Pandemic boosted e-commerce in 2020: UNCTAD

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The COVID-19 pandemic provided a boost for e-commerce last year, but the digital windfall was not enjoyed equally across the board, a UN study found Monday.

"Although it will take some time to get the full picture of the impact of COVID-19 on e-commerce... a number of developments point to the strong rise in e-commerce in 2020," said the report by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The study crunched data from seven countries—Australia, Britain, Canada, China, Singapore, South Korea and the United States—representing some two-thirds of online trade.

Online sales rose 59 percent in Australia, 46.7 percent in Britain, 32.4 precent in the United States and 14.6 percent in China.

Turnover rose by 22.4 percent last year to $2.5 trillion, having increased by some 15 percent in 2018-19, UNCTAD said.

By contrast, overall retail sales declined by one percent.

"These statistics show the growing importance of online activities," the report's author, Torbjorn Fredriksson, told AFP.

They also underscore the need for countries, especially developing states, to use such data as they rebuild from the pandemic, said Shamika Sirimanne, head of UNCTAD's technology and logistics section, in a statement.

A standout performer was Jumia, Africa's online retail giant, whose transactions jumped by more than 50 percent in volume in the first six months of 2020 compared with the first half of 2019, Fredriksson said.

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