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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSAR).**

**ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BUYING AND SELLING  
BEHAVIOUR DURING THE COVID 19 ERA**

**BY:**

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**MAPR20045**

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MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS.**

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## STUDENT DECLARATION AND CERTIFICATION

I, Michelle Fafa Agbenorto, hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university, and all materials used in this thesis have been duly acknowledged.



.....

.....**10<sup>th</sup> December, 2021**.....

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**SUPERVISOR DECLARATION**

I hereby certify that this project work was done under my supervision. I thereby approve that the work is adequate in scope and quality for the partial fulfilment of their requirements for the award of a Mater's of Art in Public Relations.



.....

**DR. MODESTUS FOSU**

**10<sup>th</sup> December, 2021**

.....

**DATE**

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## **DEDICATION**

This study is wholeheartedly dedicated to my nuclear family who have been my source of inspiration and strength even when the going became tough and thought of giving up.

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## ABSTRACT

This exploratory study tried to discover how the Covid-19 pandemic influenced the use of social media in consumer purchases during the lockdown period in Ghana. The main purpose of this study was to assess the influence of social media on the consumer behaviour using GIJ students as a case. The study employed the quantitative research approach using self-developed survey questionnaire administered to 119 respondents to assess the frequency with which consumers made purchases using social media during the lockdown period, the difference between making purchases using social media and traditional media, and evaluating the changes that social media has made to various stages of consumer buying process. The data was analysed and presented using frequency distribution table, coupled with basic descriptive analysis. The results of the study show that there was an increased use of social media among consumers during the lockdown. The findings also show that there was a high preference for social media as a medium or source of information in making purchasing decisions during the lockdown period in Ghana. Social media also affected the various stages of the consumer decision-making process. The study recommended that businesses should tailor most of their marketing and advertising strategies to suit the new age of social media.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the study**

Social media has been argued to have impacted on all aspects of human life. It has affected the worlds of interpersonal interactions, political communication, marketing, advertising, and others. In the world of business, the impact has been relatively significant. Firms, upon recognition of the utility that social media serves in relation to their business goals have embraced the phenomenon.

In a bid to communicate with external publics (customers or consumers) through marketing, advertising or promotional activities, social media have become a prominent feature in the tool kit of a firm's communication ventures and aspirations (Kotler, 2005). In an information age where every detail of life is made known through the click of a button, a lot of scholars have directed their attention towards the impact that social media have had on businesses. But there is the need to also examine how social media is used on the part of consumers in their buying decisions (Powers et al, 2012). The world has been brought to a standstill since December, 2019 in the wake of the novel Corona Virus pandemic, also referred to as COVID-19. The changes to human life brought about by the virus has increased the significance of social media. This study seeks to explore the ways in which social media as a tool by business and a handy resource to consumers, have influenced purchasing behaviours and decisions of people in the time of this pandemic. Specifically, the study seeks to ascertain the various changes that social media has made to the various stages of the consumer buying cycle.

### **1.1.1 COVID 19 and its social impact**

Corona virus also known as COVID 19 is a rampaging outbreak that was declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization on January 30, 2020 and subsequently declared as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. COVID-19 is known to be transmitted from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth. Accounts from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) suggests that, the pandemic has been worldly known to be transmitted from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are expelled when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or speaks and also via contact with fomites (WHO, 2020). Van Doremalen et al. (2020) submits that, the virus has been shown to survive outside a host for up to 24 hours to 72 hours. This is however dependent on the nature of the surface. Common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, colds, headaches, and difficulty in breathing.

The world has been hit strongly by this devastating and rampaging whirlwind. Ghana has not been an exception since the country recorded its first case involving returning residents from Norway and Turkey in March, 12, 2020. The apprehension among Ghanaians grew as the virus infected more and more countries with devastating economic and social consequences. Subsequently, first cases which was recorded in March was followed with a situation where the country evidenced a sharp rise in infections across almost all its 16 administrative regions.

The increase in the number of infections were accompanied by a resultant fear, distraught and apprehension about the disease. As a result, there was pressure on the Government of Ghana to close borders and put in place measures to ensure the possibility of avoiding and preventing prospective incidence and help curtail the infection of COVID-19. To reduce person-to-person transmission, the World Health Organization has put in place recommendations, which include avoiding or limiting physical contact (including handshake

and other forms of usual contact), regular handwashing with soap under running water, rubbing of hands with alcohol-based sanitizers with 70% alcohol strength, and the reduction of large gatherings among the general populace (WHO, 2020). Also crucial are some measures such as coughing into elbow or tissue and disposing it immediately into a bin have been recommended. As a result, these preventive behavioral change messages have been developed and are being disseminated through various media like radio, television, social media and print media, nation-wide.

The Government of Ghana, led by its President, Mr. Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo, initiated the start of the imposition of restrictions based on the WHO recommendations (WHO, 2020) on major cities in Ghana that were the hotspots for the spread of the virus. The principal cities affected were Accra, Kumasi and Kasoa; cities that were densely populated. Legislations like the Imposition of Restrictions Act (2020), Act 1012 was enacted to buttress the initiative. The lockdown was lifted 21 days after the lockdown was initiated as businesses and individuals suffered severe repercussions as individuals were increasingly losing their jobs, although the basic rationale given by the president for the move was the fact that it was buttressed by science and data.

According to the World Health Organization, and as stated in Bradbury-Jones and Isham (2020), the pandemic has brought in its wake a lot of changes, spanning from physiological ones to social as well as professional ones. In essence, lives have been affected by the pandemic as a result of a number of restrictions imposed on people by governments in a concerted effort to bring the spread of the pandemic under control. Pencarelli et al (2020) submits that, the restrictions that included the implementation of full and partial lockdowns had implications on how people connected with each other as well as the rest of the world.

The impact of the imposed lockdown on businesses were drastic. Ibrahim (2020) notes that, during the 21-day lockdown in Ghana, the implementation of the physical distancing

protocols has necessitated businesses to reduce the number of customers that they can accommodate at a time. This greatly impacted restaurants, who had to offer take-away services as a replacement for their dine-in services, and a strict control of the number of people who access other public settings like supermarkets, shops, among others (Ibrahim, 2020). Pancarelli et al (2020) indicates that, the lockdown, which made the use of social media a prominent feature in our social lives also served as assets to businesses since this was a way of engaging their customers. Social media, hence, became a buffer zone between businesses and firms, and this greatly impacted the traditional methods of buying, selling, advertising, marketing and communication between firms and their customers.

### **1.1.2 Social Media and its business influences**

Social media is a relatively recent phenomenon. Over the last decade, the World Wide Web has seen a proliferation of user-driven web technologies such as blogs, social networks and media sharing platforms. Collectively called social media, these technologies have enabled the growth of user-generated content, a global community, and the publishing of consumer opinions (Smith, 2009). This movement now dominates the way we use the web and has given rise to popular platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter, where people connect, produce and share content.

Kempe et al (2003) conceptualizes Social Media as web-based services which are referred to network of relationships and interactions among different users. They facilitate communication flow and sharing of different information (Kietzmann et al, 2011). Dhuhli & Qaboos also posits that social media have given plenty of opportunities to consumers in expanding consumers' online purchases.

The increasing use of social media worldwide has led to the belief that this is a valuable tool in supporting consumer engagement. Companies are continuously looking to new methods for reaching consumers and for shaping consumer behaviours, including brand loyalty and

intention to buy. The changing technological era has led to increased activity in social network platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, all of which have created mechanisms through which consumers can develop rapport and create interactions with brand-specific content. Thus, the need to discover how social media influenced customers' behaviour during the 21-day lockdown period in Ghana becomes important.

Internet usage and social media have been able to revolutionize the way we seek information and also interact and connect with each other. It has also helped in creating the atmosphere for the emergence of brands as well as the shaping of consumer opinions/ perception on products and services (Powers et al, 2012; Smith, 2009). Consumers now control information and pace of information distribution. Mangold & Faulds (2009) admitted that marketers now have no power over content, timing or frequency of conversation among consumers online. Social media has enabled the growth of user-generated content, a global community and the publishing of consumer opinion (Smith, 2009).

The social media revolution has led to new ways of seeking and obtaining information on the multitude of products and services in the market. It has enabled consumers to connect and discuss brands with each other quickly and easily (Powers et al., 2012). Consumer opinions on products and services are now increasingly dominated by strangers in digital spaces, which in turn influence opinions in the offline space (Smith, 2009). Social media have empowered consumers, as marketers have no power over the content, timing or frequency of online conversations among consumers (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

### **1.1.3 Sales and Marketing during COVID**

Pencareli et al (2020) argue that this period has been characterized with a corresponding increase in the use of social media to ease the burden of establishing contact with family, relatives, work colleagues, school mates, teachers, mentors and friends both far and near.

Social media also ameliorated and abated the psychological strain that came with the pandemic and imposed lockdown by providing an avenue for people to have fun, serving as a source of distraction and a good way to while away time (Pencarelli et al, 2020). The added advantages of social media within this period included its significant role in aiding in the spread of information while simultaneously serving as a source of information about the pandemic, despite debates about its efficacy. Contenti (2020) and Webnoviny.sk (2020) highlight the exponential increase of social media use during the pandemic and explored the most used social media sites such as Tik Tok, Pinterest, Twitter and LinkedIn, not forgetting messaging applications like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger as a result of the adherence to the social distancing and lockdown protocols in most countries. Based on the proliferated use in social media during the period as attested to by the aforementioned scholars, the lockdown period was also characterized by businesses capitalizing on social media by making their services available online. Bearing in mind the limitations of physical interactions as well as human movements (WHO,2020), consumers have had to rely on social media to make purchases. Organizations and firms alike have now amplified their use of social media, with the hopes cashing in on its prospects (Pencareli, 2020).

Kohli et al (2020) advances that the pandemic has had a great impact on old consumer behaviour and has introduced new consumer behaviour across all areas of life during the period of heightened spread of the pandemic. Activities such as work, teaching and learning, communication, travelling and shopping, have all been impacted. The consumers have been observed to purchase more essential goods such as food by taking advantage of online shopping services Kohli et al (2020).

Studies done in Italy clearly demonstrate that, consumer interest in online shopping increased due to limitations on physical interactions. Lv et al (2020) estimates that as a result of this new way of life, business, firms, organizations and merchants have invested a lot of time and

resources in boosting their promotional activities on online platforms in a bid to promote their brand awareness, increase revenue and the acquisition of more customers.

This shows that there is an increasing market for internet purchase which needs to be looked at. It has however become important that we look into how social media is contributing to this online purchase and how it is used to influence firms in their marketing activities as well as consumers into making purchasing decisions in Ghana as long as the lockdown, which was necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic is concerned.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The use of social media by consumers is anxiously followed by marketers, but not much is known about how it influences the consumers' decision-making. Many studies focus on consumer behaviour in the online shopping environment, but without consideration of the effects of the internet on the different phases of consumers' decision process (Darley et al., 2010). A study by Varghese and Agrawal (2021) employed a quantitative survey to explore the aspects of the customer decision process which showed that, social media had a powerful impact on consumer buying behavior in digital age. The research also shows that consumers are highly selective in making product choices while making a purchase. According to the study, the factors that can change the customer's brand perception and willingness to buy include the strategies that led to consumers' perspective, and the opinion of the people who create content on Social Media. As a result, the study recommends that, companies should adapt an integrated strategic approach with the aim of narrowing in on social network platforms since they can make them successful in getting, engaging, influencing and retaining customers. Dotsey (2017) in examining the same phenomenon in the Ho Technical University students indicated that when social media is used in shopping, it fostered quick access to product information, reduce stress of face-to-face bargaining, enhancing customer students' engagement and improving communication among seller and buyer.

In the estimation of Lv et al (2020), there is the need for companies to take advantage of the prospects of social media marketing on the purchasing power of consumers. In a pandemic era, several studies have been done to assess the impact of social media on consumer purchasing behaviour.

A study by Maon, Nacum and Mason (2020) in their analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an increment of social media marketing activities in the United States (U.S.) showed that consumers have increased their use of social media. The authors advance that social media was used by consumers as a tool for the identification of products, the collection of information about products as well as evaluation of products and making purchases. The findings of this study clearly demonstrate the growing importance of social media marketing since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Taha et al (2021) in their evaluation of impact of social media on shopping behaviour during the pandemic demonstrates that there is a high incidence of social media use during the first wave in Slovakia and Italy. The authors, as argued in the paper are of the view that their findings are inconclusive with respect to measuring the overall impact, but it speaks to the likelihood that some social media platforms like Facebook, Messenger, Instagram and Twitter may have had a greater impact on consumer behavior due to their characteristics as compared to others like Whatsapp and Messenger. The study suggests that, this could have managerial implications on businesses. The authors recommend that business managers should increase the use of social media to improve the experiences of their customers at different stages of the purchasing cycle. The findings of this study serves as the basis for investigating whether the significance of social media has had some managerial effect on businesses in Ghana, and how such businesses are responding to the pivotal role that social media plays in the purchasing process of consumers.

There appears to be a gap in literature with respect to the African situation, and particularly an empirical study that seeks to measure the effect of social media on consumer purchases during the pandemic era in a Ghanaian context. It is in light of this that this study seeks to explore how the presence and abundance of these new information sources is influencing the decision process of consumers for complex purchases during the lockdown phase of the pandemic.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The following will serve as the objectives that will guide the study:

- i. To explore the frequency with which consumers used social media for making purchases during the lockdown.
- ii. To understand which medium (between traditional media and social media) most accounted for the purchases made by consumers during the lockdown period.
- iii. To understand the changes that social media made to the different stages of the consumer decision-making during the lockdown period.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

Gleaning from the research objectives above, the following are the research objectives for the study:

- i. How frequent did the consumers use social media for making purchases during the lockdown?
- ii. Which medium (between traditional media and social media) was the most significant in the purchases made by consumers during the lockdown period?
- iii. What changes has social media made to the various stages of the consumer - decision making process during the lockdown?

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

This study is of significance to various stakeholders. Researchers can use this study to facilitate further research in other sectors especially those that are related to social media platforms. The study will provide the referential findings that will be needed to assist other researchers in carrying out similar studies among other organizations with similar business environment. It is also going to help online marketers understand consumer buying behaviour and how they can position their brands online to grasp the attention of consumers

The study can also help the youth and online consumers establish the factors that impact on their choices based on the different stages of the consumer buying decisions process.

Consequently, the findings of this study will also contribute to the debate on the efficacy of social media marketing in areas where changes and effects on consumer purchases are concerned. The findings will be of essential help to marketers in Ghana to be able to strategize on effective social media techniques during pandemics like the Corona case.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The delimitation of the study refers to the scope of the study. Delimitations are characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the study (Yin, 2014). Research delimitations of a study are self-imposed limitations from the scope and design of the study (Snelson, 2016). The remits of the study will be Ghana, since the focus will be on consumers and businesses during the 21-day lockdown period in Ghana.

## **1.7 Organization of the study**

The study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter one will be an introductory chapter which will espouse the framework of the study. The chapter discusses the background of the problem, problem statement, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, scope of the study and limitations of the study. The second chapter is themed literature review. This chapter is centred around the analyses and discussion of literature that are relevant to the problem or phenomenon under investigation. The chapter will explore the theoretical underpinnings of the study, as well as the discussion of key concepts. Lastly, the chapter reviews and discusses other related empirical studies. Chapter three will look at the methodology to be adopted to complete a study of this nature. The research design and orientation will be carefully explored, justification given for the selected research method, data collection method, population and target sample. The sampling technique will aptly be explained and how data collected will be treated and analysed. Chapter four will be dedicated to the presentation and discussion of findings in tandem with the key research questions, and also in conjunction with relevant literature in chapter two. Chapter five which happens to be the last chapter will be focused on the summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature on how consumers in this technological era consume information about products on social media and how this influences their consumer behavior. The chapter looks at works that have been done on how people are choosing and accessing the different types of media available and the theoretical framework underlining the study. The chapter further reviews literature on the uses and gratification theory and how technology affects traditional media. The chapter begins by examining the theoretical assumptions underpinning the study. The chapter then reviews work related to the study. This is done, first by scanning the global scholarly field of work examining the influence of social media on consumer behavior.

#### **2.1 Theoretical framework**

The following theories will be used in line with the objectives of this study;

- i. The Uses and Gratification Theory
- ii. Theory of technological Determinism

##### **2.1.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory**

One influential tradition in media research is referred to as Uses and Gratification (occasionally Needs and Gratification). This theory focuses on why people use particular media. It can be seen as part of a broader trend amongst media researchers which is more concerned with ‘what people do with media’, allowing for a variety of responses and interpretations. The Uses and Gratification Theory arose originally in the 1940’s and underwent a revival in the 1970’s and 1980’s. The theory, which was promulgated by Katz

and Blumer in 1974 sprung from a functionalist paradigm in the social sciences. It presents the use of the media in terms of the gratification of social or psychological needs of the individual (Blumler & Katz 1974).

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is an audience centered theory that seeks to understand why and how people actively seek specific media to satisfy their needs. Before the uses and gratifications theory, most of the earlier theories were on the effects of media on people. UGT diverges from these media effect theories that state what media do to people and rather focuses on what people are doing with the media. The driving question of UGT is: Why do people use media and what do they use them for?

Uses and Gratifications theorists argue that people's needs are influenced by how they use and respond to a medium. Zillman (cited by McQuail 1987:236) has shown the influence of mood on media choice: boredom encourages the choice of exciting content and stress encourages the choices of a relaxing content. The same TV programme may gratify different needs for different individuals. UGT currently gives communication scholars a perspective through which a number of ideas and theories about media choice, consumption, and even impact can be viewed. In the early 1940s, researchers began seeing patterns under the perspective of the uses and gratifications theory in radio listeners. Lasswell (1948), introduced a four-functional interpretation of the media on a macro-sociological level. Media served the functions of surveillance, correlation, entertainment and cultural transmission for both society and individuals. The uses and gratification theory was further developed from a number of research conducted by fellow theorists.

The advent of the internet also brought in its wake the need to conduct research in that regard. Modern applications of uses and gratifications research include the internet use. The internet

provides a new and deep field for exploring UGT. It was found to have three main categories of gratifications: content gratification, process gratification, and social gratification.

The uses and gratifications theory is still helpful when finding out the relationship between people and the media. To a large extent, some people genuinely have reasons for using the media and it is basically because of a particular need. The plurality of the media in recent times has also given audiences a variety to choose from making the theory relevant. How can we explain why people are stuck to a particular media and not the other at a particular time? This can be a clear indication that there is a need for the choice.

There are those who genuinely have no choice when it comes to the media they use but to a large extent, people decide where they want to go when it comes to media choice. UGT researchers are developing the theory to be more predictive and explanatory since those are some of the criticisms of the theory. They are doing this by connecting the needs, goals, benefits, and consequences of media consumption and use along with individual factors.

Denis McQuail offers the following typologies of common reasons for media use (McQuail 1987:73), which we believe provides a useful insight into the perceived effects that the internet, particularly social media can influence and trigger certain actions in a consumer:

- Finding out about more relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society and the world including the existence of products, and purchasing behavior.
- Seeking advice on practical matters or opinion and decision choices
- Satisfying curiosity and general interest
- Learning; self-education
- Gaining a sense of security through knowledge

Relevance of the theory to the study:

As iterated earlier, there is an increasing attention to the uses and gratifications of the internet being an alternative information tool for people. It is particularly important and imperative

that a closer look be taken at the gratification and uses of the internet (social media) by consumers. This theory will provide a useful insight into the reasons why consumers opt for social media as compared with traditional media, and why organizations are increasingly gravitating towards the internet as a viable marketing option, to augment other traditional marketing approaches.

### **2.1.2 Technological Determinism**

The theory posits that technology has a significant effect on our lives (Adler, 2006). It also presumes that a society's technology drives the development of its social structure and cultural values. The theory was believed to have been coined by an American sociologists and economist called Thorstein Veblen (Medosch, 2005). Medosch (2005) explained that once new technology is been introduced into the world, it becomes impossible to resist and it has a strong impact on the social world.

The theory is of the assumption that the technology of a given society is a fundament influencer of the various ways in which a society exists. Another assumption also states that, changes in technology are the primary and most important source that leads to change in society. Technology sometimes had unintended or unexpected results and effects as well. Similarly, the introduction of new media to the traditional media have totally changed the way individuals receive information and organizations communicate now.

Technological determinism according to Medosch (2005) has become a very powerful concept because it is often accepted without further thought and it shapes the views of experts and non-experts; of scientists, engineers, politicians, business executives, advertisers and people on the streets. It is supported by the belief in the authority of science and by the joined together narratives of modernist progress and capitalist economic growth.

McLuhan (1964/65) believes that modern technology will affect the lives we conduct. He believes that the way of people's life would be changing due to media's evolution. McLuhan

(1964/65) predicted that people can become both producers and consumers of information by using new media. Subsequently, the introduction of social media has democratized the communication and business industry making it easy for people to share their opinion on issues freely unlike the traditional media that gives authority to the gatekeepers to manage information about products and brands as they deem fit. The introduction of smart phones and the web 2.0 has somewhat revolutionized communication and marketing techniques by dictating information flow.

People now prefer to use social media to communicate and make purchases because of its convenience. As cited earlier, almost about 2 billion people have created an account with Facebook alone as of 2018. According to report by Kweku Zurek of Graphic Corporation, Ghana as of 2018 had about 10 million social media users representing 19% of the general population. A number that is bound to increase with the cause of time. According to the report, Ghana as of 2017 had 5.6 million active social media users. It was also revealed that 32% of the population used mobile internet. It was also revealed that out of the 5.6 million social media users, 30% of them used WhatsApp, 28% use Facebook, 15% use YouTube, 15% use Facebook Messenger, and 12% use Instagram ([www.graphic.com.gh](http://www.graphic.com.gh))

This shows that internet and social media users in the country are increasingly growing. McLuhan asserts that this change in communication is also changing the concept of information flow and the process of marketing brands and products and this penultimately affects brand and product perception and consumer purchases. People are now getting information they have not even asked for. Many corporations and businesses have identified this trend and are now exploring them in other to stay competitive and viable in today's technological era. Conventional marketing and business communication have changed. Marketers now do not only deal with journalists and traditional media only, but they also the

public through social media. This to a large extent is changing culture of marketing and has also broadened the scope of work for the marketer.

McLuhan was able to link communication flow to the technological advancement and cultural change in terms of consumer preference and source of information about brands or products. This has made it possible to explain why social media has now become a very important part of an organization's daily responsibility.

Relevance of the theory to the study

The discussions presented earlier seems to present some credent findings. It suggests that internet and social media users in the country are increasingly growing and this is accompanied by a corresponding change in communication with subsequent change in the concept of information flow and the process of marketing. Social media is now more than ever, a great ammunition in the marketing prowess of an organization and this theory will help us examine the reasons for this perceived impact of social media on marketing initiatives, particularly on consumer purchasing behaviour.

## **2.2 Discussion of concepts**

### **2.2.1 History and classification of social media**

The term social media emanated from the development and subsequent commonization of some platforms like Facebook and MySpace in 2003 and 2004 respectively. At the time where these platforms were becoming proliferated, it was then that the coinage of Web 2.0 to describe and encapsulate the new form of internet usage and how the internet was used to replace the creation and publishing of content by people, as seen in publishing firms. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) advance that, this was equally advantageous since it afforded many users of these platforms the chance to adjust, be involved and collaborate with the rest of the world. Constantinides (2014) agrees with the earlier assertion by advancing that, the

introduction of the Web 2.0 came along with a subsequent introduction of projects that were collaborative in nature such as Wiki and blogs. This made it possible for the creation of user networks, that is content that is generated by users and publicly available, and dissemination of ideas, information and knowledge among users (Constantinides, 2014).

The various views regarding the concept of user generated content and Web 2.0, results in an interpretation of social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the beliefs and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that permits the creation and exchange of UGC (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The authors provide some categorizations of social media. Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010) argue that the various social media platforms or networking sites can be grouped into collaborative projects (Wikipedia and blogs), social networking (Facebook), content communities (YouTube), virtual social worlds (Second Life), and virtual game worlds (World of Warcraft). Presently, there have been the resurgence of social sites that are meant for the purposes of commercial and professional review while accommodating content generated by users such as Amazon, among others.

### 2.2.2 Social Media as electronic word-of-mouth

The concept of word-of-mouth stated gaining prominence after it was introduced in the 1950s. The proliferation of the internet has resulted in the rebirth and revitalization of the concept. Arndt (1967) argues that, Word-of-mouth, mostly referred to in literature as WOM is a form of communication that transpires between persons where the receiver gains information regarding a brand, product or service. Kimmel and Kitchen (2014) argues that, the concept of WOM is regarded as one of the most significant sources of information for consumer buying used by consumers in making purchasing decisions, shaping attitudes, perceptions and expectancy of brands, products and services.

It can be inferred from the above arguments for the purposes of this study that, the concept of WOM has an influencing power in all phases of the of the consumer decision-making

process. This is in part due to the fact that, the increasing reliance on social media as a WOM is as a result of the simultaneous increasing interconnectedness of people based on the advancement of social media networking sites and the increasing use of social media (Kimmel and Kitchen, 2014).

The use of social media as WOM has been conceptualized by Bronner and Hoog (2010) as Online or electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) where internet users use social media to proffer their evaluation of diverse products, firms and services. A more articulate definition is given by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004: 31) as “any positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”. Subsequently, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and others are tools that have been very instrumental in the dissemination of electronic WOM about the products, services and firms and inadvertently affects the marketing communication strategies of companies and organizations. Content produced by internet users, who are also consumers, is generally considered to be independent of commercial influences (Bronner and Hoog, 2010). This trust makes consumers go to blogs, forums, and other impartial social media sources to collect information for purchase decisions (Powers et al., 2012).

### **2.2.3 Social Media and Marketing**

Social Media Marketing is a bridge of two concepts that is simply used to describe the increasing use of social media as a tool for marketing. Weinberg (2009) explains social media marketing as leveraging the ‘social’ through the ‘media’ to ‘market’ businesses’ constituents. Alternatively, it can be said that social media marketing helps in the empowerment of people in the promotion of their products, services and others using social media networking sites,

based on their added advantage that enables them to interact with and to tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional advertising channels. It is no longer a striking fact that most of the advertisements via mass media are not as efficient as in the past, because by advertising through the mass, the message is generally reaching far more people than the potential customer intended to reach (Weber 2009; Weinberg 2009).

Weber (2009) argues that, the proliferation of social media networking sites has resulted in the creation of the social web, a platform where similar people with common interest share their thoughts and ideas. Weber (2009) portends that, markets should learn to use social media networking sites for the purposes of networking with customers where they can listen and respond to the views, opinions and evaluation of their customers. This should be the most potent use of social media platforms instead of their use as merely channels of advertising. Social media marketing is special and considered more advantageous to traditional media based on how easy and cost-effective it is for small, medium-sized as well as large companies, hence the call for firms to make judicious use of it. Weber (2009) argues that, although social media is still evolutionary, it has a lot of potential and its use does change the purpose of marketing. Social media helps in the firm's effort in defining the target market, communicating with prospects, building loyalty, and customer engagement and so on (Weber 2009).

The change from traditional media to social media or in some cases, the use of social media to augment other marketing practices should be embracing the changes that social media has brought to various marketing processes such as segmentation, the formulation and implementation of marketing strategies among others (Weber 2009).

Marketing researchers like Drury (2008), Mayfield (2008), Weber (2009), and Weinberg (2009) have made arguments with regards to the fact that, the use of social media is a two-dimensional process where there is engagement between a brand and an audience since social

media is focused on the exchange of ideas and perceptions (Drury 2008), as well as a creation of increasingly visualize contents (Weber 2009). Oftentimes, content is a critical factor in achieving an effective marketing via social media; however, according to Curata's "B2B Marketing Trends Survey 2012 Report" (Marketing Profs 2012), companies seem to encounter challenges in creating original content, having time to create it, and finding high-quality content (Jacobs 2013).

#### **2.2.4 Consumer buyer behaviour**

The goal of this study requires the use of a well-researched method used in the evaluation of the various stages of the consumer purchase. The study narrows in on the decision-process approach which studies the events that precede and follow a purchase, and that explains the way decisions are made (Karimi, 2013).

Du Plessis et al. (1991) defines consumer decision making as the "behaviour patterns of consumers, that precede, determine and follow on the decision process for the acquisition of need satisfying products, ideas or services." The various consumer models that have been promulgated by scholars differ from each other in terms of their complexity, with the simplest ones including the economic model which explains how consumers use the principle of maximum utility and end up spending minimum amount for maximum gains, Maslow's hierarchy of needs which is a psychological model where individuals are motivated by their strongest needs, the Pavlovian learning model where consumer behaviour informed by their practice, learning and experience, and sociological model which explains how buying is influenced by society or social norms.

The 1960's were characterized with the development of several models by scholars such as Nicosia (1966), Engel et al. (1978) and Howard and Sheth (1969). These three models are sometimes referred to as the 'grand models' of consumer behaviour. The Nicosia (1966)

model had four fields of actions in the decision process: consumer attitude-formation, information search and evaluation, the act of purchase, and post-consumption feedback. The Howard and Sheth (1969) model also had four sets of variables: inputs (stimuli); perceptual and learning constructs; outputs (consumer behaviour, purchase decision); and external variables (social, psychological and marketing factors). The EKB model, later renamed EBM (Engel et al., 1990), has four parts: information input, information processing, decision stages, and decision process variables. The decision process of consumers consists of five sequential phases: need recognition, search for information, alternative evaluation, purchase (choice), and outcomes (post-purchase), which are each influenced by individual characteristics, environmental influences and psychological processes. The three grand models captured the stages of the purchase process but differed in their emphasis on different variables and their presentation. However, they were criticised as being too complex, with many poorly defined variables, vague and complex interrelationships, and lack of empirical support (Karimi, 2013). As a reaction, in the 1970s–1980s, simpler models like the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen, and the Bettman model were introduced. The TPB does not address the decision process, while the Bettman model illustrates the process as a decision tree governed by how consumers process external information under the constraint of limited information processing.

### **2.2.5 The classical or traditional purchase model**

While the grand models were overreaching, they contained a view of the decision process that was concise, plausible, and in agreement with the work of Herbert Simon on decision-making (Simon, 1960). The classical model simplified the grand models by eliminating the numerous variables and their interrelations, and focusing only on the five decision stages of problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision and post-

purchase behaviour. Often referred to as the EKB model or EBM model, this has been one of the most well-known and commonly-used standard model in consumer behaviour research (Karimi et al., 2015).

In the realm of decision science, Simon's model is considered a pioneering decision-making model since 1960. He broke down decision-making into the three stages of intelligence, design and choice. The intelligence phase involves the classification of the problem, and the gathering and processing of information. During the second phase of design activity, alternatives are generated and evaluated; and in the final choice phase, an alternative is chosen. When compared with the classical model, Simon's intelligence phase is a combination of the first two stages: need recognition and information search. The design phase is the third stage of alternative evaluation, while the choice phase coincides with the purchase decision stage. The five stages of the classical model are described in the following paragraphs.

**i.** Stage 0 – need recognition

Need recognition is the first stage of the buyer decision-process. Internal stimuli (like hunger) or external stimuli (e.g., advertisements) make the consumer realise that there is a difference between their current state and their desired state (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014). This is generally regarded as the trigger that initiates a purchase decision process, and is the precursor of all subsequent consumer-initiated activities such as information search, evaluation and purchase. Choices that establish a need for a purchase may depend on many varied individual characteristics. With the many complicated drivers, this stage is sufficiently different from the later stages, and is hence not considered in this study.

**ii.** Stage 1 – information search

Following need recognition, a consumer undertakes a 'search' into memory to determine if enough is known about the available options to make a choice. If internal knowledge is not

sufficient, an external search is required to supplement existing knowledge. Complex buying with its infrequency will involve a greater amount and intensity of search. External search is typically undertaken through personal sources (e.g., friends and family), commercial sources (e.g., advertisements and salespeople), and public media sources (e.g., newspapers, magazines, television, and internet). User reviews on websites like Amazon.com or TripAdvisor are seen as providing a complete and more reliable product assessment (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014). Search continues until enough information of sufficient quality is gathered, but can be constrained by the availability and quantity of information. While low availability certainly limits decision-making, too much information also hinders good decisions due to limits on the consumers' information processing capabilities. Social media adds a new element to information search, and its influences are therefore the main subject of this study.

**iii.** Stage 2 – evaluation of alternatives

Once information has been collected, the consumer uses it to evaluate and assess the alternative product choices to arrive at a purchase decision. The alternative evaluation and information search stages, though presented separately, are intricately intertwined during decision-making, and consumers often move back and forth between the two. Alternative evaluation involves the selection of choice alternatives and evaluative criteria. Once determined, the performance of the considered choices is compared along the salient criteria, and finally, decision rules are applied to narrow down the alternatives to make a final selection. This stage leads to the formation of beliefs, attitudes and intentions, leading to the subsequent stage of purchase.

**iv.** Stage 3 – purchase decision

Purchase decision refers to the final choice or selection made regarding which product to buy. The act of purchase is the last major stage, with the consumer deciding on what to buy, where

to buy, and how to pay. Purchase is a function of intentions, environmental influences and individual situations. Some of the influences that can affect the purchase action include the time available for decision-making, information availability and the retail environment. The attitude of family and friends, and unanticipated circumstances such as product availability (size, colour) and stock-outs may also force a re-evaluation (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014).

v. Stage 4 – post-purchase behaviour

In the post-purchase stage, consumers evaluate the product's performance based on expectations, and reach a state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The expectation confirmation theory (Oliver, 1977) explains post-purchase satisfaction as a function of expectations, perceived performance, and confirmation (or disconfirmation) of beliefs. Outcomes are compared against expectations in a subjective evaluation, which takes one of three different forms: positive disconfirmation or satisfaction (performance is better than expected); simple confirmation or neutral response (performance equals expectations); and negative disconfirmation or dissatisfaction (performance is worse than expected). Consumers who invest a lot of time, effort and money into a purchase may experience cognitive dissonance on whether a right decision was made (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014). This makes the consumer search for supportive information to reduce the dissonance, by either positively confirming the choice made, or concluding that it was an unwise decision. Consumer satisfaction is a result of experiences during all stages of the purchase process, as the outcome in one stage affects the experiences in the other stages (Karimi, 2013). Many studies on consumer satisfaction focus only on satisfaction with the final choice and outcome, and ignore satisfaction with the decision-making process. Both concepts have different underlying dimensions, but together make a significant impact on consumers' overall satisfaction (Karimi, 2013). Hence, it is important to analyse the entire decision process.

## **2.3 REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES**

### **2.3.1 Impact of the internet on consumer decisions**

The impact of social media on consumer decisions has received a lot of attention from researchers. Aksoy and Cooil (2006) conducted a multivariate and latent class analysis on the quality measures of consumer decision making within the context of electronic services. Their findings revealed that, the enhanced variety and amount of information online has improved the ability of consumers to make better consumption choices (Aksoy and Cooil, 2006). The findings also indicated that, the internet has resulted in the availability of new opportunities that help consumers to search for information in a cost-effective manner. This is confirmed by the earlier assertions of Jepsen (2007) who stated that, the advent of the internet and the inadvertent use of social media has improved the speed of information search and has contributed towards making the process less costly and convenient.

The results from an analysis by Smith (2009) which focused the social media revolution was aimed at understanding how social media has contributed to the changes associated with the consumer decision making process. The focus of the study was on search engines and how consumers used the search engines for the purposes of decision-making. Smith (2009) concludes that, the nature of the consumer activities on search engines are now often dominated by user content and opinions (Smith, 2009).

An examination of the impact of social media on the consumer behaviour showed that, the impact of the internet varies on the various stages of decision-making. This was profoundly discussed in the work of Karimi (2013) who evaluated the purchase decision-making process model and the various factors that affect or influence it. Karimi (2013) argued that the internet initially supported only the information search stage but recent trends in social media, online decision aids and recommender systems have extended the internet's influencing role to all the decision stages. In a subsequent study. Karimi, Ppamichail, and

Holland (2015) empirically examine the effect of prior knowledge on the online purchasing decision of consumers. The results indicated that, the internet presents an opportunity for consumers to have prior knowledge of products, goods and services and this has the tendency to affect their decisions to buy or not to buy.

Jepsen (2007) also evaluated the factors that affect the impact of social media or the internet on the decision-making processes of consumers. For online decision-making quality, besides time costs and the cognitive costs of acquiring and processing information, other influencing factors include perceived risk, product knowledge and trust. Internet or web skills have also assumed importance: the higher the amount of internet use by consumers, the more likely they will use it for decision-making (Jepsen, 2007). According to findings from the theoretical analysis on consumer decision-making on the internet by Punj (2012), the essential difference in decision quality between offline and online settings can be attributed to the technology available online, including access to the varied sources of information and decision aids, which have the potential to help consumers make better quality decisions. The findings were based on one of the main objectives that sought to distinguish between the impacts of offline and online information sources

Other recent studies that have been dedicated to the study of social media and its influence on consumer behaviour although significant, were not done within the purview of the decision-making process. One of such studies was by Chu and Kim (2011) in an assessment of the determinants of consumer engagements in social media networking sites. The authors conceptualize the impact of social media as an electronic word of mouth, which has the propensity to influence the degree to which consumers engage with the products. Another study that focused on social media and how this affects consumers was by Xie and Lee (2015). Xie and Lee (2015) sought to quantify the effects of exposure to social media activities and concluded that, there is a relationship between social media and brand

purchase. However, the study failed to determine the various changes that social media has made to the various stages of the consumer decision-making process.

To fill the gap identified in the afore discussed studies, a different group of researchers have attempted to quantitatively and qualitatively determine the impact of social media on consumer purchasing decisions as well as the decision-making process. Mangold and Faulds (2014) conducted a study to understand how the various elements of the marketing mix has been hybridized by the advent and proliferation of social media. The findings from the study are indicative of the fact that, consumers use social media for the benefit of immediate access to information at their convenience (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). This conclusion is buttressed by Powers et al (2012) in their assessment of digital and social media in the purchase decision process. Powers et al (2012) underscore the centrality of social media in information search and has also extended the boundaries of the consumer decision-making process by helping them to decide what to buy or to know more about new products or brands, when and where they want.

The influence of social media in the consumer decision-making process is also exemplified in the study Goh et al (2013), who quantified the impacts of user and market generated content in today's social media age. In what the authors refer to as a social media brand community, they argue that social media influences consumer behaviour as well as decisions that affect what to buy, where to buy and how to buy.

Xiang and Gretzel (2010) in their analysis of the role of social media in online travel search produced findings that speak to the information stage of the consumer decision-making process. The authors argue based on their findings that social media served as the most preferred source of information and inquiries about travels. Based on the above assertions on the utility of customer reviews, Yayli and Bayram (2012) sought to investigate the effects of consumer reviews on the purchasing decisions of customers. The findings indicated that

the incidence of online consumer reviews have been shown to have a causal impact on product choice and purchase behaviour by consumers (Yayli and Bayram, 2012). Ashman (2015) explains the reasons for this, indicating that social media has resulted in a culture of participation that has increased the networking between other like-minded individuals resulting in the sharing of information, opinions and experiences with regards to different kinds of products, goods and services. These interactions was agued by the author to have an effect on consumer decisions.

Zhang et al. (2014) examined the influence of online reviews on the decision making of consumers and assert that, Zhang et al. (2014) online reviews of products provide consumers with more information in relation to the product, good or service. Due to their pervasiveness, online product reviews were found to have a significant positive influence on consumers' purchase intentions. Similarly, Zhou et al (2014) attempted to understand whether the characteristics of online consumer reviews results in engendering a bias in the consumer's decision-making process with a focus review quality, review quantity and negative reviews. The findings from this study, corroborates that of Zhang et al. (2014) discussed above and advances the knowledge that social media is perceived by consumers as a more trustworthy source of information when compared to corporate communications and advertisements.

According to Constantinides (2014) in unearthing the foundations of social media marketing indicated that, the impact of social media in consumer decision-making has the potential of resulting in a general feeling of mistrust towards mainstream media. Mauld and Faulds (2009) make similar assertions and indicate that, this has some repercussions on the viability of the influence of traditional and mainstream media in consumer decision-making process This has resulted in a situation where consumers are turning away from traditional media such as television, magazines, and newspapers as sources to guide their purchases (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Mauld and Faulds (2009) portend that, the efficiency and effectiveness of the role of social media in the consumer decision-making process is inhibited by information overload. Powers et al (2012) advance that, the proliferated amount of information available on social media often results in what they call ‘analysis paralysis.’ Analysis paralysis is a situation where consumers have difficulty in navigating all available information about products, goods or services (Powers et al., 2012). Karimi (2013), who also unearthed information overload has the propensity of affecting the consumer decision-making process intimated that, there are limitations on the degree and extent to which information available on social media can be processed by consumers resulting in a deficiency in the ability of the consumers to adequately evaluate the various alternatives of their choices in greater depth.

The above discussions provide a blue print that will help in this current study. However, the incidence of the pandemic and the various debates around the increased social media usage occasions the need for an analysis of the various scholarly works that have been done. The next section of the empirical review discusses the use of social media by consumers during the lockdown necessitated by the Corona virus pandemic.

### **2.3.2 The Use of social media by Consumers During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Social media has been argued to have played a big role during the Covid-19 pandemic as seen in how it has influenced and impacted on various aspects of human life. With attendant changes to human life such as social and physical distancing protocols, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in individuals turning to social media for purposes such as education, entertainment, and human interactions. Islam et al (2020) believe that social media enabled the sharing of information about the crisis as well helping to sustain existing relationships between people.

The advertising platform, Criteo (2020) in an examination of the behaviour of consumers during the lockdown phase assessed that, 61% of the respondents that were Italian consumers used downloaded store applications with about 31% using the online platform daily. Out of the total respondents sampled, 58% of them indicated that they used the online platforms for food delivery with most of them indicating that they downloaded online food delivery applications during the lockdown. Importantly, majority of the respondents indicated that their use of social media during the pandemic rose since they used social media several times a day.

Previous authors have advocated for the advantages of social media to organizations, firms and marketers. Evidently, Poornima et al. (2019) believe that a lot of firms and organizations are falling back on digital marketing techniques, more especially the use of social media as a result of its effectiveness and efficiency, as compared with other forms of advertising and marketing. In the intimations of Hauncu-Budui et al. (2020), social media advertising is one of the most techniques for the promotion due to its inexpensiveness and its interactive nature allowing for the communication between the firm and its consumers. Fedorko (2018) believes that, communication with the aid of new technology like social media, increases the prospects of purchasing, underpinning the need for organizations to promote their products using such channels.

Out of the 21 forms of advertising identified and explored by Karenkova (2020) in exploring the perception of consumers with regards to the different types of advertising used, social media happened to be the most influential of all. The findings show that, there were varied experiences between the older and younger generation in assessing their perception of the advertising mediums. 37 concludes that, the older generation perceived online adverts such as pop-up messages as worrisome more than the younger generation. These findings may be due

to the notion that, younger people are perceived to spend more time online and so they are more attuned to the influence of social media and online advertising.

During the lockdown, the restrictions placed affected retail centres in terms of opening and closing times, resulting in an intensification of online buying. According to an assessment by Pencarelli (2020), 44% of Italians with a majority from the younger generation downloaded software or applications for the purposes of shopping during the imposed lockdown. Pencarelli et al (2020) concludes that, there are generational differences between the young and the old with respect to their social media use during the first wave of the pandemic and its attendant lockdown.

Varghese et al. (2021) focused on the buying process of consumers in relation to complex purchases, with a special emphasis on how social media influences the processes, in a time when a lot of countries had been plunged into lockdown as an aftermath of the pandemic. The research explored how the abundance of the content and the user generated information influenced the buying pattern of consumers. Using the six phases of customer decision process, also known as EBM model, the research was also hinged on an assessment of the relevance of the model in the context of social media usage. The quantitative survey indicated a significant impact of social media on consumer buying behavior in digital age. Based on these findings, the researchers recommend that companies should adapt an integrated strategic approach with the aim of narrowing in on social network platforms since they can make them successful in getting, engaging, influencing and retaining customers.

Bearing in mind the unpreparedness of the world for the pandemic and the rampaging effects it has had on our lives, Ali-Taha et al. (2021) sought to examine how the pandemic has affected consumers' habits, preferences, and shopping behaviors in Italy and Slovakia. The authors examined how the pandemic affected shopping behavior and consumer preferences of specific e-shops during the first wave of the virus. The study shows a high incidence of social

media use during the first wave in both countries. The authors argued that their findings are inconclusive with respect to measuring the overall impact, but it speaks to the likelihood that some social media platforms like Facebook, Messenger, Instagram and Twitter may have had a greater influence on consumer behavior due to their characteristics as compared to others like Whatsapp and Messenger. The study suggests that, this could have managerial implications on businesses. The authors recommend that business managers should increase the use of social media to improve the experiences of their customers at different stages of the purchasing cycle.

The above studies, although critical to this research, provides the basis for the examination of the influence of social media in consumer behaviour. The above discussions revealed that, an empirical investigation in the Ghanaian context was missing. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the extent of use of social media during the lockdown in Ghana among the students of the Ghana Institute of Journalism. The findings from the studies will either corroborate or refute the claims made by other authors in other jurisdictions.

## **2.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed and evaluated the various literature that underpin this research. The discussion began with the theoretical framework where the theories of technological determinism and Uses and Gratification. The conceptual review saw a discussion of relevant concepts such as social media, social media marketing, and the consumer decision making process. The assessment of empirical literature revealed that, although the area of social media and its influence on consumer purchasing decisions is one of the most researched area, discussion of the influence of social media on the consumer making decisions was limited during the Covid-19 lockdown period, with little known about the Ghanaian jurisdiction.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter explained the role and importance of social media in consumer buying behaviour. It also established the theoretical underpinning that steers the course of the study. This chapter explains the necessary research steps taken to collect and analyze data for the study. The chapter presents the research design, population, sampling and sampling techniques as well as the instruments of data collection. The chapter ends with details on reliability and validity of data as well as data analysis.

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

A research approach involves the specific approach employed by studies for further investigations of a phenomenon. There are three main research methods in scientific research namely; qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Amongst these three, the study which is focused on the use of social media for buying and selling during the Covid-19 lockdown period in Ghana deems it necessary for this study to be done quantitatively. Quantitative research allows a researcher to distance him or herself from the process to avoid bias. Quantitative research refers to the numerical representation and manipulation of observation which are described and explained in numeric terms (Yin, 1993). It assumes that tables provide factual presentation on issues. Also, quantitative is reliable and objective and statistics described can be used to generalize the findings. Qualitative research method investigates issues in its natural setting. Qualitative methods help the researcher to evaluate the issues in an in-depth and detailed manner.

The study did not adopt the qualitative approach because it has one of its weaknesses as the fact that findings cannot be generalized because reality is not out there but, in the mind, (construction of reality).

### **3.2 Research Design**

According to Pannercselvan (2014), a research design is an outline of how a study is to be carried out. According to Creswell (2013), the research design is the strategy for carrying out the investigation. Thus, research strategies and processes cover everything from general assumptions to particular data collecting and analysis (Creswell, 2009, p.25). Given (2008) defines it as the process of transforming a research concept into a research project or plan that a researcher may subsequently carry out in practice. It is defined as ‘a detailed blueprint used to guide implementations of a research study towards realizing its aims and objective (Aaker and Day, 1990). It focuses on the techniques and methods of collecting data and analyzing it. (Zokmund, 2003). Therefore, a design is about choosing the best approach or method in collecting data.

According to Creswell (2009), research design denotes the plan and procedures for research spanning from broad decisions of problem identification to detailed assumptions of data collection and analysis. Thus, a research design seeks to provide the guiding principles and the framework within which all research activities are undertaken (Kothari, 2004). This makes it necessary for any study or research such as this should have a well-established research design, because it provides the framework and the structure for the entire research.

It is based on this argument that this study will be an exploratory one. Cresswell (2009) argues that exploratory research is used to have a better understanding of an existing problem, but are not used to provide conclusive results. Explorative research is used to identify issues that can serve as the foundation of future research. Creswell (2009) asserts that explorative research is used for studies when the phenomenon being studied is at its preliminary stage.

There is a plethora of studies that have focused on the impact of social media on the purchasing decisions of consumers. However, the incidence of the Corona virus pandemic

and the subsequent lockdowns that ensued has generated the need for the phenomenon to be critically examined. This is against the knowledge that social media use increased during the period due to reduced human interactions. There are a few studies that have focused on the use of social media by consumers during the period in European regions like Italy. But little is known about the African and Ghanaian context with respect to how social media was used as a tool for buying and selling during the lockdown period. As the first of its kind, this study will be an explorative one, since its findings will serve as a foundation for prospective studies.

### 3.3 Surveys

There are various quantitative methodologies available. But for the purpose of this study, surveys will be used. The reasons for the central position of the quantitative survey as a research strategy are both methodological and substantive. The essence of quantitative research is the study of relationships between variables. For the quantitative researcher, reality is conceptualized as variables which are measured, and the primary objectives are to find how the variables are distributed, and especially how they are related to each other, and why (Punch, 2000).

Survey in research is defined as “the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions” (Check & Schutt, 2012, p.160). This type of research method allows for a variety of methods to recruit participants, collect data, and utilize various methods of instrumentation. As it is often used to describe and explore human behaviour, surveys are therefore frequently used in social and psychological research (Singleton & Straits, 2009).

Therefore, the study used quantitative survey approach involving a statistical description of data which is designed to assess the influence of social media in consumer purchasing behavior during the Covid-19 lockdown in Ghana. The study employed the use of a survey

with questionnaires as its primary instrument of data collection. Descriptive statistics was used to explain the data gathered from the filled and presented in a table format following the research questions which were used to develop subheading to guide the study.

### **3.4 Research Population**

Population refers to the collection of elements about which the researcher wishes to make inference to. According to Wimmer and Domminick (2011), a research population refers to all subjects and variables in the study area. The targeted population for the study was the residents in Accra, Ghana. This is because, reports from *Daily Graphic* (2020) indicated that some parts of Accra were hotspots for the spread of the virus and this necessitated the lockdown protocols. Therefore, the choice of population satisfied the basic requirements of the study. The study was predicated on the knowledge that, the selected population were likely to have been affected by the lockdown protocols, as far as purchasing of goods and services are concerned, and as a result, may have had to rely on social media to make some purchasing decisions.

### **3.5 Sampling technique**

The study of entire population may be challenging to researchers with respect to constraints of time and resources. Resultantly, it is advised that researchers select a sample of the population for the study. Sampling is the process of selecting units (e.g. people, organizations) from a population of interest so that by studying the sample, a generalized result can be given back to the population from which they were chosen (Yin, 2013). Researchers use sampling techniques to decrease the number of instances since they do not have the time or resources to examine the total population (Taherdoost, 2016).

There are two approaches to sampling namely probability and non-probability sampling. Under probability sampling, all elements in the population have a greater than zero chance of being selected in the sample and the mathematical probability that any of them will be

selected can be calculated (Wimmer and Domminick, 2011). Non-probability sampling on the other hand refers to any sampling method where some elements of the population have no chance of selection or where the probability of selection cannot be accurately determined.

The convenience sampling method was used. The researcher's reason for the choice of convenience sampling was due to the fact that, only the people available will be used for the study. Yin (2013) argues that, convenience sampling is used as a cost-effective method of sampling. Convenience sampling was used in this study due to the physical unavailability of the respondents at the time of data collection.

### **3.6 Sample Size**

Sample size is a portion or subset of a larger group called a population (Fink, 2003). Cleave (2021) asserts that sufficient sample size is needed to reveal the range of viewpoints required to answer the research questions and provide findings of sufficient value to the field of study. Sample size represents part of the larger population that will be used to elicit information. A total of 119 respondents was sampled and selected to respond to the questionnaires. This is due to limitations such as time and resources.

### **3.7 Data Collection Instrument**

The study employed the use of a questionnaire as the main instrument in the data collection process. The research questionnaire consisted of close ended questions aimed at helping the researcher to elicit relevant information from respondents. The questionnaire was structured into sections in such a way that, the research can capture both bio-data and data relating to the main research questions.

### **3.8 Data Collection Procedure**

Questionnaires were administered based on the convenience sampling technique to the respondents. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to as many that she could find based

on the willingness and availability of the respondents to participate. The researcher waited for the completion and collect them for the purpose of analysis. Those who could not finish the answering of the questionnaire were asked to furnish the researcher with their details for collection on a later date.

### **3.9 Presentation and Analysis of Data.**

The data was categorized into the various themes that are captured in the questionnaires to enable the researcher code the data and make entries. The data was then analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analyzed data was presented in the form of tables, charts, and bars to help give a better understanding to readers about the research results.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical concerns form a major deal of every research as it almost crops up in any research undertaking involving participants or individuals. Saunders et al. (2009) define research ethics as the appropriateness of a researcher's behaviour in the conduct of research, especially the researcher's relationship with the rights of participants. That is, participation in the research should be at the discretion of the participants. In this research, participants will be exposed to the research objectives after which their consent will be sought to be part of the study. As it stands now, all participants agreed to voluntarily be part of the research and the researcher made sure they understood that they had the sole right to pull out of the study whenever they felt the need to do so. In addition, the study will maintain a high level of participant's confidentiality by ensuring that the data provided will be bereft of the participant's identity.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

The chapter has been able to outline the specific methods that was used to gather and interpret data from the field. It has also been able to tell the population and the sampling size of the study and data collection instrument as well as data analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter will be devoted to the analysis and presentation of the key findings. It describes the analysis of data collected. The data collected was processed in response to the research objectives, questions and problems that motivated the study. The fundamental goals that drive data collection was to establish the influence of social media on the consumer purchasing behaviour during the lockdown period in ACcra due to COVID-19. The findings are organized in four parts. The first part was aimed at exploring the frequency with which consumers used social media to make purchases during the lockdown period. The second part was aimed at assessing the differences between the use of social media and traditional media to make purchasing decisions during the lockdown period. The third part had to focus on the changes that social media has brought to the consumer buying process. Finally, the fourth part explored demographic details of the respondents such as sex, age, and educational level. Frequency Distribution Tables were used in presenting the data gathered from the respondents. The findings are discussed according to the themes that have guided the study so far.

#### **4.1 Demographic details of respondents**

##### **4.1.1 Age of respondents**

The frequency table below is the age distribution of the respondents. The figure shows clearly that majority of the respondents were youthful and fell within the ages 18 to 25 while the second biggest age group were between 26 and 35 years. The least age representation was those in age bracket below 18, above 56 and between 46 to 55.

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents.

Age group of the respondents	Frequency	Percentages
Below 18	4	3%
18-25	77	65%
26-35	37	31%
36-45	4	3%
46-55	0	0%
Above 56	1	1%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

#### 4.1.2 Sex of respondents

The chart below shows the sex distribution of the respondents. It clearly shows that **the** majority of the responses **were made up of males** who made up 58% of the respondents while the female accounted for 42% of the respondents who participated in the survey. According to Bharucha (2018), social media is growing very popular with young consumers which is also not too far from the findings of this study where bulk (65%) of the responses on social media usage came from the youth within the age brackets 18-25 years.

Table 2: Sex of respondents.

Sex of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Male	69	58%
Female	50	42%

Total	119	100%
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*Source: Field Data, 2021.*

## **4.2 How often social media was used in making purchasing decisions during the lockdown period**

The part of the survey was in a broad aim of examining the length to which consumers fall back on social media as tool in making their buying decisions due to its proliferation and use during the lockdown period.

### **4.2.1 Consumers' use of social media usage during the lockdown period**

The survey, as a way of gauging the use of social media in consumer purchasing decisions during the lockdown period, sought to look into the frequency of social media among the respondents. The results show that, all the sampled respondents use social media representing 100% of all responses.

Table 3: Consumers' use of social media use during the lockdown period

Did you use social media during the lockdown period	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	102	86%
No	17	14%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field data, 2021.

The findings buttress the thoughts of Weinberg (2009) who notes that, based on the increased frequency with which social media is used, it is being leveraged as marketing tools which is empowering individuals and organizations as well as businesses to promote their products and services through social channels which will enable them to interact and tap into a much bigger community that may not have been available via traditional advertising channels.

#### 4.2.2 Consumers Use of Social Media

This question in the survey sought to empirically investigate what consumers mostly use social media for during the lockdown period. Among the alternatives provided, the respondents were asked to select the various alternatives that best explains what they used social media for during the period. The results are highlighted below;

Table 4: Consumer's use of social media

Gratifications from the use of social media during the lockdown period	Frequency	Percentage
Information	93	78%
Making friends	60	50%
Chatting	79	66%
Shopping	52	44%

Source; Field Data, 2021.

The results above shows the various ways in which consumers use social media. The findings shows that the utility with the most responses was the use of social media for information which represented about 93 of all valid responses. However, 79 of the respondents indicated that they used social media for chatting, 60 indicated that they use social media for making friends, with 52 asserting that they used social media for shopping purposes.

The Uses and Gratification theory posits, there are various needs and gratifications sought from the use of media (McQuail, 1987). In consonance with that, the findings showed that social media was used for socialization purposes as indicated in the findings where the respondents attested to the fact that they used social media for chatting and making friends. But other indications from the findings show that social media is a hub for information about products, goods and services as well as shopping and making online purchases. These

findings are in line with that of Criteo (2020) in an examination of the behaviour of consumers during the lockdown phase, stating that the use of these online platforms rose exponentially as seen their use by the consumers daily, with most of them using them for essentials such as food purchases and delivery.

This is not a deviation from McLuhan’s assertion in the theory of technological determinism that social media and the internet for that matter are increasingly growing. This is also in line with the assertions of Islam et al (2020) who argued that, the attendant changes to human life such as social and physical distancing protocols as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in individuals turning to social media for purposes such as education, entertainment, and human interactions.

#### **4.2.3 Type of social media used most frequently during the lockdown period**

The study also attempted to identify the social media that was most used by the respondents sampled for the study to find out the social media platforms that the respondents use frequently. Respondents were allowed to select more than one, as it is evident that they may have presence on more than one social media networking site. The results are displayed in the diagram that follows;

Table 5: Most used social media by consumers

Most frequently used social media during the lockdown period	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	43	36%
Instagram	62	52%
Whatsapp	99	83%
Snapchat	25	21%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

The findings above indicate that among all social media stated in the survey questionnaire, the most used social media happens to be Whatsapp accounting for 99% of the responses. Instagram happens to be the second most used social media by the respondents sampled as seen in the 62% share of the valid responses, followed by facebook accounting for 43% of the responses while Snapchat was the least with a representation of 25%. These top social media sites used by the respondents are seconded by Zurek (2018) who advanced that about 10 million people use social media out of which WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are the most used social media in Ghana. The discovery corroborates this as WhatsApp appears to be the most used social media, followed by Instagram and then closely by Facebook

**4.2.4 Most preferred source of information in making a buying decision about a product during the lockdown period.**

The study thought it relevant to assess the consumer’s most preferred source of information about a product before making a purchasing decision. Knowing that these can be multifactorial, in that, there are diverse sources of information available to the respondents during the period, respondents were asked to select as many options that best describes their source of information. The results are highlighted in the table that follows:

Table 6: Most preferred source of information about a product

Most preferred source of information in making product decisions during the lockdown	Frequency	Percentages
Advertisements on Newspapers, radio and tv	40	34%

Friends and relatives	38	32%
Social media	71	60%
Company's website	50	42%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

The findings show that consumers use all the options enumerated. However, social media happens to be the most preferred medium of eliciting information about a product before making a buying decision, accounting for 60% of all valid responses. This was followed by the company's website as a preferred source (42%), advertisements on newspapers, radio and television (34%) and friends and relatives (32%).

McLuhan (2005) asserts that this change in communication is also changing the concept of information flow and the process of marketing brands and products and this penultimately affects brand and product perception and consumer purchases. Rightly so, the findings suggest that although family and friends, an organization's official website, and advertisements via traditional media seem to somehow be a good source of information, the touting of social media as the most potent source of information is not a misplaced assertion

#### **4.2.5 Attention paid to business and product advertisement on social media during the period**

The statistical representation below shows the responses as to whether consumers pay attention to advertisements on businesses and products done via social media. The results gives a great indication that an overwhelming percentage of the respondents indicated that they do pay attention to the advertisements about businesses and products actuated on social media.

Table 7: Attention paid to business and products advertisements on social media

Attention to paid to advertisements about businesses on social media during the lockdown period.	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	102	86%
No	17	14%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

McLuhan (2005), as a reference point asserts also that social media has resulted in a change in consumer preference and source of information about products and brands and this is evidenced in the findings where 86% of the respondents indicated that they pay a lot of attention to business and product advertisement on social media.

#### **4.2.6 Trustworthiness of information about businesses and products seen on social media.**

Scores of literature have been focused on determining the trust appeal of social media based advertising. The study sought to find out from the perspective of the consumers the rate of trustworthiness of the information about products and businesses they come across on social media. The results are outlined below;

Table 8: Trustworthiness of business and product information accessed on social media.

Trustworthiness of information seen on social media	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	82	69%
No	37	31%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

The table shows that 69% of the respondents indicated that they trust the information sourced on social media about products and businesses while the remaining 31% said they do not. The findings provide empirical credence to the widely held assertion that social media is an electronic word of mouth. Kimmel and Kitchen (2014) aver that word of mouth has obtained new fame today due to the greater inter-connectedness of people on social media. Similarly, Bronner and Hoog (2010) also see social media as an electronic word of mouth where users provide commentaries and ratings to all kinds of products, brands and services. Consumers are able to validate and authenticate the efficacy of a product based on a wide range of information available to them via social media.

#### **4.2.7 Frequency in the use of social media for purchases during the lockdown period.**

The essence of this section in the survey was to evaluate how consumers use social media in making purchases. This part shows the results of the frequency of the use of social media in making purchases and buying decisions.

Table 9: Frequency in the use of social media for purchases

Frequency in the use of social media for purchases	Frequency	Percentages
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Very often	39	33%
Less Often	45	38%
Once in a while	25	21%
Not at all	10	8%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

The results above indicate that 92% of the respondents indicated that they used social media in making buying and purchases with 33% asserting that they use it very often, 38% asserting they use it less often and 21% admitting that they use it once in a while in making purchases. However, 8%, inferring from the data, do not use social media in making purchases. Hauncu-Budui (2020) advanced that during the lockdown period, a lot of firms and businesses turned to social media techniques for the promotion of their products, goods and services. The assertion articulated above demonstrate that, the most veritable source of information with regards to products, goods and services during the lockdown was social media, as indicated by the responses demonstrated in the frequency distribution table above.

#### **4.2.8 Social media's influence on consumer buying decisions and purchasing behaviour.**

The survey, at this point aspired to measure the overall influence of social media in the buying decisions and purchasing behaviour of the respondents. The results are outlined below.

Table 10: social media’s influence on consumer buying decisions and purchasing behaviour.

Social media’s influence on consumer buying behavior	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly agree	27	23%
Agree	44	37%
Neutral	35	29%
Disagree	12	10%
Strongly disagree	1	1%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

The findings broadly indicates 60% of the respondents responded in the affirmative that social media does influence their buying decision and inadvertently, their purchasing behaviour. Within this, 23% strongly agreed with the notion while 37% superficially agreed. However, 29% were indifferent about the influence of social media on their behaviour as consumers. But, 11% disagreed with the notion that social media influences their behaviour as consumers. Within the 11%, 1% strongly disagree and 10% disagree.

Poornima et al (2019) equally agree with this by alluding to the fact that, organizations during the lockdown fell back on digital technologies especially the use of social media due to its effectiveness and efficiency, as compared with other forms of marketing. This is based on the perceived influence that social media is known to have on the consumer purchasing behaviour.

#### **4.3 Difference between making purchases using social media and traditional media during the lockdown period.**

The section sought to distinguish between the making purchases using social media and purchases using traditional media during the lockdown period necessitated by the Covid-19

pandemic. Inadvertantly, it spells out the effects of traditional media and social media product and business advertising on consumers.

#### **4.3.1 Most preferred medium of information about products during the lockdown period.**

The results below shows the most preferred medium of information about business, services and products as asserted by the respondents. The results indicate that social media was the most preferred medium of choice representing 86% of valid responses while 14% indicated that traditional media was their preferred medium of accessing information about products.

Table.11: Most preferred medium of information about products.

Most preferred medium of information about products during the lockdown	Frequency	Percentage
Social media	102	86%
Traditional media	17	14%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

Powers et al (2012) avers that the increasing use of social media worldwide has led to the stern belief that this is a valuable tool in supporting consumer engagement and has been employed by marketers in their advertising and business communication initiatives and interventions. The findings above is supported by researchers like Pencarelli et al. (2020), who argue that the advertisement of social media increased during the lockdown due to its exponential use by consumers for interacting with the rest of the world. Resultantly, businesses turned to the use of social media with traditional media augmenting their advertising efforts. According to Aksoy and Cooil (2006), the upgraded variety and amount of information online has enhanced the ability of consumers to make better consumption

options which in the view of Jepsen (2007) opens up opportunities for information search as a result of low costs.

#### **4.3.2 The medium that guarantees immediate access and convenience to information about products during the lockdown period**

The survey sought to examine which of the two mediums is the most convenient and most accessible source of information about businesses and products.

Table 12: The medium that guarantees immediate access and convenience to information

Medium that guarantees immediate access and convenience	Frequency	Percentage
Social media	105	88%
Traditional media	14	12%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021

The results indicate that social media is the most preferred medium in terms of accessibility and convenience, as shown in the 88% of the total responses while 12% prefer traditional media to access information. Consumers use social media for the benefit of instant access to information to their satisfaction (Mangold and Faulds, 2009), which helps them to decide on what to buy, what to know about new products or brands and when and where they want (Powers et al., 2012). This position is not misplaced as the findings of the survey seem to suggest the same thing.

### **4.3.3 The most authentic source of information in making buying decisions during the lockdown period.**

The diagram below is a representation of the results in evaluating the source of information about products and businesses that consumers describe as the most authentic in making a purchasing decision.

Table 13: The most authentic source of information in making buying decisions.

Most authentic source of information	Frequency	Percentage
Social media	82	69%
Traditional media	37	31%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

Inferences from the result show that 69% of the respondents believe that social media is the most authentic source of information, in sharp contrast to 31% in favor of traditional media. As stated by Constantinides (2014), there is a common feeling of doubt towards mainstream media. Social media is recognised as a more reliable source of information when compared to corporate communications and advertisements. Mangold and Faulds (2009) advance that consumers are averting from traditional media such as television, newspapers and magazines as sources to guide their purchases.

### **4.3.4 Medium that influences buying and purchasing decisions during the lockdown period**

There have been a proliferation of debates regarding the medium with the most influence on the consumer buying and purchasing behaviour. The survey aspired to quiz the respondents on which medium they think influenced their buying decisions mostly

Table 14: Medium that influences buying and purchasing behaviour

Medium that influenced purchasing decisions	Frequency	Percentage
Social media	92	77%
Traditional media	27	23%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

77% of the responses suggest that social media was the medium with the most influence as indicated by the respondents. 23% of the respondents still held on to the belief that traditional media has the most effect on their consumer behaviour. According to Punj (2012), this can be attributed to the technology available on the internet, as well as access to the varied sources of information and decision help, which have the capability to help consumers make the best quality decisions. These advantages of social media made it a more efficient medium of information about products during the lockdown as evidenced in other studies by Criteo (2020).

#### 4.3.5 Most effective medium in targetting consumers during the lockdown period.

The diagram below shows the responses in line with the medium which according to consumers were the best suited for targetting consumers during the lockdown period.

Table 15: Most useful medium in targetting consumers during the lockdown era

Most useful medium in targetting consumers	Frequency	Percentage
Social media	105	88%
Traditional media	14	12%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

The responses indicated that a majority of the respondents believe social media is the most effective tool in targeting consumers in this century as seen in the 88% who chose social media. 12% of the respondents asserted that traditional media is still a useful tool in targeting consumers during the lockdown period. This finding is highlighted in other studies such as Hauncu-Budui (2020), in which it was concluded, that during the lockdown period, a lot of firms and businesses turned to social media techniques for the promotion of their products, goods and services.

**4.3.6 The medium that enhances the amount of information and has improved the consumers ability to make the best purchases during the lockdown period.**

The diagram below is a representation of the results when respondents were asked to select the medium that enhances the amount of information at their disposal and has incontrovertibly improved their ability to make the best purchases.

Table 16: The medium that enhances the amount of information and has improved the consumers ability to make the best purchases

Medium which enhances amount of information and improved ability to make choices.	Frequency	Percentage
Social Media	103	87%
Traditional media	16	13%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

The results indicate that social media was a medium that consumers felt enhanced their access and amount of information, and simultaneously improved their ability to make purchasing decisions. According to Aksoy and Cooil (2006), the improved variety and

number of information online has enhanced the ability of consumers to make the best consumption choices.

#### **4.4 Changes made by social media to the various stages of the consumer buying process during the lockdown.**

Several authors have advanced the idea that, the increased use of social media during the lockdown has influenced the consumer buying processes, becoming an instant source of information about products, goods and services, resulting in some changes. This section evaluates the various changes that social media has brought in its wake to the various stages of the consumer buying process.

##### **4.4.1 Social media's prospects of bringing change to how consumers access and purchase products**

The figure below shows the respondents perception of whether social media has brought any changes to the various stages of the consumer buying process, particularly how consumers purchase goods, services and products. The results, as shown in the frequency distribution table below indicates that the respondents overwhelmingly agreed that social media has brought strong changes to how they accessed and purchased products as seen in 93% of respondents indicating they agreed. Within this, 45% strongly agreed and 48% agreed. However, 2% of the respondents indicated that they disagreed with 5% feeling indifferent about social media's effect on how they access and purchase products. Kotler and Armstrong (2014) are of the view that social media are providing a complete and more reliable medium for product assessment. Criteo (2020) also indicated that, the lockdown increased people's dependency on social media for purchasing decisions due to limitations that were placed on human interactions.

Table 17: Social media’s prospects of bringing change to how consumers access and purchase product

Social media has brought changes to how consumers accessed and purchased products during the lo	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	54	45%
Agree	57	48%
Neutral	6	5%
Disagree	2	2%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

#### 4.4.2 Choices that establish the need for the purchase of any product dependent on social media

This section of the survey seeks to evaluate whether or not the choices made by consumers were largely established and dependent on social media. The results show that, 56% of the respondents agreed with the assertion that in this modern era, choices made with regards to products, goods and services are mostly made with a heavy dependency on social media, while 12% disagreed. However, 37% were undecided about this. This is explained by Kotler and Armstrong (2014) who advanced that there are stimuli, both internal and external that trigger and initiates a purchase decision process and is the precursor of all subsequent consumer-initiated activities such as information search, evaluation and purchase. This was also manifest in studies by Criteo (2020) where findings indicated that, consumers during the lockdown phases used social media in search of products.

Table 18: Choices that establish the need for the purchase of any product dependent on social media

Choices of products dependent on social media	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	27	23%
Agree	39	33%
Neutral	44	37%
Disagree	14	12%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

#### **4.4.3 Social media’s ability to aid in the search of information that aids in purchase of products**

The figure below is an illustration of the responses in line with social media’s ability to aid consumers in their search for information that penultimately helps them in making purchases. The results indicate that 88% of the respondents agreed that social media aids their search for information about products while 5% disagreed, with 9 percent in a neutral position. Aksoy and Cooil (2006) believe that this is due to the improved variety and amount of information online which has, on one hand, enhanced the ability of consumers to make the best consumption choice while serving as a source of information to consumers regarding products, goods and services during the lockdown. This was also highlighted in studies such as Criteo (2020) and Pancerelli (2020) where similar findings were made regarding how effective social media was as a source of information used in making product choices during the lockdown period.

Table 19: Social media’s ability to aid in the search of information that aids in purchase of products

Social media helped in the search for information resulting in purchase	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly agree	36	30%
Agree	69	58%
Neutral	11	9%
Disagree	6	5%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

#### **4.4.4 The use of social media in evaluating and assessing alternative productie choices before making buying decisions.**

Consumers are psychologically known to evaluate and assess alternative products before deciding to buy. This part of the survey seeks to establish the role that social media plays in that regard. Inferences from the results below shows that 84% of the respondents indicating that social media is a potent tool in theipir evaluation and assessment of alternative products before deciding to buy or not while 5% disagreed with 12% staying neutral.

The post-purchase process involves consumers evaluating the performance of products based on expectations, which enables them to a state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Oliver (1977) explains that post-purchase satisfaction is “a function of expectations, perceived performance, and confirmation (or disconfirmation) of beliefs”. The quality of online product reviews, characterised by perceived informativeness and persuasiveness, together with the perceived

quantity of reviews, are found to have an important positive impact on consumers' post-purchase evaluations (Zhou et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). The survey shows that although the consumers use social media to evaluate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction of a product. This was also made prominent in the findings of Pancereili (2020) in an assessment of how social media was used for purchases in Italy during the lockdown where it was concluded that, social media was also used in the evaluation of alternative product choices.

Table 20: The challenges in the use of social media in evaluating and assessing alternative product choices before making buying decisions.

The use of social media in the evaluation and assessment of alternative products	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly agree	40	34%
Agree	60	50%
Neutral	14	12%
Disagree	6	5%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

#### **4.4.5 Social media ability to influence decisions on what to buy, where to buy and how to pay.**

An evaluation of the ability of social media to influence and affect decisions such as what consumers buy, where they decide to buy, and how they decide to pay is the key objective of this survey, and the findings are displayed below.

The findings show that 76% of the respondents admitted that they used social media to make decisions about what to buy, where to buy and how to pay, while 20% of the respondents asserted that social media had no influence over such decisions, However, 14% were indifferent about whether or not social media affected or influenced such decisions.

Purchase is a function of intentions, environmental influences and individual situations. Kotler and Armstrong (2014) believe that some influences such as time, information availability, attitude of family and friends, amongst others affect purchasing decisions. The survey shows that social media influences decisions such as what to buy, where to buy and how to buy. Previous studies have affirmed this position. Notable among them are the observations by Panceralli (2020) indicate that, during the lockdown, there was an increase in the use of social media in making payments The survey also buttresses this as findings indicate that a majority of the respondents indicated that they used social media for the same reasons, during the lockdown.

Table 21: Social media ability to influence decisions on what to buy, where to buy and how to pay.

Social media influences what to buy, where to buy and how to pay. deciding on what to buy, where to buy and how to pay	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly agree	19	16%
Agree	71	60%
Neutral	17	14%
Disagree	18	15%
Strongly disagree	6	5%
Total	119	100%

Source: Field Data, 2020.

#### **4.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter focused on the presentation of the findings after the data collected was subjected to statistical tests using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were then discussed by relating the crucial findings to relevant literature discussed in the second chapter. The findings spoke to the widely held assertion in the field of media studies that, indeed social media was frequently used in making purchases, consumers preferred social media as a source of information due to its convenience, authenticity, and reliability. Finally, the chapter revealed that social media was a critical tool in the various stages of the consumer buying process.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This final chapter served as the concluding chapter where the findings are summarized. The chapter also explores the limitations of the study and makes recommendations that will influence and inform further studies into social media and consumer behaviour.

#### **5.1. Summary**

The first chapter introduced the study. It gave an overview of what the study was going to look like. The background of the study was discussed, creating the setting of the study. This was followed by the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, and the research questions, as well as the organization and significance of the study.

The second chapter reviewed literature and other research materials that were related to the navigation of the study and its objectives. This was done to help contextualize the study within the arguments of broader literature. The chapter began by exploring and discussing the various theoretical underpinnings of the study. The theories used in the study included the Uses and Gratification theory and the theory of technological determinism. The chapter then continued with a review of the concepts undergirding this study such as social media, social media marketing, consumer buying process, etc. The chapter concluded by discussing empirical studies that were tailored towards the area of social media and consumer behaviour in the pandemic era.

The third chapter discussed the methodology used in the collection of data. It was established that due to the nature of the research, it would be appropriate to solicit the views from consumers in Ghana to compliment the scores of literature on the subject. The study adopted the quantitative methodology where surveys were used. A survey questionnaire was developed and administered online where 119 were completely filled and used for the study.

The methodology was adopted based on the objectives of the study and the uniqueness of the approach based on its generalizability.

The fourth chapter reviewed the data collected and made meaning out of them. Since the methodology adopted was one of quantitative approaches, the researchers used statistical methods in the analysis and interpretation of data. Frequency distribution tables were used in the presentation of the findings, coupled with descriptive analysis to help make meaning out of the data collected. The findings were then discussed in tune with the three broad research objectives that formed the basis for this study.

## **5.2. Conclusions**

### **5.2.1 Frequency with which consumers made purchases using social media during the lockdown period**

The study first analysed the frequency with which people make purchases using social media. The study found out that there was a high incidence of social media usage among Ghanaians and particularly the youth. But among all social media cited, the mostly used one include WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. Based on the different gratifications and needs sought from the use of social media, the study found out that social media still remained quite instrumental in purchases made and information accessed about products and businesses. However, consumers paid a lot of attention to advertisements about businesses, brands, products and services on social media, and as such, social media remained the source of information in making a buying decision about a product. Social media, as inferred from the findings and discussions is perceived as a veritable and trustworthy source of information and this makes the consumers make frequent purchases using social media., an indication that social media does influence their buying decisions and purchasing behaviour.

### **5.2.2 Differences between the use of social media and traditional media to make purchasing decisions during the lockdown period.**

The study moved on to further evaluate and examine the differences between the use of social media and traditional media in making purchasing decisions. The findings showed an overwhelming support gravitated towards the use of social media in making purchases. Social media happened to be the most preferred medium when it came to accessing information about businesses and products. Social media, by virtue of its participatory nature, afforded consumers the opportunity to participate actively in information seeking due to the enhanced variety and amount of information social media provided consumers to make better decisions. The use of social media during the lockdown was a more convenient option to traditional media and granted them immediate access to information about products. It was also revealed that social media, rather than traditional media helped them to make the best product choices based on the enhanced amount of information made they were privy to. As such, between the two mediums, social media was the medium that influenced them most when it came to making buying decisions.

### **5.2.3 Changes made to the various stages of the consumer buying process by social media.**

The five-stage decision making model has provided a systematic approach in outlining the general stages that consumers engage in all purchase. The next phase of the study investigated the changes that social media made to the various stages of the consumer buying process. The analysis of the data obtained from the online survey showed that, the consumers are highly selective in attending, process, and selecting the information before a purchase takes place. Predominantly, social media was a core aspect of the various stages of the decision-making process from the recognition of needs all the way to the evaluation of the products in the post purchase analysis. Consumers fell back on social media in each stage of

the process, and although there were other factors like friends and relatives, advertisements on magazines, newspapers, television and radio. This is because consumers used social media for the benefit of immediate access to information at their convenience, resulting in a situation where consumers turned away from traditional media to social media as sources that guided their purchases during the lockdown.

### **5.3 Practical Suggestions of the study**

- i. Social media continues to be a major marketing tool, as evidenced in the findings of the study, where the respondents indicated that it was their most preferred medium. As such, businesses and organizations should intensify their social media presence and marketing efforts.
- ii. The study revealed that there were a lot of changes to the consumer decision making process associated due to the use of social media for making purchases. This insight should inform the social media marketing strategies of organizations, so they can capitalize on these changes through the use of social media as a marketing tool.

### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

The study was an exploratory one that sought to examine from the consumers' perspective, the influence of social media on the consumer buying behavior during the lockdown period. However, the study suffered from the following limitations;

- i. The study failed to use a larger sample size due to financial and time constraints. The time frame for the study was the limiting factor to the scope of this study
- ii. The study was conducted using respondents from the Accra without any organization, business or product as a case.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for future studies**

Gleaning from the limitations discussed above, the following recommendations are suggested:

- i. Futures studies should use a larger sample to make the findings more generalizable.
- ii. Future studies must endeavor to conduct studies based on cases using the explorative findings of this study. This will help understand the specific influence that social media has over consumer purchasing behavior in relation to specific products.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

I am a Master's student of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) reading pursuing a Master's degree in communication studies. I am conducting this research as part of the requirements needed for the award of a Master's degree. I am currently investigating the influence of social media on buying and selling behavior during the covid 19 era. I will appreciate it if you could fill out this questionnaire. All responses provided will only be used for academic purposes and under no circumstance will your identity, or the responses provided, be compromised.

Kindly choose from the alternatives the one that best answers the question. You are reminded to select only one answer.

Thank you.

#### **SECTION A**

##### **HOW OFTEN SOCIAL MEDIA IS USED IN BUYING DURING THE LOCKDOWN**

This part of the questionnaire will examine how social media is used by consumers in making purchases during the lockdown. You are kindly reminded to only choose one option that best answers the questions in this section.

**1. Do you use social media?**

- a. Yes**
- b. No**

**2. What do you use social media for?**

- a. Shopping**
- b. Chatting**
- c. Information**

**d.** Making friends.

**3.** What type of social media do you use most frequently? Choose one

**a.** Facebook

**b.** Instagram

**c.** Whatsapp

**d.** Snapchat

**4.** What is your preferred source of information in making a buying decision about a product?

**a.** Company's Website

**b.** Social media

**c.** Friends and relatives

**d.** Advertisements on newspapers, television and radio

**5.** Do you pay attention to business and product advertisement on social media?

**a.** Yes

**b.** No

**6.** Do you trust the information you come across on social media about business and products?

**a.** Yes

**b.** No

**7.** How often do you use social media in your product purchases?

- a.** Very often
- b.** Less often
- c.** Once a while
- d.** Not at all

**8.** Social media influences your buying decisions and purchasing behavior

- a.** Strongly agree
- b.** Agree
- c.** Neutral
- d.** Disagree
- e.** Strongly disagree

## SECTION B

### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MAKING PURCHASING DECISIONS USING SOCIAL MEDIA AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA.

The questions in this section are aimed at examining the differences between consumers' purchasing decisions made using social media and traditional media. This will help understand which medium was used the most during the lockdown.

9. Which is your most preferred medium of information about products?
  - a. Social media
  - b. Traditional media
  
10. Which medium guarantees you immediate access and convenience to information?
  - a. Social media
  - b. Traditional media
  
11. Which of the sources of information about products or services will you describe as authentic in making a purchasing decision?
  - a. Social media
  - b. Traditional media
  
12. Which of the sources influences you most in making a buying or purchasing decision?
  - a. Social media
  - b. Traditional media
  
13. Which of the medium is the most effective in targeting consumers in this century?
  - a. Social media

- b.** Traditional media

**14.** Which of the sources enhances the amount of information and has improved your ability to make the best product choices?

- a.** Social media
- b.** Traditional media

## SECTION C

### CHANGES THAT SOCIAL MEDIA HAS BROUGHT TO THE CONSUMER DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

This part will examine the changes that social media has brought to behaviour patterns of consumers, that precede, determine and follow on the decision process for the acquisition of need satisfying products, ideas or services.

**15.** Do you think social media has brought some changes to how consumers access and purchase products, goods and services?

- a.** Strongly agree
- b.** Agree
- c.** Neutral
- d.** Disagree
- e.** Strongly disagree

**16.** Are your choices that establish the need for the purchase of any product dependent on social media?

- a.** Strongly agree

- b.** Agree
- c.** Neutral
- d.** Disagree
- e.** Strongly disagree

**17.** Does social media aid in your search for information that helps you in making purchasing decisions?

- a.** Strongly agree
- b.** Agree
- c.** Neutral
- d.** Disagree
- e.** Strongly disagree

**18.** Do you use social media to evaluate and assess alternative product choices before making a decision to buy or not?

- a.** Strongly agree
- b.** Agree
- c.** Neutral
- d.** Disagree
- e.** Strongly disagree

**19.** In deciding what to buy, where to buy, and how to pay, is social media one of the influences that affect such decisions?

- a.** Strongly agree

- b.** Agree
- c.** Neutral
- d.** Disagree
- e.** Strongly disagree

**20.** In evaluating the performance of a product after purchase, do you fall back on social media to assess its limitations, satisfaction or dissatisfaction?

- a.** Strongly agree
- b.** Agree
- c.** Neutral
- d.** Disagree
- e.** Strongly disagree

## SECTION D

### DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS

This part will elicit basic demographic details from you to enhance the study.

**21.** Age

- a.** Below 18
- b.** 18-25
- c.** 26-35
- d.** 36-45
- e.** 46-55
- f.** Above 56

**22. Sex**

- a. Male**
- b. Female**

**23. Level of education**

- a. Master's degree or higher**
- b. Undergraduate level**
- c. No university degree**
- d. High school education**
- e. Primary education**
- f. No school education**

**24. Employment Status**

- a. Employed full time**
- b. Employed part time**
- c. Self employed**
- d. Unemployed**
- e. student**

Thank you for participating in this survey.