

Problem Statement

Small and medium-sized retail businesses in emerging markets face significant challenges when transitioning to digital commerce platforms. Many existing e-commerce solutions are either expensive, difficult to customize, or lack localized payment integrations such as M-Pesa, which is the primary mobile money platform for millions of users. Additionally, customers expect modern mobile applications with fast performance, smooth user experiences, secure authentication, role-based access, and visually appealing interfaces, which many local solutions fail to provide.

Most small businesses rely on fragmented systems—separate platforms for product listings, order management, payments, and customer communication—leading to inefficiencies, poor user experiences, and limited scalability. Furthermore, administrators often lack centralized tools for managing products, tracking payments, and responding to customer inquiries in real time.

There is therefore a need for a modern, scalable, and mobile-first e-commerce application that provides a seamless shopping experience for customers while empowering administrators with robust management tools. The system must support secure user authentication, role-based access control, real-time data synchronization, localized and international payment options, and high-quality UI/UX standards, including support for dark mode and smooth loading states.

Proposed Solution

The proposed solution is a cross-platform Flutter-based e-commerce mobile application backed by Firebase services. The application will utilize Firebase Authentication for secure user login and role management, Firebase Firestore for real-time product, order, and user data storage, and the Provider package for scalable and maintainable state management.

To enhance user experience, the application will implement Shimmer effects for product images and content placeholders during data loading, ensuring a polished and professional interface even on slower network connections. The system will support search and filtering functionality to allow users to quickly find products by name, category, or price.

A key feature of the system will be payment integration, with M-Pesa implemented using Node.js and Firebase Cloud Functions to securely handle payment requests, callbacks, and transaction verification. The architecture will also be extensible to support additional payment gateways such as Stripe for card payments, enabling future scalability.

Core Functional Areas

1. User Roles and Access Control

- **Admin Role**
 - Manage products (add, update, delete)
 - View and process orders
 - Monitor payments and transaction status
 - Manage users and roles
- **Customer/User Role**
 - Browse and search products
 - Add items to cart and checkout
 - Make payments via M-Pesa or other gateways
 - View order history and payment status

2. Authentication and Security

- Firebase Authentication (Email/Password, Google Sign-In optional)
- Role-based authorization using Firestore rules
- Secure backend payment processing via Cloud Functions

3. Product Discovery and Search

- Real-time product listings from Firestore
- Search by product name, category, or keywords

- Optimized queries and indexing for performance

4. UI/UX and Theming

- Shimmer loading effects for images and lists
- Light and Dark mode support using Provider
- Responsive layouts for different screen sizes

5. Payments and Checkout

- M-Pesa STK Push integration via Node.js and Firebase Functions
- Secure handling of callbacks and payment confirmations
- Extensible architecture for Stripe or other gateways

6. Settings and Support

- Profile management
- App theme preferences (Dark/Light mode)
- Help and Support section (FAQs, contact support)

Expected Impact

This system will provide a cost-effective, scalable, and user-friendly e-commerce platform tailored to local and international markets. By combining Flutter's cross-platform capabilities, Firebase's real-time backend services, and localized payment solutions like M-Pesa, the application will empower small businesses to operate efficiently while delivering a modern shopping experience to customers.