

## Be wary of shopping via social media platforms - FOMCA

Written by

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FOMCA has been receiving numerous complaints from people who have been cheated when shopping via social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WeChat, WhatsApp, Telegram and others. Buying via social media platforms is unadvisable.

The government is encouraging Malaysians to venture into online businesses as the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted many people due to job loss, while some have been forced to take no-pay leave.

Although there are many sincere sellers who are selling their products such as food, clothes, art and craft, etc, to make ends meet, nevertheless, there are many who are using online platforms to cheat guileless consumers.

The largest number of reports were on non-delivery of goods purchased. Most of the complaints were regarding sellers not delivering the promised goods, sellers were missing, ghosting, etc.

Most of the transactions ranged from RM30 to RM9,000. Once payments were made, the scammers disappeared without a trace. Even the websites and phone numbers were no longer available.

Besides being victims of online scams, many consumers also claimed to be given the runaround and when it came to product delivery, with some products taking more than a month to arrive.

While many online sellers are legitimate, social media scammers use the internet to rip off unsuspecting shoppers. They will often ask consumers to wire transfer money upfront.

As more Malaysians turn to the internet to purchase goods and services, there is a pressing need for an improved legal framework to protect rights of consumers.

The Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs and Ministry of Communication and Multimedia Commission should regulate online sellers who use social media to sell their products and services.

Many of them are not registered with the Companies Commission of Malaysia. Consumers are urged not to trust any social media platform to do any transaction.

We also encourage consumers to report scams to the ministries so people can be pre-warned about current scams, and the ministries can monitor scam trends and disrupt them.

Make sure to include details of the scam contact, for example, email or screenshot. Always use legitimate online platforms so if there are any disputes, they are traceable and refunds can be obtained, or a case can be filed

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at a tribunal as there are proper channels for disputes.

**Warning signs to look out for:**

A product is advertised at an unbelievably low price or advertised to have amazing benefits or features that sound too good to be true. Some advertisements will coax consumers to buy as the items are limited, or push consumers to grab the offer within a stipulated date, which is often immediate, leaving consumers no time to check on the sellers.

The other party insists on immediate payment or payment via electronic funds transfer, or wire service. They may insist that consumers pay up-front for vouchers before they can access a cheap deal or a give-away.

The social media-based store is new and selling products at very low prices. The store may have limited information about delivery and other policies.

AN online retailer that does not provide adequate information about privacy, terms and conditions of use, dispute resolution or contact details.

**Protect yourself**

Check if the website or social media page has a refund or returns policy, and that their policies sound fair. The better online shopping sites have detailed complaint or dispute handling processes in case something goes wrong.

When using retail websites, find out exactly who you are dealing with. If it is a Malaysian company, you are in a better position to sort out problems if something goes wrong.

When making online payments, only pay for items using a secure payment service ♦ look for a URL starting with ♦https♦ and a closed padlock symbol or a payment provider such as PayPal. Think twice before using virtual currencies such as bitcoin ♦ they do not have the same protections as other transaction methods, so you cannot get your money back once you have sent it.

Avoid any arrangements with strangers who ask for up-front payment via money order, wire transfer, international funds transfer, pre-loaded card or electronic currency. It is rare to recover money sent this way.

Never send money or give credit card or online account details to anyone you do not know or trust.

Check if the sellers are blacklisted via <https://ccid.rmp.gov.my/semakmule.>

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