

"After wearing the glasses, I felt a lot better": Customers at a BRAC Vision Camp in Sherpur, Bangladesh on deciding whether to get reading glasses

Ambika Samarthya-Howard

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Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What is her name?

Najma: Najma.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Why did you choose to buy [glasses]?

Najma: When I am tailoring, or reading the Quran, things look blurry.

Translator: Is this your second pair of glasses? Did you have them before?

Najma: No, I just got these now

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Why didn't you buy glasses?

Customer 1: I didn't like the frames.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: If the frames were different, would you have bought them?

Customer 1: Absolutely. After wearing the glasses, I felt a lot better.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: If he knew there was a pharmacist with different frames, would he go there?

Customer 1: Absolutely.



Translator: I understand you didn't like the frames here. But what did you think of the service and price? Door to door service for 150 taka, is this good or bad?

Customer 1: It's absolutely good.

Mohammed Abul Said (Customer): My name is Mohammed Abul Said. I am 46 years old. I sell medicine for cows—veterinarians. I got glasses around one and a half years ago at the hospital in Mymensingh. I told them I had a problem and they suggested getting glasses. They gave me an exam, and gave me glasses. Once I got the glasses, I felt like maybe I needed more power in the glasses. I went back for another exam here. I had 1.25 power, then I tried 1.50. After trying it out, I thought to myself my old ones were good enough, so I returned the new ones. I had the exam one year eight months ago, something like that. I have problems with near vision.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Can you ask if it was due to money?

Mohammed Abul Said (Customer): I was thinking I would get another test and then come back.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Because he thinks they will do a better job than the pharmacist.

Mohammed Abul Said (Customer): Yes, that is what I was thinking.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: If the pharmacist were older or if there were anything different about the pharmacist would it change his mind? Or is it just that it was a pharmacist.

Mohammed Abul Said (Customer): No it's not that, I just think the level is better with a doctor. [The pharmacists] are good but not as good as a doctor.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Can he do anything to change his mind?

Mohammed Abul Said (Customer): No, usually we do come here. My family members generally listen to his suggestions.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Can you tell me about why you came to the camp today?

Customer 2: I got glasses before, when the doctor came. After wearing it for a while, it bothered my skin. The power was higher. After wearing it for a while, I would get a headache. I still have those glasses.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: So you had glasses before. What is the biggest difference that made?

Customer 2: Without glasses, when people are far away, I cannot see them clearly. When they come closer, I can see. When I wear the glasses, I can see far away, but it bothers my skin and gives me a headache.

Translator: Who gave you those glasses?

Customer 2: A doctor that came before.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard (she/her) is Solutions Journalism Network's Chief Innovation Officer. She strategizes on communications, metrics, impact, product and technology, leveraging platforms for the network and creating cool content. She also leads the Solutions Insights Lab, an initiative of SJN that uses targeted research and analysis to identify and interrogate what's working and what's not in a particular sector or field. She has an MFA from Columbia's film program and has been creating, teaching and writing at the intersection of storytelling and social good for two decades. She has produced content for Current TV, UNICEF, Havas, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Prism.

* This interview has been edited and condensed.