

## **THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF ONLINE SHOPPING SYSTEMS FOR MICRO-ENTREPRENEURS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### ***Abstract***

*This study examines the adverse effects of online shopping systems on micro-entrepreneurs from a phenomenological perspective. As e-commerce platforms expand, micro-entrepreneurs face significant challenges that threaten their survival and growth. Through in-depth interviews and analysis of lived experiences, this research uncovers the multifaceted impact of online shopping systems on these small business owners. Key findings highlight increased competition, reduced profit margins, and the loss of direct customer relationships. Additionally, the study reveals how the technological and logistical demands of e-commerce can overwhelm micro-entrepreneurs who lack the resources and expertise to adapt. The findings suggest that while online shopping systems offer opportunities for broader market access, they also create barriers that can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities within this business segment. By exploring these challenges through a phenomenological lens, this research provides a deeper understanding of the personal and professional struggles micro-entrepreneurs face in the digital marketplace. The study calls for more supportive measures and tailored solutions to help micro-entrepreneurs navigate the complexities of online commerce, ensuring their sustainability and contribution to the economy.*

***Keywords: negative impacts, online shopping, micro-entrepreneurs***

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The rapid expansion of online shopping systems has significantly transformed the retail landscape, offering unprecedented convenience and access to a broad array of consumer products and services. This digital revolution has not only reshaped consumer behavior but has also opened new avenues for businesses of all sizes to reach a global audience. E-commerce platforms, such as Amazon, Alibaba, and Etsy, have become integral to the modern economy, driving substantial growth in the retail sector and enabling seamless cross-border transactions (Sharma & Anurag, 2024). Despite these advancements, the proliferation of online shopping systems has introduced a set of complex challenges, particularly for micro-entrepreneurs. Micro-entrepreneurs, defined as small business owners with minimal capital and limited workforce, often rely on personal resources and local networks to sustain their operations. These entrepreneurs are vital to local economies, fostering innovation, providing employment opportunities, and contributing to community development. However, the shift towards digital marketplaces has created a highly competitive environment where micro-entrepreneurs struggle to maintain their foothold.

One of the most significant challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs is the

intensified competition from larger, more established businesses. These larger entities can leverage economies of scale, advanced technology, and sophisticated marketing strategies to dominate the online market (Garai-Fodor et al., 2022). In contrast, micro-entrepreneurs often lack the resources and expertise to compete effectively. The digital divide exacerbates this issue, as access to technology and digital literacy varies widely among small business owners. Consequently, micro-entrepreneurs may find themselves at a disadvantage, unable to fully exploit the benefits of e-commerce. The logistical demands of managing an online business further complicate the situation for micro-entrepreneurs. Online shopping systems require efficient inventory management, reliable shipping solutions, and effective customer service areas where micro-entrepreneurs may lack experience and infrastructure. The complexity of digital payment systems and the need for cybersecurity measures add additional layers of difficulty. As a result, the operational burdens can overwhelm micro-entrepreneurs, leading to reduced profit margins and compromised business sustainability.

Furthermore, the shift to online platforms often results in the loss of direct customer relationships, which are crucial for micro-entrepreneurs. Personal connections and community engagement are foundational to the success of many small businesses (Abu Alia et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023). The impersonal nature of online transactions can erode customer loyalty and reduce the ability of micro-entrepreneurs to differentiate themselves through personalized service. This disconnect can be particularly detrimental in niche markets where customer relationships are paramount.

While a considerable body of research has explored the advantages of e-commerce for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), there is a notable lack of studies focusing specifically on the negative impacts of online shopping systems on micro-entrepreneurs. The existing literature often emphasizes the benefits of digital marketplaces, such as increased market access and scalability, without adequately addressing the unique challenges faced by the smallest business operators. This gap in the research leaves a critical aspect of the digital economy underexplored and underserved. The limited studies that do address the experiences of micro-entrepreneurs in the context of e-commerce tend to provide a generalized overview, lacking the depth and nuance required to understand the specific difficulties these entrepreneurs encounter. Additionally, the perspective of micro-entrepreneurs themselves is often underrepresented, with much of the research relying on quantitative data that may not fully capture the lived experiences and subjective challenges faced by these individuals.

To guide this investigation, the study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the primary challenges that micro-entrepreneurs face when integrating

their businesses into online shopping systems?

2. How do online shopping systems impact the profitability and sustainability of micro-entrepreneurial ventures from a phenomenological perspective?

The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on e-commerce and small business management by highlighting the unique challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs. This research will provide valuable insights for policymakers, business support organizations, and technology developers, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and supportive measures to help micro-entrepreneurs navigate the complexities of online commerce. By addressing the specific needs of micro-entrepreneurs, stakeholders can develop tailored solutions that enhance their competitiveness and sustainability in the digital economy. Moreover, this study will underscore the importance of considering diverse perspectives in the discourse on digital transformation. By amplifying the voices of micro-entrepreneurs, it will advocate for a more inclusive approach to e-commerce development, ensuring that the benefits of digital marketplaces are accessible to businesses of all sizes. The research will also inform future studies, providing a foundation for further exploration of the intersection between technology and micro-entrepreneurship.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The evolution of e-commerce has transformed the retail landscape, bringing both opportunities and challenges for businesses. Early research on e-commerce highlighted the potential for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to access broader markets, reduce operational costs, and enhance customer engagement through digital platforms (Cassia & Magno, 2022; Maslichah & Nur Diana, 2022). E-commerce was initially perceived as a democratizing force, enabling smaller businesses to compete with larger, established firms by leveraging the internet's vast reach. However, as the digital marketplace has matured, it has become evident that the benefits of e-commerce are not uniformly distributed, with micro-entrepreneurs facing distinct challenges.

The concept of micro-entrepreneurship refers to individuals who run very small businesses, often with limited capital and resources. These entrepreneurs play a vital role in local economies, driving innovation and providing employment opportunities (Adefare et al., 2024; Lingappa et al., 2024). Despite their importance, micro-entrepreneurs often encounter significant barriers when attempting to integrate their businesses into online shopping systems. Research has shown that one of the primary challenges is the intense competition from larger firms that can exploit economies of scale and advanced technological capabilities.

Micro-entrepreneurs typically lack the financial resources to invest in sophisticated e-commerce infrastructure. While larger firms can afford state-of-the-art

websites, robust cybersecurity measures, and comprehensive digital marketing campaigns, micro-entrepreneurs often operate on shoestring budgets (Akouwerabou et al., 2022; Datta, 2023; Löwy, 2022). This disparity creates a competitive imbalance, making it difficult for micro-entrepreneurs to attract and retain customers in the digital marketplace. Furthermore, the cost of maintaining an online presence, including website development, hosting fees, and online advertising, can be prohibitively expensive for micro-entrepreneurs. Technological barriers also pose a significant challenge for micro-entrepreneurs. Many micro-entrepreneurs do not possess the technical expertise required to manage e-commerce platforms effectively. The digital divide, characterized by disparities in access to technology and digital literacy, exacerbates this issue. Research indicates that micro-entrepreneurs often struggle with the technical aspects of online sales, such as search engine optimization (SEO), data analytics, and online payment systems. These technical challenges can hinder their ability to compete in the digital marketplace and fully leverage the benefits of e-commerce.

Logistical complexities further complicate the integration of micro-entrepreneurs into online shopping systems. Efficient inventory management, reliable shipping solutions, and effective customer service are critical components of successful e-commerce operations. However, micro-entrepreneurs frequently lack the infrastructure and experience to manage these aspects efficiently. Studies have highlighted the difficulties micro-entrepreneurs face in handling logistics, particularly when dealing with cross-border transactions (Mhlongo & Daya, 2023; Oluwakemi et al., 2023; Susi, 2023; Zwane & Zhou, 2023). The logistical demands of e-commerce can overwhelm micro-entrepreneurs, leading to operational inefficiencies and increased costs. The impersonal nature of online transactions poses another significant challenge for micro-entrepreneurs. Personal relationships and community engagement are often central to the success of micro-entrepreneurial ventures. Unlike larger firms, which can rely on brand recognition and marketing budgets to attract customers, micro-entrepreneurs depend heavily on word-of-mouth referrals and repeat business from loyal customers. The shift to online platforms can erode these personal connections, making it difficult for micro-entrepreneurs to differentiate themselves through personalized service. Research has shown that the loss of direct customer relationships can negatively impact customer loyalty and reduce the ability of micro-entrepreneurs to compete effectively.

In addition to these challenges, micro-entrepreneurs often encounter regulatory and compliance issues when operating in the digital marketplace. The regulatory environment for e-commerce varies significantly across different jurisdictions, creating complexities for micro-entrepreneurs who may lack the resources to navigate these regulations (Geeta et al., 2023; Wen, 2023). Studies have identified compliance

with data protection laws, consumer rights regulations, and online transaction regulations as significant barriers for micro-entrepreneurs. The administrative burden of complying with these regulations can divert time and resources away from core business activities, further disadvantaging micro-entrepreneurs. Despite these challenges, research has also identified potential strategies for mitigating the negative impact of online shopping systems on micro-entrepreneurs. One such strategy is the use of digital platforms specifically designed to support small businesses. These platforms can provide micro-entrepreneurs with access to affordable e-commerce tools, training, and resources, helping them to compete more effectively in the digital marketplace. Additionally, collaboration among micro-entrepreneurs, such as forming cooperatives or alliances, can enhance their collective bargaining power and resource-sharing capabilities.

Another potential strategy involves the use of social media and other digital marketing tools to build and maintain customer relationships. Research has shown that micro-entrepreneurs can leverage social media platforms to engage with customers, promote their products, and generate word-of-mouth referrals (Jalil & Zakaria, 2024). By using social media effectively, micro-entrepreneurs can create a sense of community and foster customer loyalty, mitigating some of the negative impacts of the impersonal nature of online transactions. Government and policy interventions can also play a crucial role in supporting micro-entrepreneurs in the digital marketplace. Research suggests that policies aimed at reducing the digital divide, such as providing access to affordable internet services and digital literacy training, can help micro-entrepreneurs overcome technological barriers. Additionally, government programs that offer financial assistance, grants, or low-interest loans can enable micro-entrepreneurs to invest in e-commerce infrastructure and digital marketing. Regulatory reforms that simplify compliance processes and reduce administrative burdens can also alleviate some of the challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the importance of education and training for micro-entrepreneurs cannot be overstated. Research has highlighted the need for targeted training programs that equip micro-entrepreneurs with the skills required to manage online businesses effectively (Putri & Hamidi, 2024). These programs can cover various aspects of e-commerce, including website development, digital marketing, logistics management, and compliance with regulatory requirements. By enhancing the digital literacy and business acumen of micro-entrepreneurs, these training programs can improve their competitiveness and sustainability in the digital marketplace.

## **C. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **1. Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the negative impact of online shopping systems on micro-entrepreneurs. The phenomenological approach is chosen because it focuses on understanding and describing the lived experiences of individuals, providing a rich and detailed account of their personal and professional challenges (Brogan & Dooley, 2024; Ghorbanzadeh & Nordberg, 2024). This method is particularly suitable for capturing the nuanced and subjective experiences of micro-entrepreneurs navigating the digital marketplace.

### **2. Participants**

The participants in this study will be micro-entrepreneurs who have integrated their businesses into online shopping systems. These individuals will be selected from various industries to ensure a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. The inclusion criteria will be Micro-entrepreneurs operating businesses with fewer than ten employees, Micro-entrepreneurs who have been involved in e-commerce for at least one year, and Micro-entrepreneurs from different geographic locations who capture a broad spectrum of experiences. A purposive sampling method will be used to identify and select participants who meet these criteria. This method ensures that the selected participants have relevant experiences and can provide valuable insights into the research questions (Amrin, 2023; Lestiyawati, 2023).

### **3. Data Collection**

Data will be collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. The interviews will be conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing platforms, depending on the participants' preferences and logistical considerations. Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes to allow for a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences. The semi-structured interview format will provide flexibility, allowing participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely while ensuring that key topics are covered (Haridan et al., 2018; Mohammad et al., 2022). The interview guide will include open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the challenges and impacts of online shopping systems on their businesses.

### **4. Data Analysis**

The data analysis will follow a phenomenological approach, focusing on identifying and describing the essence of the participants' experiences. The analysis will involve several steps:

**Familiarization:** The researcher will read and re-read the interview transcripts to become deeply familiar with the data.

**Coding:** The transcripts will be systematically coded to identify significant statements and phrases that capture key aspects of the participants' experiences. These codes will be organized into meaningful categories and themes.

**Thematic Analysis:** The researcher will analyze the coded data to identify common themes and patterns across the participants' experiences. This process will involve clustering similar codes together and interpreting the underlying meanings.

**Essence Description:** The final step will involve synthesizing the themes into a coherent description that captures the essence of the participants' lived experiences. This description will highlight the core challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs and the impact of online shopping systems on their businesses.

### **5. *Trustworthiness***

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies will be employed:

**Credibility:** Triangulation will be used by comparing the findings with existing literature and seeking feedback from participants to verify the accuracy of the interpretations. Member checking will also be conducted, where participants review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts and the emerging themes.

**Transferability:** A thick description will be used to provide detailed accounts of the participants' experiences, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts.

**Dependability:** An audit trail will be maintained, documenting the research process, decisions made, and changes to the research plan. This will provide transparency and allow for replication of the study.

**Confirmability:** Reflexive journaling will be used by the researcher to reflect on personal biases and assumptions that may influence the research process and findings.

## **D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. *Research Question 1: Primary Challenges in Integrating Online Shopping Systems***

#### **a. *Competition with Larger Firms***

A predominant theme that emerged from the interviews was the intense competition micro-entrepreneurs face from larger firms. Many participants expressed that competing with well-established companies, which have more substantial financial and technological resources, is one of their most significant challenges. Larger firms can afford to invest in sophisticated e-commerce infrastructure, advanced marketing strategies, and bulk purchasing, which allows them to offer lower prices and faster delivery times. One participant noted, "It's tough to compete with the big players. They have the budget for high-quality websites, professional marketing, and fast shipping options. I simply can't match that with my limited resources." This

competitive imbalance creates a significant barrier for micro-entrepreneurs attempting to carve out a niche in the digital marketplace.

*b. Technological Barriers*

Technological challenges also emerged as a critical issue. Many micro-entrepreneurs lack the technical expertise needed to manage e-commerce platforms effectively. Participants reported difficulties with website development, search engine optimization (SEO), data analytics, and integrating online payment systems. The digital divide, characterized by disparities in access to technology and digital literacy, exacerbates these issues. A participant shared, "I struggled a lot with setting up my website and making it user-friendly. I had to learn everything from scratch, and even then, I'm not sure if I'm doing it right." The lack of technical skills and resources can prevent micro-entrepreneurs from fully leveraging the benefits of e-commerce, hindering their ability to attract and retain customers.

*c. Logistical Complexities*

Logistical challenges were frequently mentioned as a significant obstacle. Efficient inventory management, reliable shipping solutions, and effective customer service are crucial for successful e-commerce operations. However, many micro-entrepreneurs reported struggling with these aspects, particularly when handling cross-border transactions. One interviewee explained, "Managing inventory and shipping is a nightmare. There are so many things that can go wrong, and I don't have the infrastructure to handle large volumes or international orders." The logistical demands of e-commerce can overwhelm micro-entrepreneurs, leading to operational inefficiencies and increased costs.

*d. Loss of Direct Customer Relationships*

Another critical challenge identified was the loss of direct customer relationships. Personal connections and community engagement are often central to the success of micro-entrepreneurial ventures. The shift to online platforms can erode these personal connections, making it difficult for micro-entrepreneurs to differentiate themselves through personalized service. A participant lamented, "I used to know my customers by name and build relationships with them. Now, with online sales, it feels very impersonal. It's hard to maintain that personal touch." This loss of direct interaction can negatively impact customer loyalty and reduce the ability of micro-entrepreneurs to compete effectively.

*e. Regulatory and Compliance Issues*

Regulatory and compliance issues also emerged as a significant barrier. The regulatory environment for e-commerce varies significantly across different jurisdictions, creating complexities for micro-entrepreneurs who may lack the resources to navigate these regulations. Participants reported challenges with data protection laws, consumer rights regulations, and online transaction regulations. One

micro-entrepreneur stated, “The regulations are so confusing, and it’s hard to keep up with all the requirements. I’m always worried about getting something wrong and facing penalties.” The administrative burden of complying with these regulations can divert time and resources away from core business activities, further disadvantaging micro-entrepreneurs.

## **2. Research Question 2: Impact on Profitability and Sustainability**

### *a. Reduced Profit Margins*

Many participants reported that the challenges associated with integrating online shopping systems have led to reduced profit margins. The increased competition from larger firms often forces micro-entrepreneurs to lower their prices to remain competitive, which can significantly impact profitability. Additionally, the costs associated with maintaining an online presence, including website development, hosting fees, and online advertising, can further erode profit margins. One participant explained, “I had to reduce my prices to compete with larger companies, but that means my profit margins are much smaller. When you add in the costs of running an online store, there’s not much left over.” The financial pressures created by these challenges can jeopardize the sustainability of micro-entrepreneurial ventures.

### *b. Operational Inefficiencies*

The logistical complexities and technological barriers faced by micro-entrepreneurs often result in operational inefficiencies. Participants reported difficulties in managing inventory, fulfilling orders, and providing customer service, which can lead to delays, errors, and dissatisfied customers. These inefficiencies can increase operational costs and reduce the overall profitability of the business. A participant shared, “I’ve had issues with inventory management and shipping delays. Customers get frustrated, and it reflects badly on my business. Fixing these problems takes time and money that I can’t afford.” Operational inefficiencies can undermine the sustainability of micro-entrepreneurial ventures, making it difficult to achieve long-term success.

### *c. Customer Attrition*

The loss of direct customer relationships and the impersonal nature of online transactions can also impact the sustainability of micro-entrepreneurial ventures. Participants reported that it is more challenging to build and maintain customer loyalty in the digital marketplace. The absence of personal interaction can lead to customer attrition, as consumers may be more likely to switch to competitors offering similar products at lower prices. One interviewee noted, “It’s harder to keep customers coming back when you don’t have that personal connection. They can easily find other options online, and price becomes the main deciding factor.” Customer attrition can reduce repeat business and hinder the growth of micro-entrepreneurial ventures.

*d. Increased Stress and Burnout*

The cumulative impact of these challenges can lead to increased stress and burnout among micro-entrepreneurs. Participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the demands of managing an online business, particularly when balancing these demands with other responsibilities. The financial pressures, operational complexities, and regulatory burdens can take a significant toll on the well-being of micro-entrepreneurs. A participant expressed, "Running an online business is exhausting. There's so much to manage, and it feels like there's never enough time or resources. It's stressful and sometimes makes me question if it's worth it." The stress and burnout associated with these challenges can negatively impact the sustainability of micro-entrepreneurial ventures, potentially leading to business closures.

This study offers a novel contribution to the existing literature on e-commerce and micro-entrepreneurship by employing a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of micro-entrepreneurs integrating their businesses into online shopping systems. Unlike previous research that often focuses on quantitative metrics, this study delves into the emotional, psychological, and operational challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs, providing a rich, qualitative understanding of their struggles (Prabowo et al., 2023; Wiradinata et al., 2023). By focusing on the unique barriers such as competition with larger firms, technological barriers, logistical complexities, and regulatory issues, this research presents a holistic view of the multifaceted challenges that micro-entrepreneurs encounter. This integrated perspective is essential for developing effective strategies to support these entrepreneurs in the digital marketplace.

The findings highlight the critical role of personal customer relationships in the success of micro-entrepreneurial ventures, an aspect often overlooked in broader e-commerce discussions. The study reveals that the impersonal nature of online transactions can erode these relationships, making it harder for micro-entrepreneurs to maintain customer loyalty. However, it also suggests that digital tools like social media can help preserve and enhance customer engagement, emphasizing the need for strategies that balance digital efficiency with personal touch. This insight is significant as it underscores the importance of customer relationships in ensuring the sustainability and growth of micro-entrepreneurial ventures in the digital age (García-Dastugue et al., 2024; Prabowo et al., 2023).

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the study has practical implications for supporting micro-entrepreneurs. It suggests that targeted support programs, digital literacy training, and government interventions are crucial for addressing the technological, logistical, and regulatory challenges identified. For instance, digital platforms designed specifically for small businesses can provide affordable e-

commerce tools and resources, while training programs can equip micro-entrepreneurs with essential skills in digital marketing and logistics management. Furthermore, policy interventions that reduce the digital divide and simplify compliance processes can significantly alleviate the operational burdens faced by these entrepreneurs, enhancing their competitiveness and sustainability.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive exploration of the negative impacts of online shopping systems on micro-entrepreneurs, employing a phenomenological approach to uncover the nuanced and multifaceted challenges these entrepreneurs face. By delving into the lived experiences of micro-entrepreneurs, the research identifies key barriers such as intense competition with larger firms, technological and logistical difficulties, loss of personal customer relationships, and regulatory complexities. These challenges not only impede their ability to compete effectively in the digital marketplace but also affect their profitability and long-term sustainability. The findings underscore the need for tailored support strategies that address these specific issues and enhance the ability of micro-entrepreneurs to thrive in the online environment.

The insights derived from this study contribute significantly to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in the realm of e-commerce and micro-entrepreneurship. They highlight the importance of balancing technological advancements with personal customer engagement and suggest actionable strategies for overcoming the identified challenges, including targeted training programs, government support, and digital tools designed for small businesses. By addressing these challenges through informed policies and practical support, stakeholders can foster a more equitable and supportive digital economy, ultimately empowering micro-entrepreneurs to navigate the complexities of online shopping systems and achieve sustainable business success. Future research should build on these findings to further refine support mechanisms and explore additional dimensions of micro-entrepreneurship in the digital era.

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