**INTRODUCTION**

**Background of the Study**

Online shopping refers to the act of buying goods or services via the Internet using e-commerce websites or mobile applications. It provides convenience, a vast selection of products, and the ability to easily compare prices. Several key factors that affect online shopping include convenience, variety of products, customer feedback, flexible delivery options, secure payment methods, and return policies. Typical features found on online shopping platforms include search bars, shopping carts, detailed product descriptions, customer reviews, secure payment gateways, options for account creation or guest checkout, discount codes, order tracking, recommended products, and wishlists, all of which contribute to a better shopping experience.

Online shopping in the local context raises several issues and concerns, such as cybersecurity risks, logistical challenges, the digital divide, weak consumer protection, environmental impact, and competition with local businesses. Cybersecurity issues, including data breaches and fraud, hinder consumer trust in online transactions, as noted by Wang et al. (2024). Logistical challenges, particularly in rural areas, result in delays and high shipping costs, as highlighted by Perez and Farfan (2023). The digital divide restricts access to e-commerce for rural communities, worsening inequalities, as observed by Banga and Saha (2023). Insufficient consumer protection and poor return policies further diminish trust, as indicated in a study by Mahajan et al. (2024). Moreover, the growth of e-commerce contributes to environmental harm through packaging waste and emissions from deliveries, as discussed by Smith and Jones (2025). Lastly, local businesses are increasingly challenged by competition from larger online retailers, making survival difficult, as found in a comparative study by Kim et al. (2025). These challenges underscore the necessity for stronger regulatory frameworks, improved infrastructure, and sustainable practices to tackle the issues associated with online shopping.

Numerous studies have explored the challenges and concerns related to online shopping, offering various solutions to improve security, logistics, consumer trust, and sustainability. To address cybersecurity threats, Chen et al. (2023) recommend implementing encryption, two-factor authentication, and AI-based fraud detection. Gomez et al. (2024) suggest the adoption of smart logistics systems, such as real-time tracking and automated warehouses, to tackle delivery issues. Banga et al. (2024) stress the need for government initiatives to close the digital divide by increasing internet access in rural regions. Strengthening consumer protection laws, as highlighted by Kumar et al. (2023), along with simplified return policies and reverse logistics proposed by Mahajan et al. (2024), can greatly enhance trust and satisfaction in e-commerce. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2025) point out the importance of sustainable practices, like using eco-friendly packaging and optimizing delivery routes, to reduce the environmental footprint of online shopping. Solutions for addressing fake reviews through machine learning, as discussed by Clark et al. (2023), and improving e-commerce accessibility for elderly and disabled consumers via inclusive design (Brown et al., 2025), further enrich the online shopping experience. Kim et al. (2024) advocate for integrating local businesses into e-commerce ecosystems by collaborating with large platforms and local logistics services, while Johnson et al. (2023) call for stricter regulations to combat unethical marketing practices. Together, these solutions aim to tackle the challenges arising from the rapid expansion of e-commerce.

The study's novelty stems from its focus on a crucial gap between the rapid growth of online shopping and the insufficient infrastructure, regulations, and consumer trust mechanisms present in local contexts, especially in developing regions. While much of the existing literature has concentrated on global e-commerce trends, many studies have not adequately examined how specific challenges like cybersecurity, logistics, the digital divide, and local business integration are uniquely faced in these markets. This gap is important because, if not addressed, the digital divide will continue to grow, making it increasingly difficult for underserved communities to take advantage of the global digital economy. Additionally, poor consumer protection and logistics solutions could undermine trust in online shopping. The lack of sustainable practices in logistics and packaging also contributes to environmental harm, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. The study's objectives aim to fill this gap by investigating localized challenges in online shopping, such as cybersecurity issues, logistical hurdles, and the digital divide, particularly in underserved markets; examining how inadequate consumer protection laws and return policies affect trust; evaluating the environmental consequences of e-commerce and identifying practical solutions; finding ways to incorporate small local businesses into the e-commerce ecosystem; and offering policy recommendations that foster inclusive digital economies. By concentrating on these objectives, the study seeks to provide a thorough understanding of the specific challenges local consumers and businesses encounter in the online shopping landscape and suggest effective, contextually relevant solutions.