness about online shopping among the population, especially among older individuals who may be less familiar with this mode of shopping. Advertising campaigns, online tutorials, and user-friendly interfaces can help in improving awareness and understanding of online shopping.

ii. **Enhance Security Measures:** To address the security concerns of potential online shoppers, e-commerce platforms should prioritize implementing robust security measures, secure payment gateways, and transparent privacy policies. Building trust and confidence among consumers is crucial for increasing online shopping adoption.

iii. **Offer Diverse Payment Options:** While cash on delivery remains a popular payment method, providing a variety of digital payment options like mobile banking, debit cards, and credit cards can cater to the preferences of different segments of online shoppers. Offering secure and convenient payment options can further encourage online shopping.

iv. **Personalize Shopping Experiences:** Online retailers should invest in technologies that enable personalized shopping experiences for consumers. This can include personalized product recommendations, tailored promotions, and customized user interfaces. Personalization can enhance the overall shopping experience and increase customer satisfaction.

v.   **Simplify the Shopping Process:** Streamlining the online shopping process, from product search to checkout, can improve the user experience and reduce barriers to online shopping. Clear product descriptions, intuitive navigation, and hassle-free checkout processes can provide a seamless online shopping experience.

vi. **Address Logistical Challenges:** Timely delivery and efficient customer service are crucial for online shopping satisfaction. Online retailers should prioritize optimizing their logistical operations to ensure prompt delivery and provide responsive customer support to address any queries or concerns.

Further research can be conducted to explore other factors influencing online shopping behavior in Sylhet, such as price sensitivity, product quality, and the impact of online reviews and ratings. Additionally, conducting comparative studies between online shopping and traditional physical market shopping can provide further insights into consumer behavior and preferences differences.

VIII.   CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide insights into the profile of online shoppers in Sylhet, Bangladesh, and their buying behavior. The majority of online shoppers in Sylhet are young individuals, with the age group of 21-30 being the most active in online shopping. Females constitute a larger proportion of online shoppers compared to males. Students are the largest occupational group engaged in online shopping, followed by individuals in public or private service.

The study also reveals that the Internet is the primary source of information about online shopping for the respondents. Family and friends also play a significant role in influencing online shopping behavior. The majority of respondents have had experience with online shopping for more than a year, indicating a growing familiarity and adoption of this mode of shopping.

In terms of purchasing habits, groceries, and foods are the most frequently purchased product category online, followed by cosmetics and healthcare. Cash on delivery is the preferred payment method among the respondents, although digital payment methods like mobile banking and debit cards are gaining popularity.

Overall, the findings suggest a positive perception of online shopping among the respondents, with a majority agreeing that it is a time-saving option. However, there are still certain factors, like security concerns and technological complexity, that may discourage some individuals from engaging in online shopping.

The results of this study can be valuable for online retailers and marketers in understanding the profile and buying behavior of online shoppers in Sylhet. It can help them tailor their strategies and offerings to better cater to the needs and preferences of the target market.

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