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STARTING E-BUSINESS IN BANGLADESH
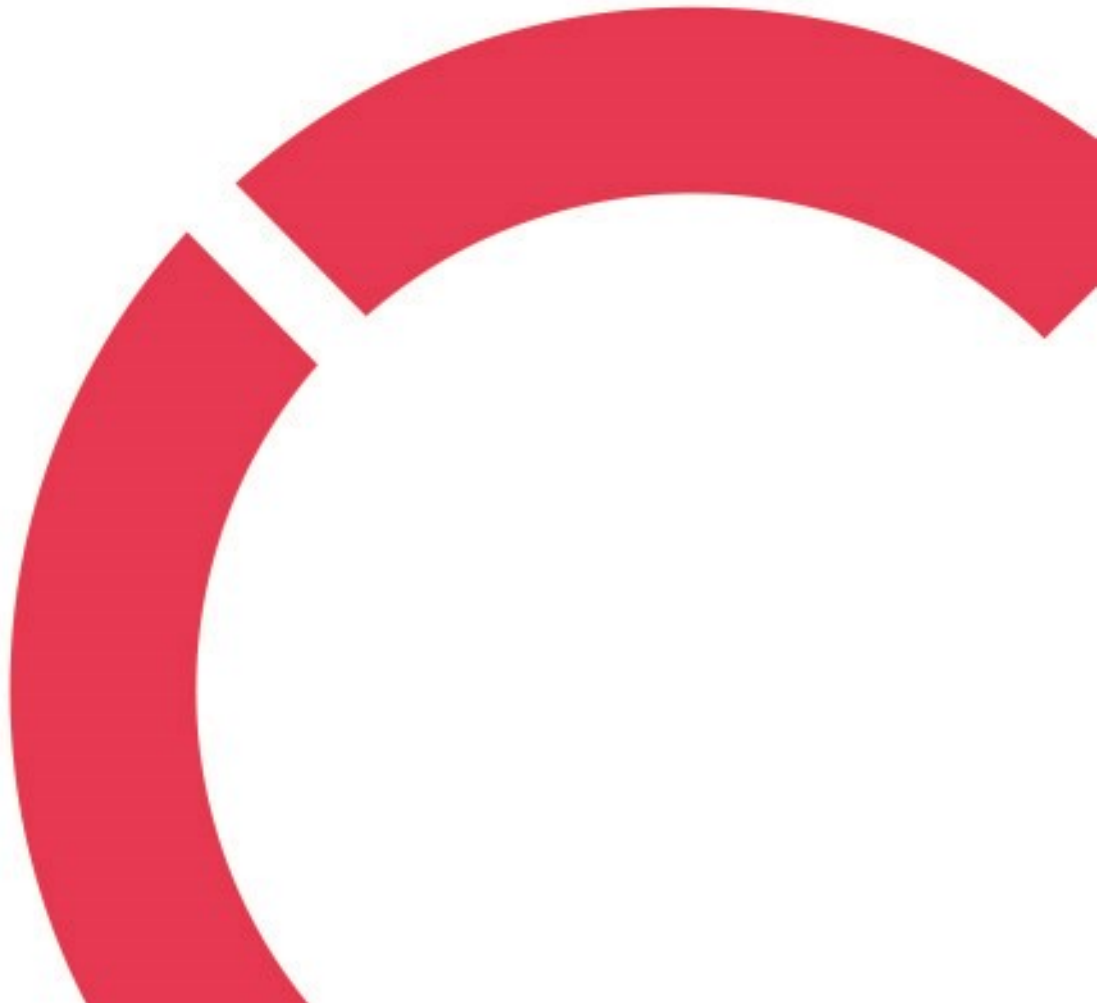
An opportunity for an entrepreneur

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ABSTRACT

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The focus of this thesis was on examining the state of e-commerce in Bangladesh, and the challenges that entrepreneurs seeking to invest in the e-business in the country would face. Also,the study sought to examine the awareness of citizens on e-commerce, as this is critical in projecting the reception of the economy towards e-businesses.

The thesis conducted a quantitative research survey. The quantitative research process involved the administration of questionnaires to respondents. Fifty respondents took part in the study, and they included business people as well as the general public.

The results indicated that Bangladesh has grown significantly since e-commerce was introduced in the country in 2009. Also, the public are not well versed with the laws and policies on e- commerce, which is a challenge to people who would want to start an e-business in the country. The other revelation was that safety and security concerns in using online transactions was affecting adoption of e-commerce in the country.

The thesis recommends that the government addresses some of the concerns that the public and businesses could have regarding e-commerce, and create awareness about the legislation and policies that are supporting application of e- commerce in the country.

CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

E-business

E-business is a broader term that encompasses all aspects of conducting business online. It includes everything from developing an online presence to managing customer relationships and shipping products.

E-commerce

E-commerce refers to the buying and selling of goods and services over the internet. It has become increasingly popular in recent years, as businesses have found that it is a convenient and efficient way to reach a larger number of potential customers.

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1 INTRODUCTION

E-business, also known as electronic business, is the conduct of business processes on the internet. These processes include buying and selling products, servicing customers, and collaborating with business partners. E-business is often used to refer to the online presence of a company or organization. In Bangladesh, there is a growing opportunity for e-business. The country has a population of about 160 million people, and the number of internet users is expected to reach 60 million by the end of 2022 (Brown and Hoque 2022, 5). There are also many opportunities for e-business in Bangladesh due to its relatively low cost of living and lack of infrastructure restrictions. Some reasons why a person might consider starting e-business in Bangladesh include a growing demand for online services in Bangladesh, the country has a large population and limited resources, which makes it easier to sell online, the cost of starting an e-business in Bangladesh is low compared to other countries. Bangladeshi internet users are enthusiastic about new technology that bodes well for the growth of e-business in the country, and Bangladeshi businesses are often willing to partner with foreign companies, making it easier for international e-businesses to enter the market.

The aim of the thesis is to examine the feasibility of starting an e-business in Bangladesh, and the opportunities that exist for entrepreneurs. Subsequently, the research examines the challenges that must be overcome when starting an e-business in Bangladesh. Potential challenges include the low literacy rate in the country that can make it difficult for businesses to reach a wider audience, low levels of established e-commerce infrastructure in the country which makes it difficult for businesses to set up shop online, lack of trust among consumers which can be an obstacle to the growth of e-business in Bangladesh, and the regulatory environment often being complex and difficult to navigate, which can lead to delays in project implementation. Despite these challenges, e-business in Bangladesh is growing rapidly and there are a number of opportunities for businesses of all sizes to enter the market. It is important to carefully consider the risks and rewards associated with starting an e -business in Bangladesh before making a decision, as the country has a lot to offer entrepreneurs looking to launch their business online.

The research objective for the thesis is to investigate whether there are practical policy issues on e-commerce in Bangladesh, e-business infrastructure in Bangladesh, and research peoples' awareness of e-business. The results from the research assist in examining ways in which businesses can get started in the Bangladeshi e-commerce market, including opening an online store on an existing e-commerce platform such as Amazon or eBay and developing an e-commerce website from scratch. Other ways

to start a business in Bangladesh include the opportunities to purchase an existing online business in the country and partnering with a foreign company to help expand the reach of an e-business. The thesis analyses the findings on the research objectives and will make recommendations on the viability of starting e-business in Bangladesh.

The thesis is conducted by applying the quantitative research method. The inclusion of the quantitative research method was the realization that people who anonymously provide information about a topic or issue tend to be honest about their responses. A questionnaire will be administered to randomly selected participants. The survey largely concentrated on security-related issues on e-commerce, e-awareness levels of Bangladeshi citizens, the adequacy of existing policies and laws, and e-readiness factors in the country. The survey is conducted electronically.

The theory part of the thesis involves examination of the e-commerce situation in Bangladesh, and the theories that highlight the necessities in establishing an e-business. Studies that highlight the success probabilities for e-businesses in developing countries, like the diffusion theory, information-retrieval theory, and strategic networking theory, are highlighted as frameworks for insight on how to conduct an e-business effectively. Comparisons are also made on the perceptions of different articles and researches that examined the e-commerce situation in Bangladesh, and the conclusions the studies fronted on the potential of Bangladesh to support e-business.

2 E-COMMERCE

E-commerce, also referred to as internet commerce or electronic commerce, refers to a situation where products and services are sold through the internet (Karim and Qi 2018, 205). In e-commerce, the existing platforms are often used to sell or purchase physical products, but the process of conducting all business transactions using the internet can be termed as e-commerce (Rahman et al. 2020, 5). Some theorists have also argued that the concept of e-commerce is often misunderstood and defined alongside the occupation of an individual or the concepts fitting the focal service or product that is provided through the internet (Hride et al. 2022, 47). For theorists arguing on the misconception of the internet, the definition that they offer is that it denotes all seamless application of communication and information technology from the origin point to endpoint within the value chain of business processes, but conducted electronically to accomplish a business objective (Sultana and Akter 2021, 6). The focus of this definition is that the use of the technology must be to achieve a specified business goal. Also, the business processes where the technology is applied might be complete or partial, and could cover consumer-to-business, business-to-consumer and business-to-business transactions.

2.1 E-commerce concept

The e-commerce concept has been discussed and researched by several theorists and researchers (Billal et al. 2019, p.67). The available literature contains a wide range of research about e-commerce. However, very few such studies are focused on exploring the e-commerce scenario and the suitability of Bangladesh to thrive in online marketing (Abir et al. 2020, 2718). The few writings that emphasize e-commerce in Bangladesh provide general information about e-commerce business in Bangladesh with little focus directed on e-readiness, which is the topmost factor in developing e-commerce in Bangladesh. *"E-Readiness Assessment: Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka"* by P.D. Kaushik (2005) are one of the appropriate pieces of literature relating to the research topic. This writing discussed the overall preparedness of four countries based on e-governance (Kaushik 2005). The article recorded limited information about e-commerce issues even though some facts are relatable to the research objectives. It outlined the great extent of efficiency that the respective government administrations enjoyed due to the adoption of e-governance (Kaushik 2005). However, the data obtained from the article is suspicious due to the time factor when the article was produced, as ICT is a rapidly evolving sector (Kaushik 2005). The author compared the e-readiness scenario in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka,

and India. The enabling factors necessary for e-commerce, according to the findings of this study, include internet affordability, access to the network, internet availability, speed and quality of internet, and software and hardware issues. The issues that the article examined remain valid in the current e-commerce platforms that are used by businesses and consumers (Kaushik, 2005). For instance, the affordability of the internet sustains the accessibility of information about businesses and the online purchase processes. Also, the internet affordability would determine internet availability (Kaushik, 2005). Additionally, the hardware that a person has can determine the accessibility to the internet, and the alignment of the hardware to support specific software can assist the user to access various e-commerce technology or applications (Kaushik, 2005). Given this, the issues raised by the article are valid to the current e-commerce application, despite having been written approximately two decades ago.

The efficiency of e-commerce platforms and how they are applied formed the discussion in Hossin Sarker, Xiaohua, and Frimpong (2018) article, where they gave their perspective on e-commerce from the findings of their study, which notes that e-commerce is a perfect platform of business for traders who deliver the expected quality to the customers and maintain a high level of innovation (Hossin et al. 2018). Therefore, according to the research findings, e-commerce offers sufficient incentive for aggressive competition in the market, which results in quality services to people (Hossin et al. 2018). The assertion implies that the lifestyle of people who reside in countries that depend more on online business is relatively high compared to physical retail stores where competition is low and hence flooded by substandard goods (Hossin et al. 2018). The argument is that e-commerce narrows the gap between large and small businesses; therefore, the only competitive factor is merchants' unique utility in the market (Billal et al. 2019, p.68). Consequently, the developed countries that have businesses and consumers adopting e-commerce applications would have citizens with better social and economic welfare compared to people living in the developing countries who are yet to accommodate the application of e-commerce in business transactions (Hossin et al. 2018). The correlation that the article makes between e-commerce and better welfare for businesses and consumers stresses the need for Bangladesh to advance its integration of e-commerce to the economy, through legislative agenda and awareness creation of the benefits associated to e-commerce.

The discussion and recommendations made by Hossin et al. (2018) are supported by Bosu et al.'s (2019) article. According to Bosu et al. (2019), the development of e-commerce in any economy can increase the convenience, effectiveness, and efficiency of the businesses and transactions between consumers and sellers in the economy. Bosu et al. (2019) argue that appropriate e-commerce focuses

on electronic commerce management, reconfiguring the purchasing process, sales promotion, timely delivery of ordered goods and services, strengthening business solutions, ethics, and new electronic communication between businesses. The article mentioned several business models but maintained that e-commerce is the most revolutionary and modern business model (Bosu et al. 2019). The model has developed rapidly since 2012 after the new generation of communication software like Google, Facebook, and Twitter, among other social media platforms. Other aspects that have advanced the capacity of e-commerce to improve the frequency of transactions is the development of e-wallet technology, that the article considers as having a revolutionary effect in the adoption and transformation of e-commerce (Bosu et al. 2019). Bangladesh benefits from a series of e-wallet platforms where individuals can store their money and use it to purchase products and services online. The ease of making online transactions fits within the argument fronted by Bosu et al. (2019) that e-commerce is the most revolutionary business model.

Hasan and Huda (2013) argued why e-commerce, especially the business-to-business model, has rapidly grown and thrives well in the most adopted economies. Cost efficiency on inventories, sales promotion, purchasing, and intangibles like banking costs is the primary reason for the high growth of electronic commerce (Hasan and Huda 2013). If an individual is to walk to a retail store for shopping, they incur an extra cost that makes the overall prices of goods higher. E-commerce minimizes costs for both the retailer and customer and is convenient for both parties (Hasan and Huda 2013). This means that Bangladesh has a high probability that online businesses succeed because it makes goods cheaper than what the customers spend in physical retail stores.

Other communication types also occur within internet platforms alongside commercial data transactions, which leads us to assume that e-commerce is the most significant technological accomplishment of modern times (Al Amin et al. 2020, 7). Concisely, e-commerce has broken the delays due to boundaries and time as it facilitates electronic data communication between two or more terminals for commercial transactions regardless of the geographical location (Islam 2018, 13). From a careful point of view, e-commerce has been a powerful industrial revolution ever since the beginning of the world, significantly influencing human behavior regarding corporate transactions (Rahman et al. 2020, 6). E-commerce is productively rising due to its cost savings and efficiency benefits among traders, where it is a tool used to make online innovations that appear impossible to happen (Sahel et al. 2018, 3). Therefore, its hesitance to develop modern companies operated through technology will automatically disqualify the global market. Coupled with innovation, e-commerce will take over the business platform in Bangladesh in the next half a century, and physical retail risks total extinction.

2.2 E-commerce in Bangladesh

The e-commerce sector in Bangladesh is a new development compared to other countries in the third world and developed countries. The electronic business technology merged in Bangladesh approximately two decades ago and has faced significant growth due to the increasing digital population (Sultana and Akter 2021, 7). It was enrolled officially in 2009 through a system developed by one of the banks that allowed online payments within the country. This advancement received a significant boost in 2013, when the government organized an e-commerce week, e-commerce fair, and international credit card powered by the Bangladesh Bank (Hride et al. 2022, 47). It was during such interventions that many problems regarding e-commerce were resolved. The term is more than the literal meaning that people associate with it. Many people think that buying and selling things over the internet is the practice as it happens over Bikory.com and OLX.bd (Amjad et al. 2021, 48). It is a broad term that arouses many questions regarding why people should embrace it in their businesses (Mahmud and Ahmed, 2019). It indirectly transforms business practices where small and large businesses have equal opportunities over the global market based on their ability to maintain an innovative high edge.

2.2.1 E-commerce growth

Bangladesh is considered as one of the vibrant economies in Asia because of the large number of small and medium enterprises and the growth of e-commerce (Rahman et al. 2020, 2). The country has a significant number of mobile money transfer platforms that have expanded the accessibility to financial services across the rural regions (Hride et al. 2022, 46). Also, the involvement of more people in economic productivity has increased the purchasing power of citizens. The heightened investment on technological infrastructure by the government and the private sector is another factor that boosts the growth of e-commerce in the country (Karim and Qi 2018, 203). Another aspect that generates the hype on e-commerce in the country is the engagement by most Bangladeshi in social media platforms where they get to know the technological developments in other countries and the economic opportunities existing in e-commerce (Sultana and Akter 2021, 4). Similarly, the ease of information accessibility on the internet has allowed most Bangladeshi to understand how best to apply the e-commerce tools and opportunities for economic benefits (Islam 2018, 10). Given this, the expectation is that

Bangladesh will have a high demand for e-commerce business, and entrepreneurs and investors can innovate ways of introducing e-commerce capabilities in their businesses.

Bangladesh has several e-commerce companies that have expanded in their scope and reach since 2015 (Al Amin et al. 2020, 7). However, most of the e-commerce companies operate in Dhaka city, and they have not existed for many years. The projection is that the existence of e-commerce companies indicates a positive sign, and a signal that the sector will grow in the future (Islam 2018, 13). Compared to the situation around the world, the globe experiences a virtual networked world within the natural world in the context of technological advancement. IoT has proved to be an essential asset in business development and success as it drives most aspects of business and customer choice (Sultana and Akter 2021, 6). Some scholars have identified the erupting virtual world due to the aggressive and consistent intervention of technology as the "Sixth World" ((Sahel et al. 2018, 1). This new world is characterized by the ready availability of vast information that flows fast. For instance, today, it is possible for a musician to roll out a new album, and it will be available in all forms to the various parts of the world through websites, YouTube, and other social media platforms (Islam and Eva, 2019). The effect extends beyond the benefits to the music producer, to the consumers who desire such products.

2.2.2 E-commerce analysis in the country

On their part, Al Amin and Bhuiyan (2010), who worked with a framework for the successful implementation of e-commerce in Bangladesh, encouraged the application of an online business model for businesses that want to strategically position themselves in the market. According to the framework that the authors developed, Bangladesh is still far yet on the right track regarding the performance of e-commerce (Al Amin and Bhuiyan 2010). The writing did not fully estimate the country's preparedness to implement online business models. However, the authors revealed that Bangladesh is not left out in implementing the e-commerce business. The projection of the article was that Bangladesh is the most appropriate country for implementing online companies, especially for those new entrants due to low competition. Online traders can grow and match the international standards concerning quality and website building with time (Al Amin and Bhuiyan 2010). While the article was written several years back, its input on the need for Bangladesh to establish itself on the e-commerce industry resonates with the focus of this study, where one of the objectives is to examine the understanding by citizens on e-commerce opportunities in the country.

The other factor that could contribute to the expectation that e-commerce in Bangladesh could be rising is the interest that people have on technological advancements in various sectors (Rahman et al. 2020, 3). The telecommunication sector has witnessed a desire by customers to purchase higher product specifications on tablets, phones, and laptops (Al Amin et al. 2020, 5). The urge for knowledge on technological application offers entrepreneurs who would seek to venture into the e-commerce business platform ready potential consumers that they can target in establishing a market share and a competitive advantage in their respective sectors (Karim and Qi 2018, 204). Also, the introduction of international businesses that incorporate e-commerce in their business operations pushes local businesses to accommodate the application of e-commerce practices in their activities (Sultana and Akter 2021, 5). The net effect is a country that has the technological infrastructure to support e-commerce business, potential customers that can be tapped in creating demand for e-commerce products, and a government that has shown a goodwill to facilitate and support the growth of e-commerce in Bangladesh.

2.3 Factors determining the success of e-commerce

One of the issues is the importance of a country to have legislation that supports the establishment of e-commerce infrastructure (Kabir et al. 2020, 24). A lack of supportive legislation might render the introduction of various e-commerce practices like online transaction as illegal ventures that might result in serving jail terms or receiving hefty fines from the judicial system. The legislative agenda is initiated and supported by the government (Hride et al. 2022, 50). Given this, for Bangladesh to advance on its e-commerce processes, the government must ensure that there is legislative framework that supports the introduction of various e-commerce ventures (Abir et al. 2020, 2722). Investors would make their investments or introduce their ventures in a country that has predictable outcomes on dispute resolution, especially those that could warrant seeking judicial intervention. The existence of a legislative framework can act as a confidence boost for e-commerce investors like Amazon and IBM, whose services are essential in broadening the scope of e-commerce in the country.

The other issue that arises is the necessity for the populace to understand the existence of e-commerce opportunities. Where businesses integrate their processes with e-commerce services, the benefits that could accrue would be experienced when consumers utilize the processes when dealing with the business (Hride et al. 2022, 51). For instance, where a business has invested in enabling online purchase of its commodities, and there is no reception from the targeted consumers, the investment would be considered as not ideal, or a loss to the business (Abir et al. 2020, 2722). Most businesses who consider

venturing into the e-commerce platforms because of the lack of adoption by the targeted market would fail to expand their business processes on e-commerce platforms (Billal et al. 2019, p.70). Given this, the progress of e-commerce in a country would depreciate or fail to kick off as would be the expectation considering the advancement in global technology. Consequently, it is critical to understand the knowledge of e-commerce by Bangladeshi citizens if the research seeks to provide recommendations on the establishment of an e-commerce business in the country.

Studies suggest that a supportive infrastructure is a necessity for the advancement of e-commerce (Kabir et al. 2020, 32). Consumers in the economy must have the necessary hardware and software to exploit e-commerce opportunities, and businesses must have the infrastructure through government investment in cable networks or partnering with the private sector to improve technological infrastructure (Kabir et al. 2020, 27). Apart from the involvement of the government, the introduction of various packages by financial institutions that allow individuals to store their funds or transfer funds from the bank to e-wallets can be supportive in sustaining the use of e-commerce in business transactions (Billal et al. 2019, p.72). Collectively, a series of issues emerge that would assist the researcher in identifying how best Bangladesh can exploit e-commerce in its economy. Also, the input from the review gives guidance on the concepts to examine or consider when conducting the discussion on the viability of starting an e-commerce business in Bangladesh.

2.4 E-business

E-business or online business is an essential requirement in the corporate sector as it offers an opportunity for an uninterrupted system of business that is less dependent on human physical behaviors (Al Amin et al. 2020, 8). The difference between e-commerce and e-business is that e-commerce refers to the buying and selling of goods and services over the internet, while e-business is a broader term that encompasses all aspects of conducting business online and includes everything from developing an online presence to managing customer relationships and shipping products (Al Amin and Bhuiyan 2019, 122). E-business is essential in the sustainability of modern economies. For example, the economy of Bangladesh and the rest of the world would not have contracted to the extent that was experienced if there were not a well-structured online business that connected various parts of the world (Islam 2018, 14). The focus of this research will be integral in assessing Bangladesh's preparedness to implement e-commerce strategies and the possibility of such a business thriving. Electronic commerce has grown in

developed countries like China, the United States, Canada, and Australia (Islam 2018, 14). However, many third-world countries have realized its effectiveness is on the lookout to implement it for the transformation of their economies.

Bangladesh has made significant progress in implementing online business systems in the recent past, reflected through its influence in the business arena and economy (Kabir et al. 2020, 17). Its rising need is making it the most appropriate form of business as the modern generation prefers online shopping compared to physical retail stores due to the comfort and convenience (Laisuzzaman et al., 2010). The government interventions favor this emerging trend in formulating suitable policies for implementation (Sahel et al. 2018, 8). Bangladesh does not have an alternative rather than adopting online businesses because the internet population is increasing and reaching all the dimensions of our lives from all global corners (Santoso et al., 2019). Therefore, its hesitance to develop modern companies operated through technology will automatically disqualify it in the global market. Even the country's citizens will create a better taste for commodities from other parts of the world due to access to a variety and range of flexible prices.

Currently, Bangladesh's e-commerce market is small because the technology is just emerging, and many merchants have not yet come to terms with the benefits of electronic commerce (Karim and Qi 2018, 206). Even though there is sufficient evidence that the number of online shoppers is increasing consistently in this country, it may take some years to develop a fully cooperative online market population (Sultana and Akter 2021, 7). The government can achieve this with less ease because e-commerce is acceptable to all residents of Bangladesh (Billal et al. 2019, p.53). The scope of e-commerce is also broader than people imagine as it does not only include the buying and purchasing of goods online but also integrates intra-company and inter-company transactions (Sahel et al. 2018, 6). For instance, manufacturing, marketing, negotiations, and transactions are among some activities that are also dependent on e-commerce.

The successful implementation of e-business depends on an effective plan to eliminate the barriers that affect the development process. Many scholars have outlined these as one of the significant concerns to trigger growth in online business. Alam (2007) classified the barriers that should be eliminated to enable the implementation of e-commerce, including strategy barriers, policy barriers, technology barriers, and organizational barriers. When these are effectively eliminated, the trader can adopt a four-stage maturity model: web presence where the entrepreneur should provide a reliable and convenient website for the products (Alam 2007). The second stage is interaction which enables product seekers

to be in touch with the sellers to agree on the terms of sales and make purchase contracts. The third stage is a transaction, where the seller and buyer finally make the purchase agreement, and payment is made. Despite the recommendations made on the benefits associated with e-commerce to businesses, the efficiency of the sector depends on enabling government policies, electronic security, peoples' participation, and beneficiaries' awareness. The final stage of the proposed model by Alam (2007) is transformation, where society accepts e-commerce and changes the code of behavior concerning business conduct. When this is achieved, the integration of a country's business operations can be considered as conducive for the implementation of e-commerce processes.

3 E-COMMERCE THEORIES

Researchers have developed various theories and conceptual frameworks in discussing e-commerce and how it manifests in the business environment (Al Amin et al. 2020, 9). One of the older theories that have been used by researchers to understand e-commerce and its application is the transaction cost theory.

3.1 Transaction cost theory

According to economists, transactions in a business environment can be classified in two categories. The first category is the market transactions, and they facilitate the coordination between sellers and buyers. The second category are the transactions that support internal coordination of the firm's processes (Billal et al. 2019, p.55). Figure 1 below showcases how hierarchy in a typical market would exist as it progresses from the manufacturer, who does the value addition to raw materials; to the wholesaler, who takes the final products from the manufacturer; to the retailer; and finally, to the consumer.
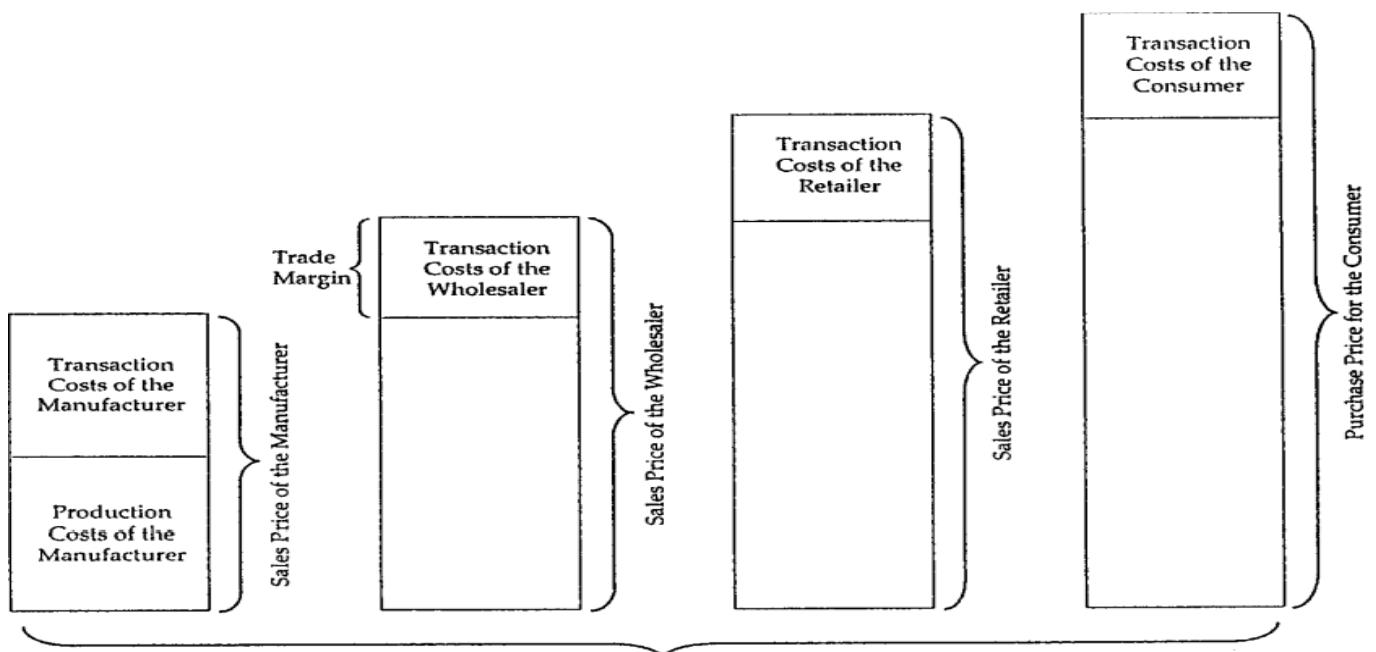
FIGURE 1. Hierarchy in a typical market (Adapted from Wolf 1997, 8)

Figure 1 above also details the associated transaction costs, where the transaction choice would depend on several factors that include the interests of the parties in completing the transaction, the asset specificity, and existing uncertainty and ambiguity in transaction description. After ascertaining the transaction costs, they can be further divided into coordination and production costs (Karim and Qi 2018, 207). In the above example, the coordination costs refer to the transaction costs in form of governance costs of processing the information necessary in facilitating the operationalization of the machines and people that are conducting the primary processes. Transaction costs could be viewed as the importance of friction in a physical system, whose variation of friction can impede the occurrence of movement (Abir et al. 2020, 2717). The suggestion in this case is that where the transaction costs are high, there would be little economic activity that would be occurring in the market. The transaction costs can manifest themselves in different ways, like adaptation costs, contracting costs, search costs, and monitoring costs.

Adaptation costs are a form of transaction costs that are incurred when making changes during a contract's life (Amjad et al. 2021, 49). Monitoring costs, on the other hand, refers to costs of ensuring that the contractual terms are met. On contracting costs, they are the costs hat businesses incur in setting up and following through with a contract, and search costs are the costs of searching for buyers, sellers, and products and services (Al Amin et al. 2020, 10). Businesses will opt for transactions that offer economy on coordination costs.

With the inception of technology and its rapid continuation on adoption in the global market and performance improvement, the costs incurred in coordinating transactions significantly declines, which supports the nurturing of innovative coordination transactions for business needs (Hride et al. 2022, 48). The figure above suggests that using information technology can assist in saving on transaction costs. The reduction in the costs is not specific to one group in the value and supply chain, but to all stakeholders in the market (Billal et al. 2019, p.55). The other significant attribute is that there is the possibility of removing the various hierarchical levels in the market, where the manufacturer deals with the wholesaler, and the wholesaler with the retailer, and the retailer with the consumer (Sultana and Akter 2021, 8). As with the case with Amazon and other companies like Tesla, Inc., the middleman is eliminated from the dealings between the manufacturer and the consumer. Where there are cheap coordinative transactions, a proportional shift in the economic activity in various sectors will occur as entrepreneurs and startups consider investing in electronic communication channels to limit their operational costs.

3.2 Market orientation

Market orientation is another concept used in the discussion of e-commerce and its applicability in the market. Marketing efforts are premised on the assumption that there a specific consumer audience exists (Karim and Qi 2018, 207). Consumers are not limited to individuals, as they could be firms that are dependent on the products or services of other industries or sectors. The three main orientation foci are the profit orientation, product orientation, and customer orientation. Product orientation operates under the assumption that the targeted consumer will appreciate and recognize products and services for their superior merit (Billal et al. 2019, p.57). Subsequently, consumers will bestow patronage to the firms based on the assigned merit. Economists indicate that a profit orientation will manifest itself through clear service and product identification that establishes a difference in products by the high profitability levels to a business, and the high demand witnessed from customers on the same product (Hride et al. 2022, 48). Consumer orientation, on the other hand, is the conduct pattern and attitude of customers, and the extent that a company determines the wants and needs of consumers and delivers on those wants and needs.

Businesses must form an understanding and a hypothesis about the potential and present customers to maximize their outcome in the market. Consequently, the business must examine the issues that affects consumer behavior (Hride et al. 2022, 49). The next hypothesis is on the channels that can be used to reach customers, which in this case refers to the publications, advertisement, the use of the internet, and face-to-face advertisement. Other considerations include the understanding of the strength or degree for the product or service's desire or need, and appropriate arguments or appeals that the potential customers are most responsive (Amjad et al. 2021, 51). The above considerations will inform the type of marketing strategy that would be taken up by a business in the market. Upon responding to the mentioned considerations, a business will proceed to select and identify the consumer type that the management chooses to learn and cultivate the requirements of the business (Karim and Qi 2018, 208). The business will then design products and services that it can bring to the market to conform to the selected customer's desires. Subsequently, the management will persuade the customer to acquire the product.

Other aspects that can facilitate the demonstration of the business's capacity to produce a product that meets the identified client's needs include the storage and display of the products (Sultana and Akter 2021, 8). Throughout the process of product design, acquisition of the technology necessary for the

production of the identified product, to the decisions on the quantity of the product to be produced, businesses can benefit significantly from the information generation capabilities of e-commerce (Billal et al. 2019, p.57). E-commerce will offer direct linkages between the targeted consumer and the business. For instance, the social media platforms where most potential consumers spend a considerable time of their daily routines would provide data that can be acted upon by business in the identification of consumers' needs and wants (Abir et al. 2020, 2719). The liquid marketing concept used by researchers in discussing the fusion between technology, businesses, and the targeted consumer, can facilitate the development of a relationship marketing attribute between the firm and potential consumers (Amjad et al. 2021, 52). Firms can suggest the e-commerce purchase capabilities of their websites as a marketing front to attract customers to their products, given the ease of product acquisition and responsive attributes of the business to deliver purchased products in time.

3.3 Diffusion theory

Diffusion is another theoretical concept used in the discussion of e-commerce and its application by modern businesses (Al Amin et al. 2020, 10). In the marketing arena, diffusion refers to the social process of communicating an innovation using specific channels over time within individuals or social system members. In this thesis, the diffusion concept would mean the capacity by businesses to communicate their intentions to targeted consumers within a shared network, which would operate as a social system (Sultana and Akter 2021, 9). The shared network in this case is the social media platform that the business seeks to use as a communication platform. Researchers have indicated that the electronic data interchange (EDI) through the web or internet acts as a time-sensitive and speed-enabled means of communication effectively through electric diffusion between customers and businesses (Billal et al. 2019, p.58). The diffusion rate is dependent on the innovation characteristics of the platform used by the business, like the compatibility of the network, the observability and relative advantage realized by the business, and the complexity of the platform to provide various options of establishing a stable and durable communication relationship between potential customers and the business.

Proponents of the diffusion theory in the applicability of e-commerce in businesses argue that the communication channel that a business has chosen can determine the possibility of establishing a successful linkage between the business and the potential consumer (Amjad et al. 2021, 53). The assumption made above is pegged on the principle that successful and ideal communication will occur in

settings that enable a face-to-face applicability (Billal et al. 2019, p.59). Social media substitutes the necessity for face-to-face communication through provision of an active engagement between the targeted audience and the business. For instance, where a business makes a post on a particular product in its social media platform, other users of the platform can begin engaging in the post by asking questions or making comments that might require replies by the social media manager of the said business (Sultana and Akter 2021, 9). The impact that the continued engagement of posts and replies provides a substitution from traditional marketing processes that depended upon face-to-face communication, which signals the entrenchment of e-commerce to how business operate in the modern era (Billal et al. 2019, p.60). Consequently, e-commerce facilitates the process of integrating information from the business to the market by supporting the dissemination of information through diffusion between the management and the targeted consumer.

3.4 Information retrieval theory

Information retrieval is another theoretical concept used in the understanding of e-commerce and its applicability in the global market. Theorists encouraging the adoption of digital technology, specifically cloud computing capabilities, discuss the challenges that businesses face with information retrieval stored in central databases (Amjad et al. 2021, 53). According to theorists advancing the information retrieval capacities of e-commerce, several companies' databases can be accessed online (Karim and Qi 2018, 209). Subsequently, companies felt that the ease of accessibility of their data would limit the competitive advantage that the businesses might possess. Given this, most businesses began to establish encryption technology on their documents or other data pieces on how they operate (Billal et al. 2019, p.61). The accessibility of company information for most businesses is dependent on the policy that the businesses use. For instance, where a policy exists that mandates publicising information like the annual financial reports to shareholders, businesses would ensure that the information is easily accessed through online platforms (Hride et al. 2022, 49). However, where the publicity provisions lack, businesses will tend to limit the knowledge of company's content without authorization. Subsequently, it would be inappropriate to consider the ease of information retrieval in the current technological environment as offering ease of company information accessibility.

Several studies have indicated the application of data mining by businesses as a mechanism of establishing a competitive advantage in most industries or sectors (Abir et al. 2020, 2722), especially where

the knowledge of industry or consumer trends can inform technological advancement or other investment inputs that a business might require to sustain its operations in a sector (Sultana and Akter 2021, 10). Social media platforms and search engine platforms can indicate to businesses the desires of potential customers, depending on what they comment about products or services in online platforms, or the type of words or phrases searched by people in a specific region (Billal et al. 2019, p.63). Some platforms source the information and sells it to businesses or other entities that might require such data for their operations, which cements the suggestion that information retrieval is one of the concepts that dictates the applicability of e-commerce in a business environment.

3.5 Strategic networking

Strategic networking is the other theoretical concept applied in academia when discussing e-commerce and its applicability. Strategic networking encompasses the ability to retrieve information, the diffusion of information, the market orientation concept, and the transaction cost theory (Billal et al. 2019, p.64). Each of the mentioned concepts in the above paragraphs denote the importance of e-commerce. However, the application of the knowledge retrieved from the concepts to develop a competitive advantage for businesses is a critical concept in understanding e-commerce (Abir et al. 2020, 2724). Traditionally, social networks have been considered as organizations, individuals, social communities, political affiliations, and social systems that provide beneficial aspects to individuals within the social ecosystem (Sultana and Akter 2021, 10). In the current context, the strategic networking aspect is understood based on the economic benefits that a business can receive from the application of e-commerce aspects in its operations (Kabir et al. 2020, 19). For instance, the alignment of a business with specific social media influencers, or celebrities who have significant following on social media platforms, or other e-commerce technological producers who innovate services and products that businesses can apply, are some of the strategic networking aspects examined in e-commerce.

Businesses with strategic networking attributes understand how best to exploit the technological possibilities in e-commerce to position themselves for higher accessibility by customers (Billal et al. 2019, p.65). For instance, whenever internet users search a specific product or service online, the results would direct them to the company's website or articles. The intention is to flood the internet platform with information about the company that can be leveraged in establishing a competitive advantage over other businesses (Karim and Qi 2018, 210). Some of the successful multinationals in various sectors have implemented this concept with significant benefits. For instance, Amazon benefits from

the information available online on researches conducted on its operations, reviews made on its approach to business, and analysis on the viability of various internet-enabled services that it uses (Sultana and Akter 2021, 11). The benefit to the company is multi-fold, where it benefits from the marketing aspect, critique aspect, and understanding of what the targeted or potential consumer thinks about the company's products. The numerous reviews assist the company to plan effectively and position itself to satisfy the needs and wants of consumers.

4 THE STUDY

The theoretical part of the thesis analysed the state of e-commerce in Bangladesh, some of the success factors of e-commerce, the theoretical underpinnings of e-commerce as an excellent dynamic in the business space, and the concept of e-business and its revolutionary effect in society. However, the reviewed literature lacked content on the conditions within Bangladesh that would enable an e-business to thrive. Additionally, the literature did not address some of the critical components of a business environment that can ensure success of an e-business. Consequently, the thesis offers insight on the elements like government policies, the popularity of e-commerce in Bangladesh, potential challenges, risk factors, and acceptance levels of e-business by Bangladeshi people. In completing this quest, a quantitative study will be conducted where 50 respondents were randomly sampled. A questionnaire is then administered to the respondents, where some of the examined issues are the e-readiness factors, security-related issues, e-commerce awareness levels, and the adequacy of existing policies and laws.

4.1 Quantitative research method

In completing this study, the thesis writer used a quantitative research method. The method was used because of the perception developed in the approach to the study of respondents or participants providing honest opinions of the questions asked within the questionnaire. The study used online survey methods in collecting the primary data for analysis. The researcher used questionnaires as the primary method of collecting the quantitative data. The questions posed to the respondents were those directly related to responding to the issues highlighted in the research objectives and research questions. The researcher felt the need of categorizing the questions according to different themes. After developing the questionnaire, the researcher transferred the questions to Google Forms. Google Forms sent the questions to the prospective respondents and the researcher received emailed responses for the survey.

The reason behind the choice of Google Forms was that it was cost-effective and convenient. Most of the respondents targeted by the survey are individuals that the researcher felt were technologically endowed and had means of accessing gadgets, or owned gadgets that would facilitate the completion of the questions asked in the questionnaire. Modern research has transformed the method of administering questionnaires by utilizing the vast options available through technology. Also, the majority of people in Bangladesh spend a considerable part of their daily schedule on the internet, which made the

choice of Google Forms appropriate. One of the benefits of incorporating technology in data collection is that the respondent can participate promptly in the survey.

4.2 Sampling

The researcher used purposive random sampling in segmenting and choosing the respondents for the study. The number of participants who took part in the study was 50, (n = 50). Purposive random sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher relies on his own judgment in choosing people to participate in the study (Klar and Leeper 2019, 420). Klar and Leeper (2019, 421) adds that the intention under purposive random sampling is not to select units randomly from a population, but develop a sample that can assist in making generalizations. The populations that the researcher sought to include in the study were the Bangladesh citizens, and members of the business community. Given this, the researcher identified a pool of members of the business community that could take part in the study, and randomly selected participants from the pool. Similarly, the researcher identified members of the public who were eligible to take part in the study because of their citizenship to Bangladesh, and randomly selected respondents from the pool.

Summarily, the respondents selected by the researcher were individuals whose responses could offer a generalization about the position that the business community and the Bangladeshi people hold on e-commerce and its application in the country. Additionally, the responses from the selected individuals from each pool would offer an understanding of the business community and citizens about the existence of various e-commerce platforms, and the process of starting an e-commerce business within the country. The data received was critical in enabling the researcher to develop the thesis recommendations.

4.3 Validity and reliability

The researcher ensured that the process of collecting data and documenting the responses was reliable. The reliability aspect in conducting research refers to the accuracy of the information that is received from the respondents (Mueller and Knapp 2018, 397). Upon completing the questionaires sent through Google Forms, the researcher retrieved the data and categorized the information according to the selected themes noted in the research objectives. The reliability aspect was also considered when

developing the questionnaire and its capacity to provide data that would guide the researcher in responding to the research questions.

The validity aspect, on the other hand, refers to the consideration on whether the data received from the questionnaires administered examined the research objectives set out in the study (Mueller and Knapp 2018, 397). In some cases, a researcher might identify issues to be examined in a study, but fail to ask questions that would respond to the issues that the study sought (Mueller and Knapp 2018, 398). The questions asked in this study were responsive in providing the responses that would assist the researcher to develop an analysis on the e-commerce situation in Bangladesh, and the capacity of the industry to offer more business opportunities that could be exploited by Bangladeshi citizens. Another aspect that the research objective sought to examine is the process of starting an e-business in Bangladesh, and the qualitative data received provided a framework of identifying the process of beginning an e-business in the country, and the challenges that start-ups must address.

4.4 Ethical considerations

In every professional or academic study, ethical standards are essential in maintaining dignity and ensuring professionalism in the research process. There are several ethical considerations that must be considered when conducting research. Perhaps the most important according to Hasan et al. (2021, 1) is informed consent, which means that participants must be fully informed about what they will be asked to do and what the risks and benefits of participating are. Hancock et al. (2020, 89) adds that the participants must also be given the opportunity to ask questions and withdraw from the study at any time.

Hancock et al. (2020, 90) explains that confidentiality is also important in research. This means that information collected must not be shared with anyone other than the participants involved in the study, unless they have given their consent to do so (Hancock et al. 2020, 90). In addition, researchers must take measures to protect the identities of any vulnerable populations, such as children or those who may be subject to discrimination (Hasan et al. 2020, 2). Finally, researchers must always ensure that their research is conducted in a responsible way, meaning taking into account the environmental and social impact of their work, as well as the potential harm that may be caused to participants or innocent bystanders (Hasan et al. 2021, 3). Hasan et al. (2021, 3) argues that by following these guidelines,

researchers can ensure that their research is ethically sound and meets all of the ethical expectations of a research process.

In this study, the researcher completed the research process through strict adherence to ethical guidelines relating to literary studies. The researcher has provided a copy of the questionnaire administered to the respondents in the Appendix section, and not copies of how the respondents replied to the questions asked. The process of maintaining integrity in the research process was extended to the data collection process. For instance, as the researcher collected data from respondents, high integrity was maintained by ensuring that personal opinions were limited, and facts were presented for analysis. Furthermore, integrity was also applied in providing that the sources of information were only involved in the manner authorized by the authors. Given this, the researcher did not apply the data from secondary sources to establish or support a personal agenda regarding the research topic. Every data relied upon from secondary research was used according to the context from which it was borrowed. Consequently, the research results are relevant and will guide making practical recommendations for future implementation.

5 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results and analysis section examines the results from the study conducted and analyses the data respective to the research objectives and questions. The quantitative data shall be analysed. The objective under this section is to provide a thematic analysis of the data. The data was collected through an online survey of the business community and overall residents of Bangladesh to reinforce information obtained from the existing literature and the grey sources. The process took place in April 2022, and the duration for data collection extended for a month to wait for responses from the randomly selected participants. As earlier stated, 50 participants took part in the study. The collected data was analysed to find out the realities and features of e-commerce in Bangladesh, such as the scenario, e-readiness factors, security-related issues, e-commerce awareness level, and adequacy of policies and laws. Each of the mentioned areas are analysed thematically in different sub-chapters.

## 5.1 Participants and gender composition

The study surveyed 50 participants. The participants were randomly sampled. The researcher sought to understand the age composition of the respondents, and as displayed in Table 1 below, the respondents were aged between 18 years and 62 years. The majority of the respondents were aged between 22 and 34 years. The table below indicates the spread of the respondents by age.

TABLE 1: Age distribution of the respondents (n=50)
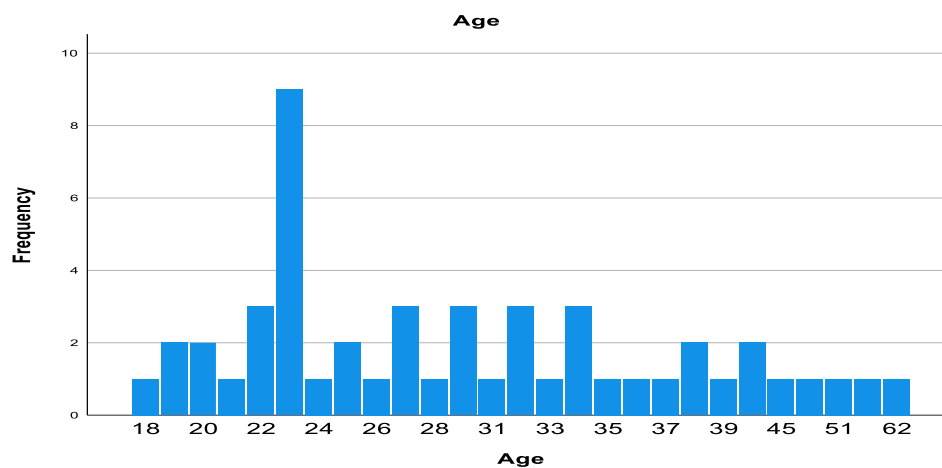
The other aspect that the researcher sought to know was the gender composition of the respondents, which informed the first question in the questionnaire. The respondents were 60 percent male and 40 percent female as displayed in Table 2 below. The study had 30 male respondents and 20 female respondents.

TABLE 2: Gender of the respondents
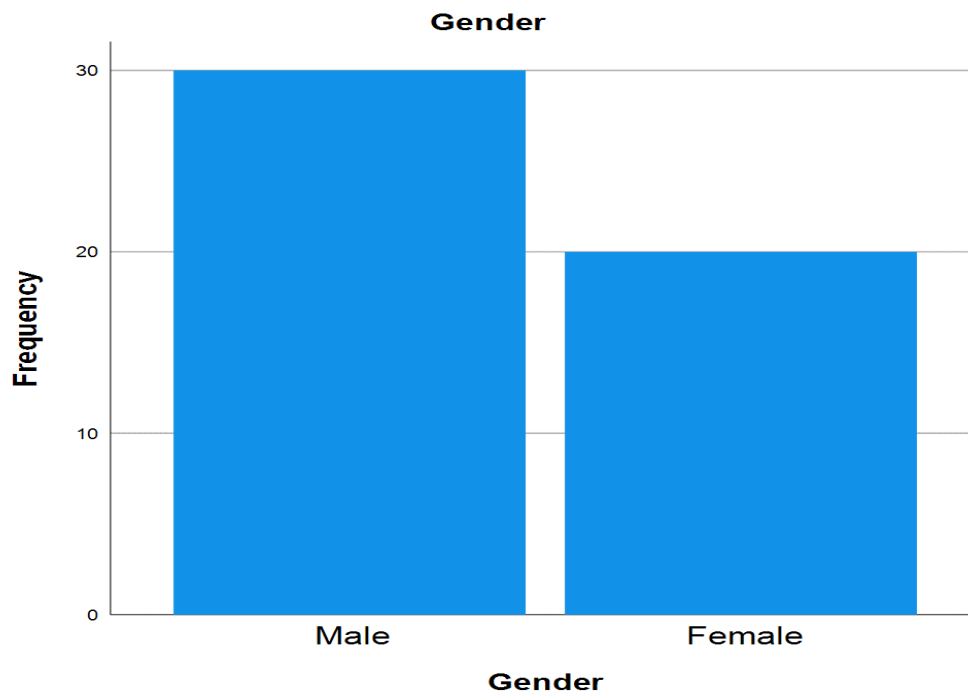
5.2 E-readiness factors

One of the research objectives was to determine the e-readiness of Bangladesh to supporting e-commerce activities. Given this, questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 sought to examine different aspects of e-readiness of a country to e-commerce. In question 2, where the respondents were asked, "Do you know about e-commerce and its applications in Bangladesh?" the focus of the researcher was in understanding the recognition of the locals on e-commerce. The results were that over 80 percent of the respondents indicated that they knew about e-commerce, and less than 15-percent stated that they did not know e-commerce. Table 3 below displays the results on the respondents' understanding of e-commerce and its application.

TABLE 3: Respondents' understanding of e-commerce and its application
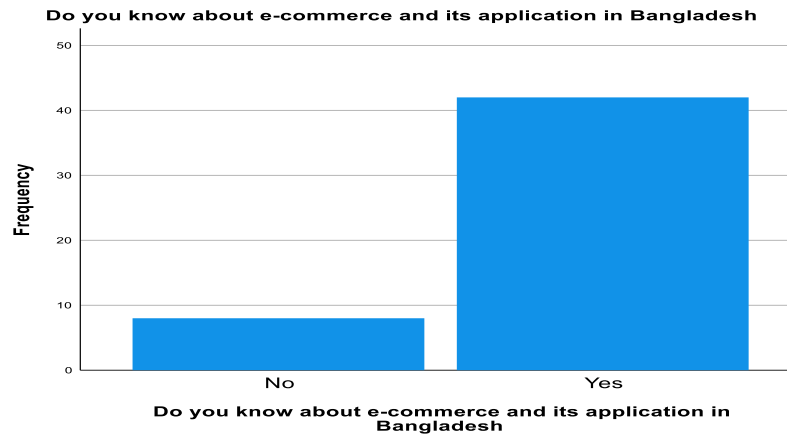
The other aspect that would indicate the readiness of the country in supporting e-commerce was the existence of necessary infrastructure like the technological infrastructure, e-commerce applications, and hardware and software in the public and private sector (Hride et al. 2022, 52). However, these elements largely depend on government initiatives. When the respondents were asked about their perception on the government doing enough to ensure e-readiness of the country through infrastructural development that supports e-commerce in Statement 3, which stated, "The government has established the necessary infrastructure to support e-commerce," 50 percent of the respondents agreed that the government had done enough, while 10 percent disagreed. The other respondents were either very strongly agreeing or very strongly disagreeing, or undecided on the issue. Table 4 below shows the spread of the respondents on the issue.

TABLE 4: Government establishment of infrastructure to support e-commerce
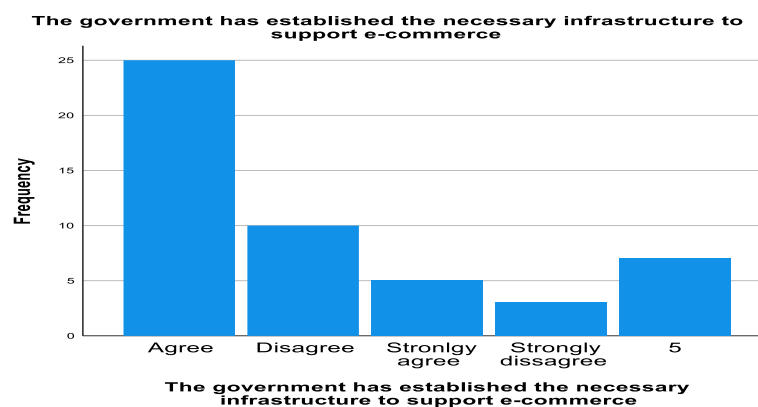
The other variable that the researcher felt useful in understanding the e-readiness of the country was the existence of laws or policies that support e-commerce application in Bangladesh. The existence of the laws or policies would encourage people to accommodate e-commerce, and the knowledge by citizens on the existence of such policies and laws would be a boost to the realization of the objective by the policy and lawmakers in establishing the regulations. Given this, the researcher introduced question 4 that required the respondents to indicate whether they knew of any laws or policies that support e-commerce in Bangladesh. 80-percent of the respondents stated that they knew of the existence of policies and laws that support e-commerce. 20-percent of the respondents replied in the negative. The researcher went ahead to introduce question 5, which sought the perspective of the respondents on whether they considered the existing laws as sufficient in supporting e-commerce in the country, and 60 percent of the respondents felt that the laws and policies were enough, and 40-percent felt that they were not enough.

## 5.3 Security-related issues

The next concern in the research objectives was the security-related issues on e-commerce that could impede the operationalization of e-commerce businesses in a country. The researcher sought to understand the position of the respondents on this issue through questions 6, 7, 8, and 9. The responses to question 6, where the researcher asked, "How secure is it to complete online money transfer or purchase commodities online?" were significantly varied, as displayed in the Table 5 below. 40-percent of the respondents felt that it was secure to purchase goods and services online, 20-percent felt that it was insecure, 20-percent stated that it was very insecure, another 10-percent stated that it was very secure, and 10-percent of the respondents were undecided on the issue.

TABLE 5: Safety in completing online money transfer in purchase of commodities online
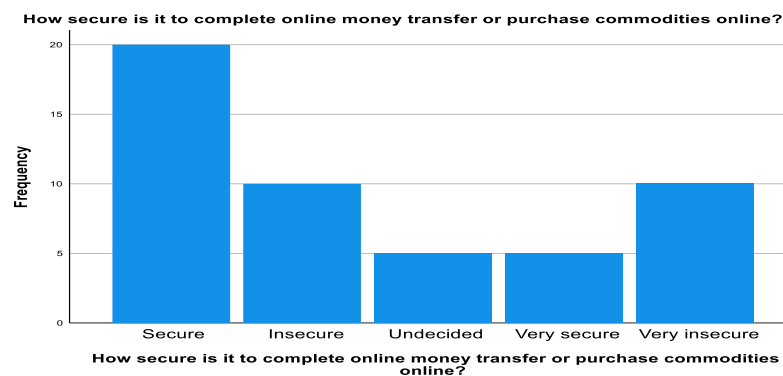
On question 7, where the questionnaire asked, "Have you ever purchased a commodity or service through a website or other online platform?" 60-percent of the respondents stated that they had purchased commodities online and completed online transactions, and 40-percent stated that they were yet to complete any online transaction in purchase of commodities. The individuals who answered in the positive on question 7 were asked in question 8 about their experiences in completing online purchase of commodities, and the results are indicated in Table 6 below. Question 8 asked, "If yes in (7) above, what was the experience?" 70-percent of the respondents who had completed online transaction in purchase of products and services stated that the experience was excellent, 10-percent felt very good, 10-percent stated that they had a bad experience.

TABLE 6: Experience after using e-commerce in the purchase of commodities
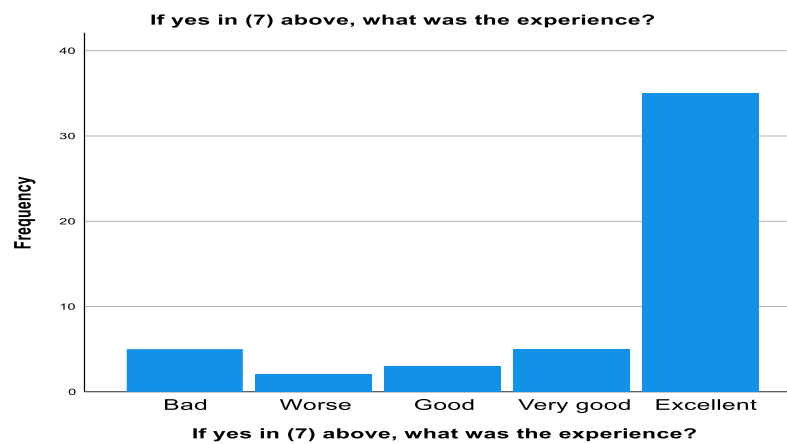

The researcher proceeded to ask the whole respondents in question 9 whether they would purchase a product or service online, and the response was evenly divided, with 50-percent stating that they would make an online purchase of products, and 50-percent responding in the negative.

5.4 E-commerce awareness level

The awareness of the public on e-commerce was another concern that the researcher felt necessary to examine in understanding the viability of starting an e-business in Bangladesh. Some of the factors that would promote the understanding of the readiness of the country to support e-business included the likelihood of people to purchase commodities online, whether individuals who have businesses would incorporate e-commerce services in their businesses, and the understanding on how to start an

e-business in Bangladesh. Subsequently, the researcher introduced questions 10, 11, and 12. In question 10, the intention was to understand whether the entrepreneurs in Bangladesh would consider introducing e-commerce in their business. The results indicated that 80-percent of entrepreneurs in Bangladesh would introduce e-commerce services in their business operations, and 20-percent responded in the negative. Also, the researcher sought to know whether the respondents understood the requirements in starting an e-business in the country, which informed the existence of question 11. The intention of the question was to gauge the knowledge by the populace on the necessities in starting an e-business. 80-percent stated that they lacked information on the requirements in starting an e-business in the country. 20-percent responded in the positive, stating that they knew what was required to begin an e-business in Bangladesh. Additionally, the researcher sought to know whether information accessibility on starting e-business in Bangladesh was easy. Given this, question 12 was introduced, and it asked, "How easy is it to get information about starting an e-business in Bangladesh?" The responses were varied, as tabulated in the Table 7 below.

TABLE 7: Ease of getting information about starting e-business in Bangladesh
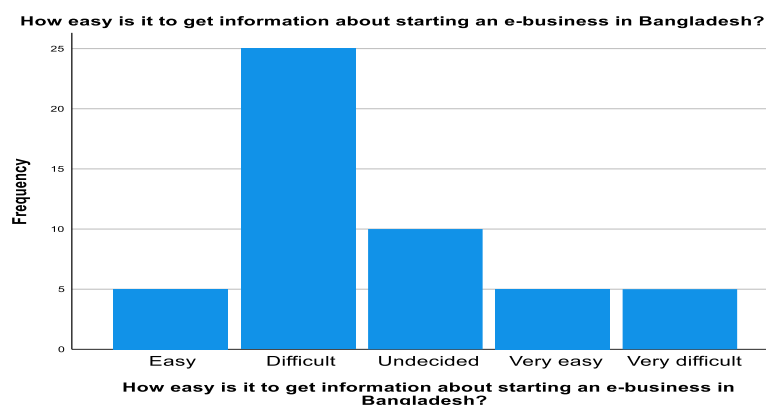
As indicated in Table 7, 50-percent stated that it was difficult to access information on starting e-business in the country. 10-percent of the respondents stated that it was easy, and 20-percent were undecided on the issue.

5.5 Adequacy of policies and laws

Adequacy of laws and policies that can support e-commerce in a country was another theme that the researcher sought to examine in Bangladesh, which necessitated the existence of question 13 in the

questionnaire, "Is Bangladesh ready to accommodate e-commerce?" The responses were varied from the respondents, as indicated in Table 8 below.

TABLE 8: Readiness of Bangladesh to accommodate e-commerce
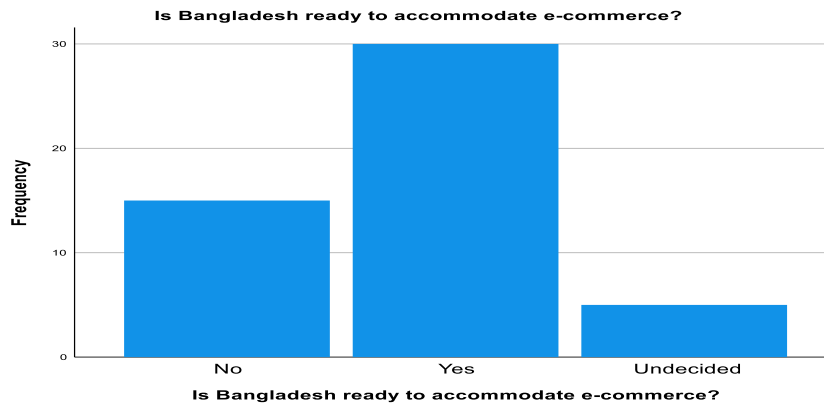
As seen in Table 8 above, 60-percent of the respondents felt that the country was ready to accommodate e-commerce, and 30-percent felt the country was not ready. 10-percent of the respondents were undecided on the issue.

5.6 Analysis

IoT has proved to be an essential asset in business development and success as it drives most aspects of business and customer choice. Some scholars have identified the erupting virtual world due to aggressive and consistent intervention of technology as having a revolutionary effect to modern businesses. The present business environment is characterized by the ready availability of vast information that flows fast. One of the benefits of the advancement in technology is the presence of social media platforms. Various types of communication take place through the internet alongside commercial data transactions, which leads us to assume that e-commerce is the most significant technological accomplishment of modern times. Concisely, e-commerce has broken the delays due to boundaries and time as it facilitates electronic data communication between two or more terminals for commercial transactions regardless of the geographical location.

Bangladesh offers an example of a developing country that desires to improve the incorporation of technology in its operations. As indicated by the responses in the study, the country has laws and policies that guide the application of e-commerce activities. However, the impact of the policies is not

as broad and expansive as would be the case in other developed countries. E-commerce has been a powerful industrial revolution since its inception, significantly influencing human behaviours regarding corporate transactions. Additionally, e-commerce is productively rising due to its cost savings and efficiency benefits among traders, where it is a tool used to make innovations that appear impossible to happen. Also, electronic commerce changes people's social life, including their world outlook and methodology. Coupled with innovation, e-commerce will take over the business platform in Bangladesh in the next half a century, and physical retail risks total extinction. Researchers have indicated that e-commerce is one of the most revolutionary elements in the era of the digital economy to the economies that are serious in enhancing their business environment. Given this, Bangladeshi government must establish ways that it can expand its application of e-commerce and make it acceptable to the public.

As has been indicated, Bangladesh would not have an alternative rather than adopting online businesses because the internet population is increasing and reaching all the dimensions of our lives from all global corners. Some of the studies that have been examined by the researcher indicated that Bangladesh has expanded its application of e-commerce in several sectors. The expansion on the application of e-commerce in several sectors has encouraged investors to engage in the development of technology. For instance, the finance sector has allowed the existence of several ways of making online transactions and facilitating the transfer of funds to e-wallets. Despite the above mentioned, some studies have offered criticism to the readiness of Bangladesh to accommodating e-commerce. One of the issues has been mentioned is the hesitance to develop modern companies operated through technology. The researchers argue that the reduced investment in infrastructural development in technology will automatically disqualify them from the global market. Examined studies have indicated that in instances where this holds true, even the country's citizens will create a better taste for commodities from other parts of the world due to access to a variety and range of flexible prices. Subsequently, the desire for the locals to consume local products would wane, and the introduction of new e-commerce businesses might not receive the required demand effect for sustainability.

The e-commerce market of Bangladesh is small because the technology is just emerging, and many merchants have not come to terms with the benefits of electronic commerce. Even though there is sufficient evidence that the number of online shoppers is increasing consistently in Bangladesh, the projection made is that it can take some years to develop a fully cooperative online market population. The government must be involved in the process of ensuring this growth, and the results from the respondents indicate that the government is required to do more. However, studies that the researcher

examined showed a possibility of achieving this objective because e-commerce is acceptable to all residents of Bangladesh. The other indicator is that the scope of e-commerce is also broader than studies might project, as it does not only include the buying and purchasing of goods online but also integrates intra-company and inter-company transactions.

On the state of e-commerce in Bangladesh, the electronic business technology was introduced in the country approximately two decades ago. The studies also indicate that since its introduction, e-commerce has faced significant growth due to the increasing digital population. A majority of the studies have also indicated that e-commerce was enrolled officially in 2009 through a system developed by one of the banks that allowed online payments within the country. Other banks adopted the approach, and the country presently has several financial institutions that enable the transfer of funds from individual accounts to e-wallets. The development in the financial sector received a significant boost in 2013, when the government organized an e-commerce week, e-commerce fair, and international credit card powered by the Bangladesh Bank. During the e-commerce fair and week, many discoveries regarding e-commerce were made. Some of the policies on e-commerce were also introduced and legislative agenda initiated to enable the progression of e-commerce businesses in the country.

The understanding of how e-commerce has progressed in Bangladesh can best be understood through the application of the sector in other developed countries. In countries like Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and France, e-commerce has significantly grown. In Asia-Pacific, the infrastructural development in the developing countries contributes to the advancement in e-commerce. Additionally, the business models used in the developed countries support the integration of the multinational processes and e-commerce services. The studies have also indicated that third-world countries that have realized its effectiveness are on the lookout to implement it for the transformation of their economies. The studies showed that Bangladesh has made significant progress in implementing online business systems in the recent past, reflected through its influence in the business arena and economy. The rising need for e-commerce is making it the most appropriate form of business as the modern generation prefers online shopping compared to physical retail stores due to the comfort and convenience. The government interventions favour this emerging trend in formulating suitable policies for implementation.

While the quantitative data from the respondents has been useful in gauging the position of e-commerce in the country, the lack of information on how to start e-business makes it challenging for potential entrepreneurs to understand how to operate their businesses using e-commerce processes in

ways that would not place them at loggerheads with the government. The respondents also indicated that getting information about e-commerce policies and laws is difficult, meaning that the government must endeavour to create awareness to the public on mechanisms of improving the efficiency of their businesses through e-commerce. Using trade fairs, exhibitions, and e-commerce weeks, as was the case in 2013, can be one of the ways that the Bangladeshi government can improve the reception of e-commerce in the country. Also, people will understand how best to integrate their businesses with emerging technologies to compete against new businesses that are introduced in the country from other regions.

Another observation from the research was that very few such studies are focused on exploring the e-commerce scenario and the suitability of Bangladesh to thrive in online marketing. The few writings that emphasize e-commerce in Bangladesh provide general information about e-commerce business in Bangladesh with little focus directed on e-readiness, which is the topmost factor in developing e-commerce in Bangladesh. Several studies on Bangladesh discuss the overall preparedness of the country alongside other countries based on e-governance. The articles examined recorded limited information about e-commerce issues even though some facts are relatable to the research objectives in this research. For instance, the studies outlined the great extent of efficiency that the respective government administrations enjoyed due to the adoption of e-governance. The enabling factors necessary for e-commerce, according to the findings of this study, include internet affordability, access to the network, internet availability, speed and quality of internet, and software and hardware issues.

Some studies examined noted that e-commerce is a better platform of business for traders who delivers the expected quality to the customers and maintain a high level of innovation. According to the studies, e-commerce offers sufficient incentive for aggressive competition in the market. Where there is competition in service delivery in the market, the quality of products and services increases significantly, which is beneficial to consumers. For Bangladesh, this is critical in offering a competitive advantage over other companies in the region. Other studies that the researcher examined showed a correlation between the welfare of individuals living in a country with the ease of doing business. The other correlation was on the association of e-commerce and boosting the financial revenue of people, which could be a need for Bangladesh. One of the studies argued that the government should consider e-commerce as an opportunity to improve people's welfare and for economic empowerment. When the researcher asked the respondents if they would include e-commerce services in their businesses, the majority of the respondents replied in the affirmative, indicating that the public is aware of the opportunities that exist in e-commerce and would accommodate its incorporation in business processes.

One of the issues that emerged from the responses was the security aspect in making payments through online platforms. A significant number of the respondents indicated that they would not complete financial transactions through online platforms, which displays a concern by Bangladeshi citizens in making online purchases. Demand for products and services is one of the necessities for success in any business venture and having several people indicating that they would not be appreciative of completing online transactions makes it challenging for any investor who would consider starting an e-business in the country. The other explanation could be that the local processes of e-commerce does not inspire hope or encourage locals to make online purchases, since companies like Amazon have showed that they have received demands for products from Bangladesh, where the only mechanism of completing transaction was through e-wallet. Given this, the government must establish ways of protecting online transactions from encroachment by criminal entities, as this impedes the advancement of e-commerce in the country.

From this research, a series of issues and conclusions have been made by the researcher. First, Bangladesh has a public that is welcoming to the existence of e-commerce. Second, e-commerce has an effect in improving the lifestyle and welfare of individuals. People residing in countries that depend on online business have a relatively high welfare compared to countries where the physical retail stores are dependent on traditional mechanisms of doing businesses. The other benefit that e-commerce provides is that it enhances competition between businesses, which improves the quality of products and services to consumers. Where competition is low, there is domination by few companies. Also, the environment allows for the flooding of the economy by substandard goods. E-commerce narrows the gap between large and small businesses; therefore, the only competitive factor Is the merchants' unique utility in the market.

Third, the Bangladeshi government must support the development of e-commerce in the economy to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and convenience. Appropriate e-commerce focuses on electronic commerce management, reconfiguring the purchasing process, sales promotion, timely delivery of ordered goods and services, strengthening business solutions, ethics, and new electronic communication between businesses. While there are several business models that have been applied in other economies with significant success, for developing countries, e-commerce is the most revolutionary and modern business model. In Bangladesh, the model has developed rapidly in the past decade after the new generation of communication software like Google, Facebook, and Twitter, among other social media platforms entering the economy.

Fourth, as indicated in most of the studies, e-commerce, especially the business-to-business model, has rapidly grown and thrives well in most adopted economies. Cost efficiency on inventories, sales promotion, purchasing, and intangibles like banking costs is the primary reason for the high growth of electronic commerce. When an individual is to walk to a retail store for shopping, they incur an extra cost that makes the overall prices of goods higher. E-commerce minimizes costs for both the retailer and customer and is convenient for both parties. Given this, Bangladesh has a high probability that online businesses succeed because it makes goods cheaper than the customers spend in physical retail stores. Also, the welfare of the locals will significantly improve with the increase in profit-making businesses in the country.

The fifth observation from the study is that Bangladesh is still far yet on the right track regarding the performance of e-commerce. The country has significant potential and preparedness to implement online business models. The partnership between the government and the private sector can enhance the speed that the country could have in incorporating e-commerce in its processes. As has been suggested by some of the studies, Bangladesh is the most appropriate country in the Asia Pacific for implementing online companies, especially for those new entrants because of the low competition on e-commerce. Online traders can grow and match the international standards concerning quality and website building with time. Consequently, the government must act with speed to establish the necessary infrastructural development and initiate partnerships that can assist in the progression of e-commerce in the country. For businesses that are coming up, incorporation of e-commerce services can be a significant boost in the profitability of their businesses.

Given the above, the researcher makes the following recommendations. The researcher argues that the barriers that should be eliminated to enable the implementation of e-commerce in Bangladesh include strategy barriers, policy barriers, technology barriers, and organizational barriers. When these barriers are removed, businesses in Bangladesh can adopt a four-stage maturity model that has been argued by some of the studies as the pathway for business to succeed through e-commerce. The first stage is the web presence, where the entrepreneur should provide a reliable and convenient website for the products. The second stage is interaction which enables product seekers to be in touch with the sellers to agree on the terms of sales and make purchase contracts. The third stage is a transaction, where the seller and buyer finally make the purchase agreement, and payment is made. The final stage is transformation, where society accepts e-commerce and changes the code of behaviour concerning business

conduct. Bangladeshi citizens seeking to start an e-business would be best guided using the proposed model.

6 CONCLUSION

Technological advancement has introduced various capabilities in the conduct of business through e-commerce. Unlike in the past where business transactions and the sales of goods and services depended on the physical availability of buyers and sellers in the market, current advancement in technology allows businesses to sell their products virtually and buyers to purchase such products and services through online completion of the transaction process. While the developed countries have accommodated the practice of e-commerce in their transactions, developing countries like Bangladesh are beginning to appreciate the viability and benefits of e-commerce. The aim of the research was to examine the processes of starting an e-business in Bangladesh, and some of the concerns that would apply to Bangladeshi that might negatively impact their capacity to appreciate businesses that incorporate e-commerce in their operations. Some of the concerns included the safety or security in completing online transactions, the knowledge on how to start an e-business, and the laws and policies that support e-commerce in the country.

The results that the researcher received from the respondents was insightful in understanding the position of e-commerce in Bangladesh. Some of the factors that would promote the understanding of the readiness of the country to support e-business included the likelihood of people to purchase commodities online, whether individuals who have businesses would incorporate e-commerce services in their businesses, and the understanding on how to start an e-business in Bangladesh. The other concern is the security-related issues on e-commerce that could impede the operationalization of e-commerce businesses in a country. The existence of the laws or policies would encourage people to accommodate e-commerce, and the knowledge by citizens on the existence of such policies and laws would be a boost to the realization of the objective by the policy and lawmakers in establishing the regulations.

The other aspect that would indicate the readiness of the country in supporting e-commerce was the existence of necessary infrastructure like the technological infrastructure, e-commerce applications, and hardware and software in the public and private sector. However, these elements largely depend on government initiatives. Lack of supportive legislation might render the introduction of various e-commerce practices like online transaction as illegal ventures that might result in serving jail terms or receiving hefty fines from the judicial system. The legislative agenda is initiated and supported by the government. Given this, for Bangladesh to advance on its e-commerce processes, the government must

ensure that there is a legislative framework that supports the introduction of various e-commerce ventures. Investors would make their investments or introduce their ventures in a country that has predictable outcomes on dispute resolution, especially those that could warrant seeking judicial intervention.

As indicated by the research, successful implementation of e-business depends on an effective plan to eliminate the barriers that affect the development process. Most studies that the researcher examined stated that e-commerce is one of the factors that can trigger economic growth in economies. Other studies stated that online businesses have become a significant contributor to the improvement of societal welfare in some economies.

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APPENDIX 1
Questionnaire

<p align="center">Starting e-business in Bangladesh</p>

1. I am
- o Female
- o Male
- o Other

2. Do you know about e-commerce and its applications in Bangladesh?
- o Yes
- o No

3. The government has established the necessary infrastructure to support e-commerce.
- o Agree
- o Disagree
- o Undecided
- o Strongly agree
- o Strongly Disagree

4. Do you know of any laws or policies that support e-commerce in Bangladesh?
- o Yes
- o No

5. Are the existing laws and policies sufficient in supporting e-commerce in the country?
- o Yes
- o No

6. How secure is it to complete online money transfer or purchase commodities online?
- o Secure
- o Insecure
- o Undecided
- o Very secure
- o Very insecure

7. Have you ever purchased a commodity or service through a website or other online platforms?
- o Yes
- o No

8. If yes in (7) above, what was the experience?
- o Bad
- o Worse
- o Good
- o Very good
- o Excellent

9. Would you purchase a product or service online?
- o Yes
- o No

10. If you had a business, would you incorporate e-commerce in your operations?
- o Yes
- o No

11. Do you understand the requirements in starting an e-business in Bangladesh?

    o Yes
    o No

12. How easy is it to get information about starting an e-business in Bangladesh?
    o Easy
    o Difficult
    o Undecided
    o Very easy
    o Very difficult

13. Is Bangladesh ready to accommodate e-commerce?
    o Yes
    o No
    o Undecided

14. Please provide your e-mail for a chance to win a coupon.