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## Consumer preferences for aquatic products in social commerce: Evidence of emerging female entrepreneurship in Bangladesh

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### Abstract

The proliferation of digital technologies, particularly social media, has reshaped entrepreneurial opportunities by providing accessible, low-cost platforms for business engagement. This shift holds particular significance for women in developing countries, who frequently encounter socio-cultural and financial constraints that limit their participation in traditional physical market spaces. In Bangladesh, Facebook has emerged as a prominent social commerce platform, enabling female entrepreneurs to engage in the sale of aquatic products such as shrimp within a domain traditionally dominated by male actors, especially in physical wet markets. As market success depends on consumer demand, this study examines consumer segmentation within Facebook-based social commerce in the context of shrimp purchases and evaluates the market potential for female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. A discrete choice experiment was conducted in March 2024, incorporating five key product attributes: product type (fresh, frozen, or ready-to-cook shrimp), safety indication, product review availability, gender of the entrepreneur, and price. The sample consisted of 869 respondents drawn from four major urban centers: Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Khulna. Latent class analysis identified four distinct consumer segments. The largest segment (34.6 %) demonstrated a preference for convenience, favouring frozen and ready-to-cook shrimp. In contrast, the remaining three segments showed a stronger inclination toward fresh shrimp. The second largest segment (34.2 %) prioritised food safety indicators and credible product reviews, reflecting heightened concerns about health and trust in online purchasing contexts. Importantly, two segments (10.1 % and 21.2 %) exhibited a statistically significant preference for purchasing from female entrepreneurs, indicating an emergent openness to women-led enterprises in digital marketplaces. However, other segments maintained a preference for male sellers, underscoring the persistent influence of traditional gender norms. These findings reveal a highly segmented consumer landscape characterised by diverse priorities and varying degrees of receptiveness to female entrepreneurship. The study underscores both the opportunities and the barriers present for female entrepreneurs operating in Bangladesh's growing social commerce sector. The insights contribute to the broader discourse on digital inclusion and offer strategic implications for designing supportive policies and interventions aimed at enhancing women's participation in digital markets for aquatic products.

**Keywords:** Choice experiment, consumer preference, shrimp, social commerce, women entrepreneurs