

E-Commerce and Its Prospects for Development in Algeria

Moussaoui Hadjer ¹, Guendouze Billal ²

1. University Alger 3 - Algeria , hadjerali88@gmail.com

2. University Alger 3 - Algeria , guendouz1986@outlook.fr

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Summary:

Life in ancient times was extremely challenging, with meeting daily needs not an easy task and requiring significant effort. However, over time, various developments have gradually transformed the world into its current state, making life easier and more comfortable. Everything can now be done with just a click of a button, eliminating any hassle. For instance, in the past, trade necessitated travel and migration between countries, whereas now all commercial transactions can be conducted from home effortlessly through e-commerce. So, what is e-commerce? What is its significance for humanity? And how does Algeria stand regarding this matter?

Keywords: Internet, e-commerce, digital marketing.

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Introduction:

In this era, the concept of e-commerce has become widespread, offering numerous advantages. The world has transformed into a single market, where opportunities for all companies, regardless of their size, are equal to enter global markets and promote their products with ease. For individuals, it has become possible to acquire their needs with just a click, without the need to leave their locations. E-commerce has become the future for significant economic sectors in most countries. However, Arab countries have only managed to capture a small portion of this opportunity, as they have only recently begun to grasp the importance of information and e-commerce economically. E-commerce has become a crucial necessity for these countries to increase their contribution to foreign trade and develop their productive and marketing sectors. Therefore, it is essential for them to overcome the obstacles that hinder the adoption and provision of e-commerce technologies.

Problem Statement:

Amidst the numerous global changes and the world's overall influence by e-commerce, the main question that arises is: To what extent is Algeria dependent on e-commerce?

Sub-questions:

- What do we mean by e-commerce and its relation to the internet?
- What is the status of e-commerce in the Arab world, and what obstacles hinder its widespread adoption?
- What is the current situation of e-commerce in Algeria, and what impact does it have on the national economy?

Assumptions:

- E-commerce is a recent phenomenon with an unclear geographic and political scope.
- The internet serves as a launching pad for the development of electronic communications due to the substantial growth in commercial and financial activities.
- E-commerce is still relatively absent in Algeria due to the lack of essential components and a lack of awareness about its significance.

Significance of the Study:

E-commerce is a characteristic of the knowledge-based economy and plays a significant role in economic growth.

Study Objectives:

The study aims to understand e-commerce, shed light on its situation in Algeria, uncover the main challenges and obstacles hindering its development, and propose potential solutions to promote e-commerce in the country.

Study Methodology:

Building any research requires a methodology that renews the researcher's research areas and facilitates answering the questions driving the study. In general, we employed the descriptive-analytical approach when exploring various aspects related to the digital economy and e-commerce, along with their status in Algeria, supported by digital field studies.

Study Plan:

Based on that, we will address the subject concerning the concept of e-commerce and its importance, characteristics, components, and advantages, as well as its types and facilitation principles, barriers, and solutions, with a specific focus on studying it in Algeria.

1. The Concept of E-commerce:

E-commerce has multiple concepts, including:

1.1. A definition that describes it as: "The process of advertising and promoting goods and services, then executing transactional deals and contracts, followed by purchasing and selling these goods and services and settling the purchase value through various communication networks, whether internet or other networks that connect buyers and sellers" (Fayez Yahya, 2012, p. 19).

1.2. A concept by the World Trade Organization defines it as: "An integrated set of processes of production, distribution, marketing, and sales of products through electronic means" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 30).

1.3. It involves financial and commercial transactions, including the purchase of goods and services over the internet, in addition to marketing, demand, and supply. It requires fundamental components such as computers, internet networks and servers, software, and applications that enhance purchasing preferences, leading to increased sales. E-commerce is considered an interactive cooperative platform between merchants and consumers, where individuals can perform various activities, from traditional shopping to financial services like online payments via the internet (Mohamed, 2013, p. 22).

1.4. Some define it as: "Commercial transactions carried out by individuals and entities, relying on the processing and transmission of digital data, including audio and visual, through open or closed networks that allow access to open networks" (Belqassem& Ali, 2013, p. 31).

Considering the diversity of these concepts, we can conclude that e-commerce is a relatively recent term that emerged recently, referring to commercial activities and transactions conducted using information technologies, communication means, and primarily the internet. Despite its recent emergence, it has made a significant qualitative leap in the field of commerce, making it smooth and effortless, offering numerous benefits to individuals, businesses, and society as a whole.

2. The Importance of E-commerce:

E-commerce can be considered one of the most important innovations of our time, enabling the attainment of profits that were not possible previously through traditional methods, and the reasons for its significance include:

2.1. Advantages for Individuals:

- It has provided many individuals with the opportunity to work from their homes, allowing them to establish and develop business ventures without substantial capital, leading to substantial profits in hard currency.
- It has opened doors for housewives, people with special needs, and retirees to work in this field from their homes, empowering them to play a vital role in the development process.

- It enables all individuals to complete their commercial transactions within very short time frames, anytime and from anywhere on the planet.
- It facilitates the easy and rapid shipment of goods and commodities, especially for electronic products.
- It allows individuals to exchange opinions and experiences regarding services and products through online communities.

2.2. Advantages for Companies and Businesses:

E-commerce has enabled the expansion of markets on an international and global scale.

It has reduced the costs of information creation, processing, distribution, storage, and retrieval.

E-commerce allows companies to customize their products according to customer preferences, giving them a competitive edge over other companies.

It has shortened the time between payment and receiving products and services.

2.3. Benefits for Society:

E-commerce enables individuals to work from home, reducing congestion, especially traffic congestion and its resulting pollution.

Affordable goods can be found through e-commerce, making it accessible to individuals with limited income.

People residing in developing countries can access products and goods that are not available in their own countries through e-commerce.

3. E-commerce Features:

E-commerce technology possesses several distinguishing features, including the following (Shahin, 2014, p. 43):

3.1. Global Trade:

E-commerce allows users to transcend national borders and reach any location worldwide with a simple click on a computer, without significant costs. In contrast, traditional commerce is mostly limited to local interactions, making it challenging for users to visit global markets for shopping.

3.2. Global Standards:

E-commerce relies on global internet standards, ensuring uniformity in electronic transactions across the world. In contrast, traditional commerce is subject to local standards and regulations that vary from one country to another. E-commerce standards reduce the cost of entering diverse

product markets, whereas traditional commerce involves varying market entry costs based on each country's policies.

3.3. Extensive Presence:

E-commerce's ubiquitous presence enables transactions to occur everywhere and at all times. Traditional commerce necessitates tangible marketplaces that consumers physically visit for purchases. In contrast, e-commerce requires no physical marketplace, allowing consumers to access intangible markets at any time and from anywhere using computers and a simple touch on the desired website, enabling them to view and purchase products with just a few clicks.

3.4. Information Density:

It is well-known that the internet has made information abundant, excellent, and up-to-date. Similarly, e-commerce has reduced the process of searching for information, as well as its storage and communication costs. Additionally, this technology has improved the timeliness and accuracy of information.

3.5. Rich Information:

E-commerce, due to its ability to reach consumers worldwide, provides abundant information using various digital technologies such as audio, visual, and written media. In contrast, traditional commerce relied primarily on face-to-face interactions to provide information.

3.6. Personal Targeting:

E-commerce allows marketers to target specific groups of individuals by modifying advertisements online. This customization involves determining desired individual details, such as age, gender, occupation, and other relevant information, which the marketer deems necessary.

3.7. Communication:

E-commerce facilitates highly effective two-way communication between customers and merchants. Unlike traditional commerce, where communication is limited to one-way communication through mediums such as television advertisements, e-commerce enables direct interaction with advertisers through electronic means.

4. E-commerce Ingredients:

4.1. View Product:

The presentation of products varies depending on the nature of the product itself. Some products may require elaborate and complex presentations, while others may need simplicity and focus. It is crucial for product owners to update and make their presentation methods user-friendly, especially for mobile users. Global e-commerce sales are projected to reach approximately \$2.571

trillion between 2017 and 2021, making it essential to understand the best way to present products online. This involves identifying products and services offered, selecting appropriate presentation methods that attract the widest audience of shoppers, and providing relevant information for each product. Furthermore, it is crucial to determine the best time to update product descriptions and prices to align with market changes. The most effective way to determine product presentation methods is for the seller to experience online shopping and browsing on various e-commerce websites and use their personal preferences as a basis for presentation. (Mohamed, 2013, p. 33)

4.2. Web Design:

The website is the core of e-commerce. As mobile devices have become more prevalent, web design has evolved to provide a consistent shopping experience for consumers, regardless of the device used. A well-designed website enables customers to easily find and consider purchasing products with a simple click. (Matthewson, 2012, p. 26)

4.3. Customer Service:

Most people extensively research products and services they desire to purchase on the internet before making a buying decision. Users often compare available options, and if a competitor's e-commerce website has superior filtering, categorization features, and better services, buyers may prefer using that website. Therefore, it is essential to understand users and their needs by requesting simple user accounts through email. (Aslam, 2017, p. 42)

5. The Advantages of E-commerce:

Among the prominent advantages of e-commerce for businesses, regardless of their size, is the opportunity to tap into markets that traditional commerce may not reach. It also enables the establishment of small-scale projects with modest capital investment. Some of these advantages include:

5.1. Corresponding to the Information Age:

In the information age, where people spend significant time in front of computers and on the internet, it is crucial for businesses to align their trading methods with the characteristics of this era.

5.2. Easily Responding to Customer Options:

E-commerce allows enterprises to understand customer needs and provide a wide range of shopping options. This fosters high customer satisfaction, which traditional commerce often cannot achieve. Customers can easily access information about products, prices, features, compare, evaluate, and choose products that best meet their preferences.

5.3. Development of Commercial and Service Performance:

E-commerce presents opportunities for businesses to enhance their performance across various aspects, including technological infrastructure, financial management, marketing strategies, and relationship management. It facilitates comprehensive assessments of a company's current state, employee efficiency, infrastructure safety, and management training programs.

5.4. Enter Global Markets and Achieve Higher Returns:

The global nature of e-commerce eliminates borders and restrictions on market entry. It transforms the world into an open market for consumers and sellers worldwide. Unlike international trade agreements that seek to liberalize goods and services trade through negotiations, e-commerce naturally achieves this goal without the need for extensive talks. (Al-Mahdi, 2011, p. 45)

6. Types of E-commerce:

E-commerce encompasses various types and forms that are essential to understand. The most important ones are:

6.1. Business-to-Business E-commerce:

This type focuses on selling products and services from one company to another, allowing electronic exchange of services and products between them.

6.2. Business-to-Consumer E-commerce:

One of the most important types, where businesses directly sell their products and services to consumers.

6.3. Consumer-to-Consumer E-commerce:

This type empowers individuals to sell to each other through internet-based auctions, facilitating the exchange of goods and services among consumers.

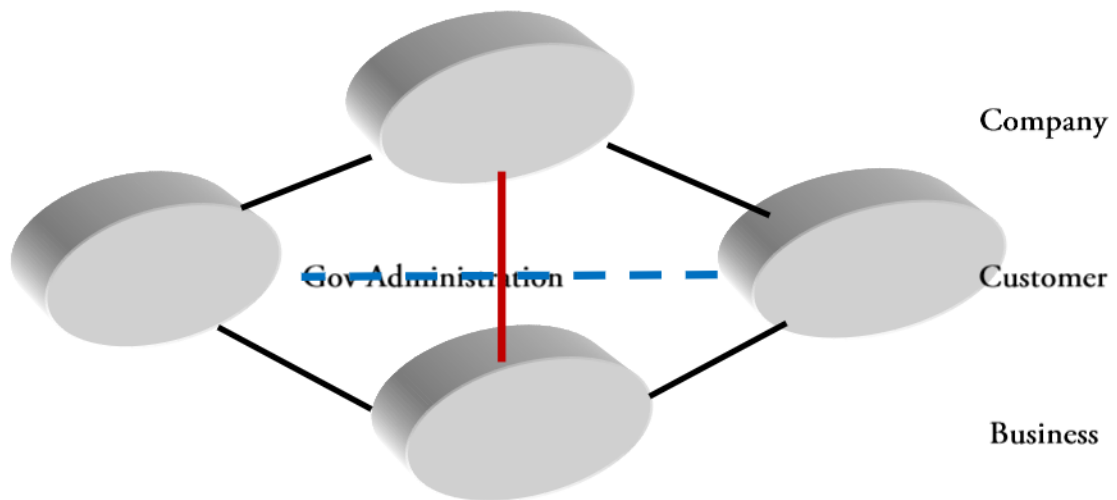
6.4. Consumer-to-Business E-commerce:

This is the reverse of Business-to-Consumer E-commerce (mentioned in item 2), where consumers offer their products and services for businesses to purchase.

6.5. Mobile E-commerce:

One of the latest types, allowing the use of digital mobile devices to connect to the internet via service providers and access specific websites to view products and make purchases.

Figure (1) Types of E-Commerce



Source: Mohammed Sameer Ahmed, E-Marketing, 2nd edition, Dar Al-Meisarah for Publishing, Distribution, and Printing, Amman, 2014, p. 76.

7. Building an E-commerce Model on the Internet:

It is widely recognized that any company aiming to venture into the realm of marketing and sales through e-commerce must evaluate its options appropriately and make informed decisions. To achieve this, the company needs to create what is known as a business model. This model identifies a set of activities planned to generate targeted profits in the market. To establish such a model, companies should take into account the following elements and models: (Aslam, 2017, p. 47)

7.1. Showing Value:

This involves understanding how the company meets its customers' desires by answering several questions. Why do consumers prefer to deal with this company over others? What unique offerings can this company provide to customers that others cannot?

7.2. Income Form (Revenue Model):

Also known as the financial model, it explains how the company generates revenue, achieves profitability, and efficiently utilizes the invested capital to achieve the best returns. This model may include various other sub-models, such as:

7.2.1. Income Subscription Form:

This mechanism involves providing additional services on the company's website, which customers may be interested in accessing for nominal fees or even free in some cases. By offering these services, the company encourages customers to make purchases, ensuring they get

additional services for free or at minimal charges. The wider the range of such services, the more inclined the consumers will be to buy products.

7.2.2. Voluntary Sales Form:

This is the primary model on the company's website, containing all necessary details about the company's products, types, categories, and order and payment mechanisms, as well as predefined terms. For example, Amazon.com, primarily selling books, offers comprehensive details about all available books with multiple specifications.

7.2.3. Revenue Announcement Template:

This model explains how to create a specialized website to advertise the company's products for specific fees. It involves including the company's products and advertising them on various other websites.

7.3. Brokers in Operations:

These are websites operated by intermediaries who advertise other companies' products for specified commissions on transactions conducted through them. It is essential for the company to advertise its products through these sites since the company's website is often unknown to internet users. Using the widely recognized intermediary sites increases visibility.

7.4. Service Providers:

These are well-known websites that specialize in certain types of services or are associated with providers of such services. For instance, if a company specializes in car repair, it is beneficial for them to subscribe to auto repair service websites. Customers looking to repair their cars would visit these websites to find specialized companies.

7.5. Market Creators:

These are entities that create a digital environment on the internet, enabling the convergence of buyers and sellers. For example, if a user wants to find a specific accounting book, they can enter well-known market creator websites like Yahoo.com, use the search option to find accounting books, and explore various options.

8. Principles of Facilitation of Electronic Commerce:

The principles of facilitating e-commerce include:

- Participation in e-commerce according to the principles of free market, transparency, and fair competition.
- Acknowledging the global nature of e-commerce, where government policies that affect e-commerce must be formulated in international cooperation and coordination.

- Tax policies that encourage e-commerce compared to traditional commerce, minimizing bureaucratic procedures.
- Protecting consumers, especially regarding privacy and confidentiality.
- Encouraging private sector involvement in shaping domestic and international e-commerce policies and consumer protection, particularly regarding privacy and confidentiality.

9. E-commerce Requirements:

For e-commerce to flourish in any society, certain conducive conditions are necessary. These requirements include:

9.1. Electronic Infrastructure:

This includes wired and wireless communication networks (fax, telephone, internet, computers, application and operating software, technical support services, human capital, etc.). Such infrastructure facilitates the growth and development of e-commerce and the widespread use of the internet, which serves as the electronic market for transactions and trade. (Taha, 2012, p. 39)

9.2. E-commerce Legislation and Regulations:

E-commerce legislation and regulations constitute the legal framework that ensures the continuity of e-commerce while protecting the rights of the involved parties. These laws establish legal tools that are appropriate for electronic transactions, such as online contracting, email communication, and necessary conditions for conducting such transactions. They also address the resolution of e-commerce disputes, whether within a society or between parties in different countries. (Al-ShouEIF, 2013, p. 21)

9.3. Availability of Human Cadres:

This aspect represents a crucial factor for the success of e-commerce in any society. It includes human resources specialized in information technology, communication networks, internet, and relevant application software for conducting e-commerce. On the other hand, e-commerce readiness refers to the electronic community that is capable and willing to engage in e-commerce activities through the internet. Increasing the level of e-commerce readiness in any society is achieved by improving the quality of educational systems, expanding opportunities for individuals to benefit from them, and fostering a technologically aware and knowledgeable society. Additionally, it involves providing opportunities for institutions, educational institutes, and schools to utilize information and communication technologies and adapt educational curricula to incorporate technological knowledge. (Taha, 2012, p. 40)

10. E-commerce Impediments and Solutions:

As the prevalence of e-commerce through the internet offers ease of access to goods and reduces material costs, especially regarding rental spaces and other expenses, it also faces certain impediments and challenges, including: (Barham Nidhal, 2014, p. 24)

10.1. Finding a Suitable and Competent Shopping Experience for a Specific Thing:

Consumers need coherence between what they see in physical exhibitions and traditional stores and what they encounter through online stores. To address this issue, merchants can synchronize the goods available in physical stores with those offered on the internet, making the purchasing process easier for consumers.

10.2. Shipping and Shipping Tracking:

Most online shoppers prefer their goods to be shipped and delivered to their doorstep. Therefore, merchants must collaborate with shipping companies that can deliver the products to customers for a fee. Additionally, there should be notifications to inform and assist individuals in tracking their shipped goods.

10.3. Fear of International Sales:

Many merchants face the challenge of venturing into international sales due to legal implications. This issue can be resolved by pricing the goods, obtaining private trademarks adhering to quality standards, which will provide a significant revenue source.

10.4. Fraud:

E-commerce transactions are susceptible to payment frauds. This problem can be addressed by obtaining a security certificate to encrypt payment processes and utilizing reliable payment processors to ensure higher security.

10.5. Loyalty Loss:

Numerous companies suffer significant losses due to customers switching to other companies because of poor customer service and better discounts offered by those companies. This problem can be mitigated by providing quality customer service, monitoring customer interactions, and utilizing technology for customer care.

10.6. Awareness and Education:

The lack of awareness and education is a major cause of several problems, including illiteracy and digital illiteracy.

10.7. Inability to Collect Taxes or Fees on These Electronic Business Transactions:

Taxes are an essential source of state funding, and tax evasion weakens this important source. E-commerce transactions may lead to goods entering or leaving the country without the sales tax being collected, resulting in a loss for the state.

10.8. Lack of Confidence:

The lack of confidence in e-commerce remains a global obstacle, making it necessary to encourage individuals to use the internet for business exchange by instilling trust in this relatively unfamiliar form of commerce.

10.9. Unemployment:

E-commerce significantly contributes to increased unemployment as long as there is a possibility to market or order services from home. In this case, why would an entity hire individuals to perform these tasks when they can be done directly through computers by interacting with other countries.

11. Algerian Electronic Commerce Situation:

In the midst of modern economic and technological developments, the importance of electronic commerce as a contemporary phenomenon contributing to shaping the distinctive world, where traditional production factors are replaced by information, has been growing in thought. This phenomenon has gained significant popularity and acceptance, quickly establishing its presence in both advanced and Arab countries. However, Algeria still lags behind and remains relatively absent in keeping up with e-commerce developments, not giving e-commerce its due importance.

After a long period of stagnation, a recent awakening has occurred, and Algeria has begun taking very slow steps to explore its path in the field of e-commerce and reap its potential benefits.

The rapid global growth of e-commerce and the increasing international trend of its adoption leave Algeria with no room for hesitation or delay in embracing this form of commerce. However, attempting to gauge and study the extent of Algeria's adoption of e-commerce and its desire to shed light on it requires accurate statistics on this subject. Unfortunately, the scarcity of data is a significant problem, as there are no relevant statistics, even basic and outdated, on the size of e-commerce in Algeria. This is due to the fact that e-commerce hasn't been fully initiated yet, and it remains merely a dream waiting to be realized. Additionally, the lack of proper measurement tools and the absence of a specialized entity or authority that comprehends the importance of e-commerce and coordinates efforts to develop and promote it hinder the availability of meaningful data and indicators reflecting the progress of e-commerce transactions.

Nevertheless, this lack of statistics does not negate the presence of initial signs of Algerian e-commerce. The government authorities have emphasized their efforts to develop e-commerce

and promote its implementation after years of being hindered by various difficulties and complexities.

Indeed, economic operators have started preparing for the e-commerce revolution and recognized the importance of transitioning from traditional commerce to its electronic form. Although Algeria is still far from widespread use of e-commerce, positive movements have begun. Some modest attempts have been made to apply this form of commerce.

To examine the status of e-commerce in Algeria, a study was conducted in March 2020, which involved a sample of 1000 individuals from various age groups and categories. It was observed that there is significant interest in the internet, with 90% of participants considering it a crucial tool that cannot be dispensed with. The internet has become an integral part of their daily lives, with at least once-daily usage.

Regarding the nature of internet usage, 83.6% of respondents use the internet for research purposes, while 16.3% engage in commercial communications through this medium.

As for internet shopping, 19.5% of Algerian users have already conducted purchasing, ordering, or booking activities after gathering product information from the internet.

What opens broad prospects for Algerian consumers and guides them towards e-commerce is that more than half of the study participants (62%) access the internet from their homes. Thus, home shopping is on its way to becoming a promising remote market through the internet. Once households are connected to information highways, catalogs will reach them. When consumers have the opportunity to browse goods available in e-commerce centers, they will have the ability to access the products they need.

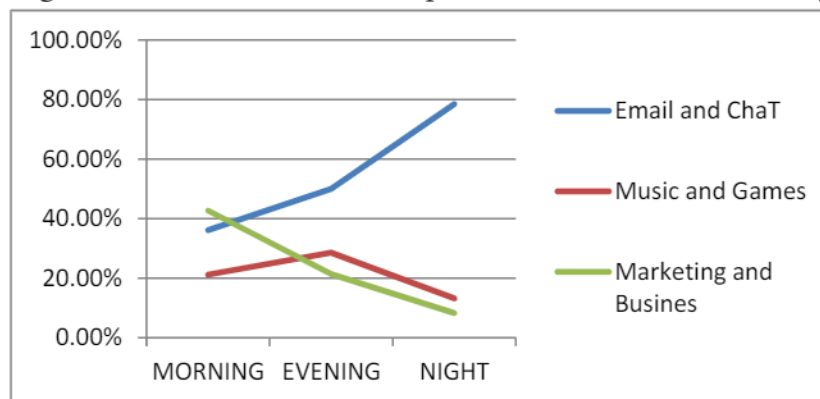
Furthermore, the study identified the internet usage behavior of Algerian consumers by asking two questions: "In which field do you use the internet?" and "How much time do you spend using the internet?" The answers revealed the activities of internet users as shown in the following table:

Table (01) Nature of Activities Practiced Online 24/7

Time/range	Email & Chat	Games & Music	Marketing & Business
Morning	%36.1	%21.2	%42.7
Evening	%50	%28.6	%21.4
Night	%78.5	%13.2	%8.3

Source: Created by the author.

Figure (02) Nature of activities practiced online 24 hours a day



Source: Created by the author.

12. The Spread of E-commerce Usage in Algeria:

From the data, we observe that the commercial use of the internet is more prevalent in the morning, reaching 42.7%. This percentage is considered acceptable and encouraging for e-commerce adoption. However, it gradually decreases until reaching 8.3% at night. The difference in usage between the morning and nighttime shifts to email and chat applications. Based on this, we can conclude that there is room for developing e-commerce among the Algerian population and the possibility of entering the Algerian market.

13. Obstacles to E-commerce Growth in Algeria:

1. Technical and Technological Obstacles:

These obstacles include:

- Weak electronic infrastructure.
- Limited technology and digital awareness.
- Insufficient support for communication lines and slow internet networks.
- Challenges in integrating e-commerce with certain applications and existing business databases.

2. Legislative and Legal Obstacles:

Legislative and legal obstacles consist of:

- Gaps in tax legislation that was formulated based on the nature of traditional commerce.
- Difficulty in identifying the identity and legal entity of online financiers, as they can conduct business transactions online without physical presence in the consumer's country.

- Difficulty in legally pursuing many e-commerce transactions.

3. Commercial Obstacles:

Commercial obstacles involve:

- Insufficient capital markets to support e-commerce projects in most countries.
- Limited commercial expertise and technical assistance required to transition traditional businesses into e-commerce.

4. Social and Psychological Obstacles:

Social and psychological obstacles include the following:

Psychological Handicap:

The Algerian consumer's behavior and perception towards e-commerce, as many are surprised by this method's utilization. Thus, there is a current lack of acceptance. Factors contributing to this include:

- E-commerce not being ingrained in Algerian society's habits.
- Consumer fear of the risk element associated with e-commerce.
- Lack of trust in unknown online sellers who are not physically visible.
- Apprehension about data theft, especially related to credit card information.

Illiteracy:

Algeria's high illiteracy rate presents a significant challenge in adopting e-commerce. Illiteracy is largely incongruent with the nature of this type of economy and trade. Illiteracy in Algeria refers to individuals who are older than ten years and cannot read or write.

Language:

Language is one of the critical challenges in e-commerce. Most e-commerce transactions are conducted in English.

14. Conclusion:

Focusing on e-commerce as an electronic intermediary indicates a mature economic awareness. E-commerce, once a mere dream, has become the primary mode of commercial activity, rapidly expanding worldwide due to its time and cost-saving advantages.

- 15. Recommendations:**
1. Support and encourage all segments of society to embrace e-commerce by emphasizing human resource development. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, educational programs, and training workshops for individuals and employees.
 2. Attract investments in information and communication technology for the local private sector and foreign investors to establish supportive infrastructure for e-commerce.
 3. Fast-track the implementation of the e-government project, providing services to citizens and companies through the internet, thus positively impacting e-commerce and increasing awareness of its essential role.
 4. Raise awareness and build trust among consumers through seminars and programs highlighting the significance of e-commerce and its role in development.
 5. Implement legal regulations and establish regulatory frameworks to protect users of information technology and safeguard consumer and seller rights in the e-commerce environment.
 6. Provide electronic systems that enable customers to request various services and goods online.
 7. Explore satellite internet connectivity and transition away from ground-based cables for better internet access.

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