

Online Shopping Tips

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Globally people are becoming online shoppers and all of us have experience with e-commerce either good, bad or both. Online shopping ends up in us buying items we really want without being able to see and feel them in person that probably is either rubbish, cheap looking and ill-fitting stuffs as we all fall a victim to false advertisement and fake reviews.

In case someone has had a negative experience with online shopping and want to learn how to prevent that from happening in the future, just continue reading on what to do to shop online wisely and safely.

1. Buy ONLY from trusted sites: The first important thing one should consider while purchasing goods is not the product by itself, but the website from which we wish to buy. The website should be reliable, with good online reputation and safe payment options. So, before purchasing any product at least do a little bit (more so if possible) of research about the website and its trust factor.

- First, browse through the website and look for information about the seller, their contact information and address, services they provide, their privacy policy and terms of service. If any or all that information is missing or appears suspicious, avoid this website.
- A secure and safe e-commerce site will be SSL-certified and the URL address will start from https:// and NOT http://.
- Any website not offering a secure payment system, such as PayPal, Visa, Master Card, etc., is unsafe and suspicious.
- Search for customer feedback of the company or do a Google search using keywords like “product quality review”, “customer service review” and “refund/return policy review” in concurrence with the website’s name. Get opinion about the website from friends and colleagues.

2. Counterfeit Items – Beware: E-commerce websites have arrangements with many product sellers. Damaged or low-quality goods are also available in reliable websites. Pictures alone is sometimes misleading. See checklist below for things to look out.

- Beware of fake photos. Pictures looking too perfect are either edited or/and probably fake. Photos exhibiting the product from different angles help one estimate its dimensions (fitting in case of clothes) is much useful to take a call.
- Always check the size when buying any item. When buying clothes check the size guide (S, M, L, XL, 34, 8, etc.) Please note that size measurements change from country to country.
- When buying a specific brand item, look for the official seller. Question the seller if the product is authentic requesting proof of evidence if in doubt.
- Check all e-commerce site with third-party sellers, of all the other items they offer. E.g., if someone is selling a very expensive high-end makeup together with some cheap plastic goods, they are most likely a fake.

3. FAKE online reviews – watch out closely: Fake reviews are common with online marketplaces, sellers and retailers as product rating can grow or disrupt businesses. Learn to spot fakes.

- If the review is excellent, without much text or barely fulfilling the minimum text requirement, it is a fake. In any case it is not useful to us as buyers, as we get no information about the quality/efficiency of the product.
- Reviews repeating or rephrasing product descriptions, without telling anything new about the item, may as well be a fake.
- Check the reviewer’s page for their reviews of other items too. If the reviewer’s ratings are all excellent with most/all of them highlighting the same seller, it is a fake.

4. Be Careful of added costs: If the price is too good to believe, it is possibly false. Online shops most often conceal added costs (high delivery costs, import duties, taxes, membership fees, etc.) until the very last moment during the checkout and ordering process. Avoid misunderstandings.

- Read the item description completely, as the seller might try to deceive you on the title.
- Compare prices with other sites and/or sellers. If the item is on offer and too cheap, there may be a catch.
- Double check before paying money as certain sites may change the shipping cost, with additional taxes and duties after adding the shipping address to your order.
- Some companies will require us to pay membership fees/subscriptions to get an item with discounts or be eligible for free shipping. A one-off purchaser might end up paying cost significantly more unlike a regular buyer.

5. Beware of Identity Theft: When shopping online always it is better to keep all personal information safe to prevent scammers from gaining access to our bank account.

- Do not shop using public Wi-Fi. When using a public internet source, all our personal information including passwords are available to all the other users of said network. When shopping online using strong passwords or double verification option is advisable. Password should necessarily contain a mix of letters with capitals and lowercases, numbers and symbols. Changing passwords at least once a year is also essential.
- Synchronize the payment system with mobile phone or enable a fingerprint scanning or double verification.
- Avoid using personal or work email for online shopping. Instead, create a new shopping account so that even if someone hacks the shopping email our personal information would be safe.
- It is safer to use the credit card for setting up a shopping account or use an alternate bank account or debit card if you pay directly on a website, thereby protecting the main bank account from access by scammers.

The views expressed in ‘Keemat’ do not necessarily reflect those of CGSI, but rather are personal opinions of the author(s) concerned.



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