

## SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR E-COMMERCE IN POST COVID 19 AFRICA



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### Abstract

*The social media has become very convenient for companies to reach their consumers. E-commerce is most considered and chosen way of purchasing different types of products and services. Social media has gained remarkable attention in the last decade and as innovation takes place, accessing social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube have become very affordable. This research looks at social media as a platform for e-commerce. The research objectives are to determine the awareness and usage patterns of social media tools to users, to establish if social media has reduced firms operating cost and to analyze the impact of social media on customer relationship. The Statement of this research Problems are the effect of social media on the company's reputation and the brand building of its products need to be studied in order to predict the marketing and distribution plan of its products before their launch, the posts on social networking sites further could be evaluated to get the feedback of their customers on its products that are already in market. Summary of Major Findings proves that the background of the study revealed that in recent times social media has been the backbone and lifeline of e-commerce globally. Recommendation of the findings of the study recommended social media to most firms since through social media businesses can communicate information in a flash, regardless of geographical locations.*

**Keywords:** *E-Commerce, Social Media, Covid, Customers, Companies.*

### Introduction:

The advent of computer in the year 2000 has tremendously transformed the global world in terms of communication. For the past decades, social media has witnessed a huge transformation for manufacturers and consumers which progressively uses social media for social networking sites to look for information regarding various products and services, instead of relying on traditional methods such as television, radio, and magazines etc. Social media has upgraded its platform for various companies to display products as advertisement and consumers to choose from varieties of products. Social media has proven its role beyond reasonable doubt as a

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platform for E-commerce. E-commerce is a transaction in which the purchase and sales of goods and services is carried out by the Internet and leads to the import or export of the products. This means that Internet networks act as intermediaries between consumers and manufacturers. Web stores are operating at the heart of the business, and internet users are also buyers and customers. Electronic commerce can also be called "Internet Business". Since the advent of e-commerce, it has undergone many changes with the advent of advanced hardware and software technologies and has grown significantly in recent years. As a result, the desire to buy and sell electronically and virtual exchanges has increased throughout the world and even in the less developed countries. On the other hand, social networks have started moving quickly to serve companies. Their social networks and their growing influence among different users around the world have made for them the tools for advertising and e-commerce. In recent years, the boundaries between e-commerce and social networking have become increasingly blurred. Many e-commerce websites support the mechanism of social login where users can sign on the websites using their social network identities such as their Facebook or Twitter accounts. Users can also post their newly purchased products on microblogs with links to the e-commerce product web pages (Zhao *et al.*, 2016). Recent studies demonstrate that 93% of social media users think that companies should engage social media in their businesses, while 85% of them believe that companies should interact with customers via social media websites (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011). The increased popularity of social networking sites, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, has opened opportunities for new business models for electronic commerce, often referred to as social commerce. Social commerce involves using Web 2.0 social media technologies and infrastructure to support online interactions and user contributions to assist in the acquisition of products and services. Social media technologies not only provide a new platform for entrepreneurs to innovate but also raise a variety of new issues for E-commerce researchers that require the development of new theories. This could become one of the most challenging research arenas in the coming decade (Liang & Turban, 2011). Crowdfunding as a new way of financing in the web 2.0 has increased over the last years, but only little is known how project initiators increase their chances of successful fundraising through on-page and off-page communication activities. Media richness in the project presentation and a high frequency of project updates leverage fundraising success (Beier & Wagner, 2015). Consumer-generated social referrals regarding deals significantly boost sales in social commerce (Kim & Kim, 2018). All this has led companies to adopt their business strategy. Culnan *et al.* (2010) state that to gain full business value from social media, firms need to develop implementation strategies based on three elements: mindful adoption, community building, and absorptive capacity. Social commerce in this regard represents a shift in consumer's thinking from inefficient individual consumption to collaborative sharing and shopping (Chen *et al.*, 2014). In general, small and large organizations have entered social networks and are trying to discover its benefits. However, nobody can

claim that in the field of E-commerce in social networks only advantages and benefits lies. But as with all dimensions of life, there are disadvantages and virtues of the same, and along with each other.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The effect of social media on the company's reputation and the brand building of its products need to be studied in order to predict the marketing and distribution plan of its products before their launch. The posts on social networking sites further could be evaluated to get the feedback of their customers on its products that are already in market.

### **Objectives of the Problem**

The objectives of present study are:

1. To determine the awareness and usage patterns of social media tools to users.
2. To establish if social media has reduced or increased operating cost for companies
3. To analyze the impact of social media on companies and customers relationship.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Social Media and E-commerce**

In order to understand their customer in a better way and finding their inclination towards their products, the marketers and advertisers are always looking for a number of ways. This requires a lot of information to be gathered about the customers. This information could be gathered from social media about online users which could be further analyzed to trace the behavior of consumers. The various businesses are using social networks like Twitter and Facebook to help them sell more products and services.

#### **Marketing and Advertising**

With the advent of social media, marketing and advertising strategies have transformed themselves from industries reliant on mass market channels such as television, radios to the social platform. All the major brands and organizations today boasts of having large fan base and followers on all major social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram etc. Social media platforms are not only cost effective but also increase the proximity between the producers and consumers.

#### **Types of Social Media Platforms**

The most commonly used social media platforms are:

##### **Facebook**

Facebook is the largest social network on the web with respect to name recognition as well as total number of users. It has approximately 1.8 billion active users and it

acts as a wonderful platform for connecting people across the globe with your business. Since the last decade, Facebook has evolved from a basic website into a multi-dimensional network and a mobile platform where anyone can connect with anybody across the world. Keeping in mind, the Pages feature of Facebook, it can really help a lot in one's business.

### **Twitter**

Twitter is a platform where one can express one's views with short text messages along with other media. Twitter is a great interface to communicate with literally anyone in the world just by mentioning their usernames in their posts. This social networking site is a great way to advertise and market one's business. It is also an effective channel for handling customer service.

### **Youtube**

The most famous video-sharing platform that has over a billion users where the users can not only view the content posted by others, but also upload, rate, share and comment on the videos as well. If one wants to engage audience by posting an advertisement of their work or business, there could be no better platform than YouTube.

### **Instagram**

Instagram is a visual social media platform that is totally based on photos and videos posts only. It is also owned by Facebook and is different from others with respect to various filters provided and other photo editing options provided.

### **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a social networking site that is dedicatedly used for business and employment-oriented services. LinkedIn allows members that may be workers as well as employers to create profiles in an online social network which may portray real-world professional relationships.

### **Social Media Marketing**

Social media marketing is the latest trend that evolved since last few years when it started ruling online communication. It is a form of internet marketing that uses various social media platforms in order to achieve marketing and advertising objectives. Social media marketing basically involves sharing of content, videos, and images for advertising reasons. The various marketing techniques adopted by business is focused on targeting the right audience, Consumer Online Brand related activities, and electronic word of mouth

### **Research Methodology**

In this study, descriptive survey is employed since it is the role of social media as a platform for e-commerce.

The target population for this research study is Airtel Nigeria, Awka, (Eastern Zonal Head Office) and the students in the School of Financial Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Oko. The entire population for the study is three hundred (300). The sample size is one hundred (100) comprising of Eighty (80) Polytechnic students and Twenty (20) employees of Airtel Nigeria. We believe the sample represent a cross-section of the total population who are information technology inclined to best understand and answer the questionnaire. The population of the study is a section of students on the various campuses and employees of Airtel Nigeria, Awka, Eastern Zonal Head Office.

According to Furlong *et al* (2000), “A sample population is a subset of the entire population, and inferential statistics is to generalize from the sample to the population”. Hundred respondents (100) were selected out of the population as the sample. Convenience sampling technique was employed to obtain data from the university students.

Also, the purposive sampling technique was employed to obtain data from employees of Airtel Nigeria, Awka, Eastern Zonal Head Office. Also known as judgmental sampling which enabled the researchers to use their judgment to select respondents that best answered the research questions and met the research objectives.

The main research instrument used is a questionnaires which included close-ended questions and open-ended questions. Close-ended questions are to provide the respondents with alternative answers to choose from whilst open-ended questions gave respondents the freedom to express their thoughts. A Questionnaire is preferred because of the ability to compare the responses and express them in statistical formats like tables and charts and also to allow respondents to respond at their own leisure time, and also not to be under pressure.

## **Analysis and Discussion of Data**

### **General Information on respondents’ feedback**

This section provides the results of the various levels of the respondents.

The Awareness and Usage Patterns of Social Media Tools to Users

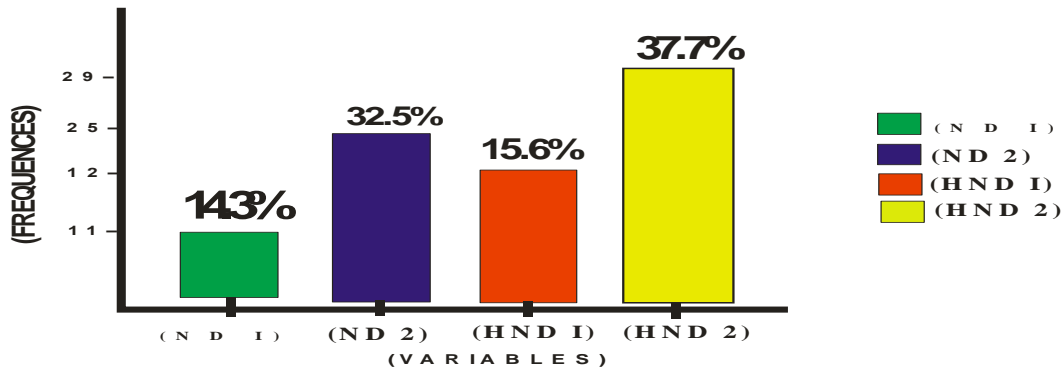
#### **Table/Chart 1**

Table 1 shows the various levels of respondents gathered from questionnaire given to students in the School of Financial studies.

Awareness and Usage of Social Media Tools to Users:

CLASS	Frequency	Percent
ND I	11	14.3
ND II	25	32.5
HND I	12	15.6
HND II	29	37.7
TOTAL	77	100.0

**AWARENESS AND USAGE PATTERNS OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS TO USERS**



From Table 1 it can be concluded that majority of the respondents with a percentage of thirty-seven point seven (37.7%) are in their Final year of study HND II going for NYSC mostly source the internet for project research work and other assignment.

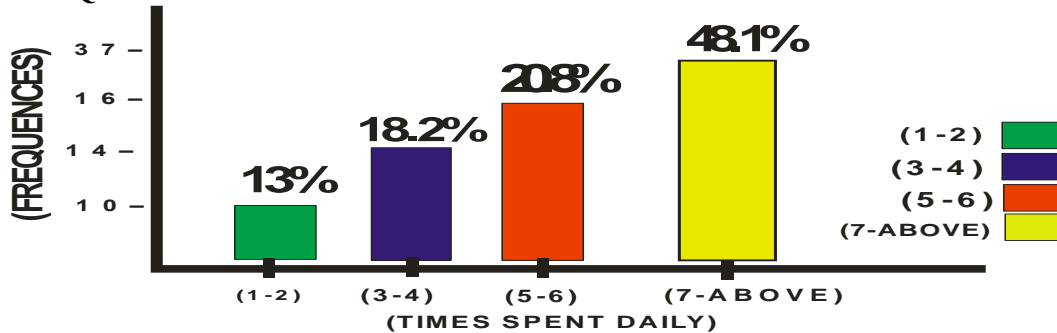
**Table/Chart 2**

The table below shows the usage of internet in a day from the questionnaires given to students living within Oko Community.

**Table 2: Frequency of Internet Usage**

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-2 times a day	10	13.0	13.0
3-4 times a day	14	18.2	31.2
5-6 times a day	16	20.8	51.9
more than 6 times a day	37	48.1	
Total	77	100.0	100.0

**FREQUENCY OF INTERNET USAGE**



From Table 2, It can be concluded that most of the respondents use the internet more than six (6) times in a day.

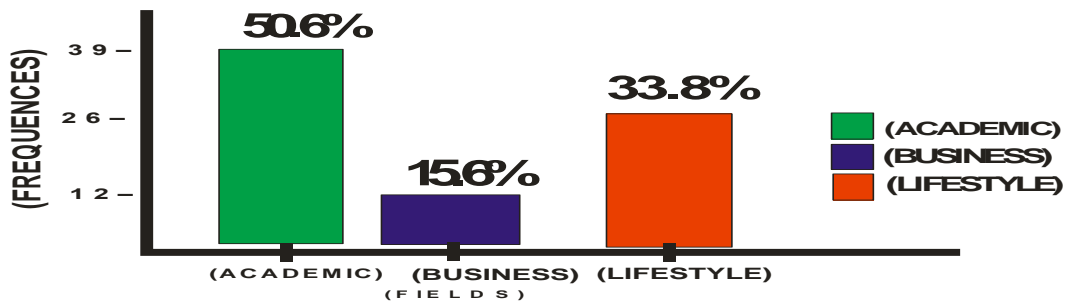
**Table/Chart3**

The table below shows the various purposes for internet usage.

**Table 3Main Purpose for Internet Usage**

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Academic	39	50.6	50.6
Business	12	15.6	66.2
Lifestyle	26	33.8	
Total	77	100.0	100.0

**MAIN PURPOSE FOR INTERNET USAGE**



Based on Table 4.5 it can be concluded that most of the respondents use the internet mostly for Academic purposes.

**Table/Chart 4**

The table below shows the awareness of online shopping sites.

**Table 4: Awareness of Online Shopping sites**

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	72	93.5	93.5
No	5	6.5	
Total	77	100.0	100.0

**AWARENESS OF ONLINE SHOPPING SITES**

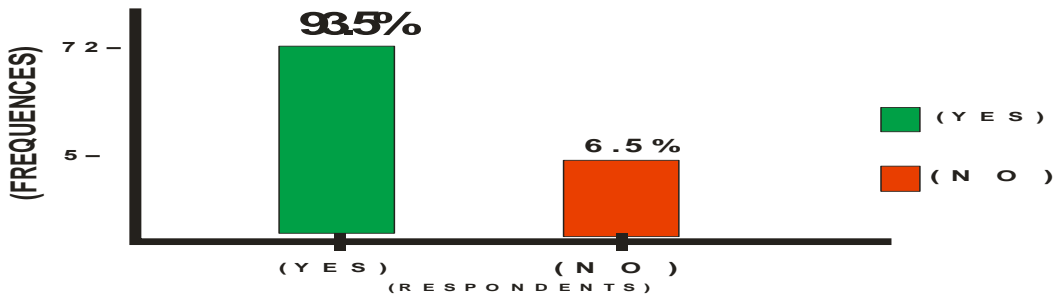


Table 4 shows that (93.5%) are aware of online shopping sites.

**Table/Chart5**

The table below shows the number of respondents that shop online.

**Table 5: Online Shopping**

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Yes</b>	23	31.2	31.2
<b>No</b>	51	68.8 ss	
<b>Total</b>	77	100.0	100.0

**ONLINE SHOPPING**

Table 5 shows that (68.8%) of the respondents do not shop online. Even thou, they are aware of online shopping sites.

The table below shows who invited respondents to join the social network.

**Table 6: Invitation to Join Social Network**

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Friends	52	67.5	67.5
Relatives	11	14.3	81.8
Colleague	6	7.8	89.6
Lectures	1	1.3	90.9
Family	7	9.1	
<b>Total</b>	77	100.0	100.0

**INVITATION TO JOIN SOCIAL NETWORK**

We concluded based on the statistics in Table 6 that most respondents were invited by their friends to join the social networks.

**Table 7: The Frequency of Facebook Usage**

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Daily	43	55.8	55.8
A few times a week	14	18.2	74.0
Once a week	3	3.9	77.9
A few times a month	11	14.3	92.2
Once a month	4	5.2	97.4
Never	2	2.6	
Total	77	100.0	100.0

**THE FREQUENCY OF FACEBOOK USAGE**

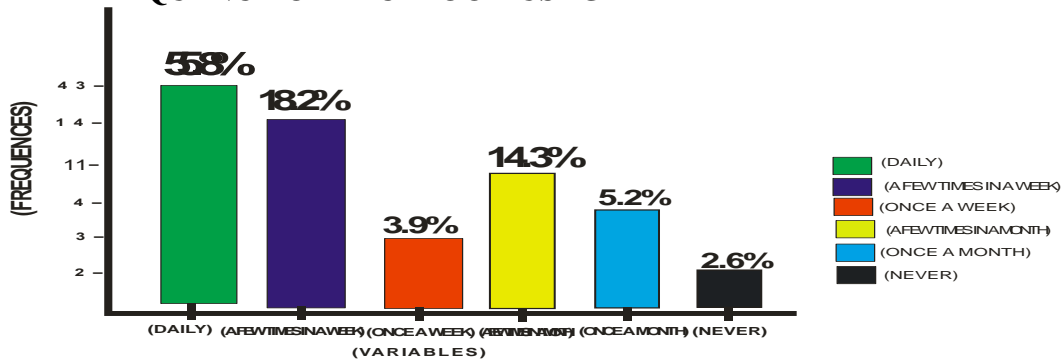


Table 7 shows that (55.8%) use Facebook daily. We believe if firms also communicate to their customers through this social network “app” it will be an effective medium to reach their target audience.

**Table 8: The Frequency of LinkedIn Usage**

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Daily	10	13.0	13.0
A few times a week	3	3.9	16.9
Once a week	10	13.0	29.9
A few times a month	8	10.4	40.3
Once a month	5	6.5	46.8
Never	41	53.2	
Total	77	100.0	100.0

**THE FREQUENCY OF LINKEDIN USAGE**

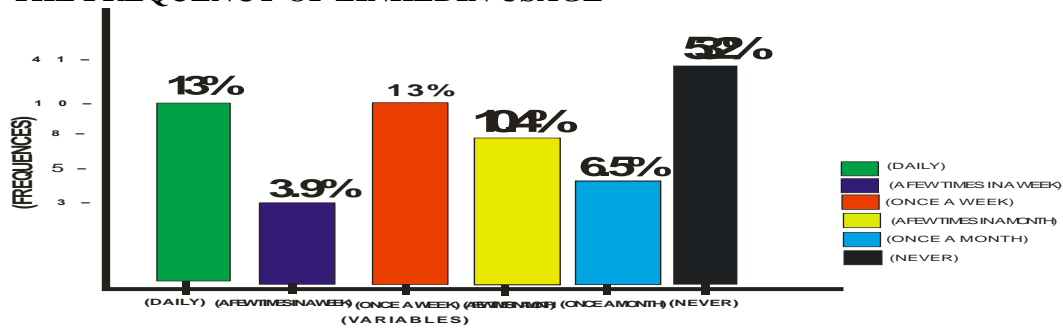
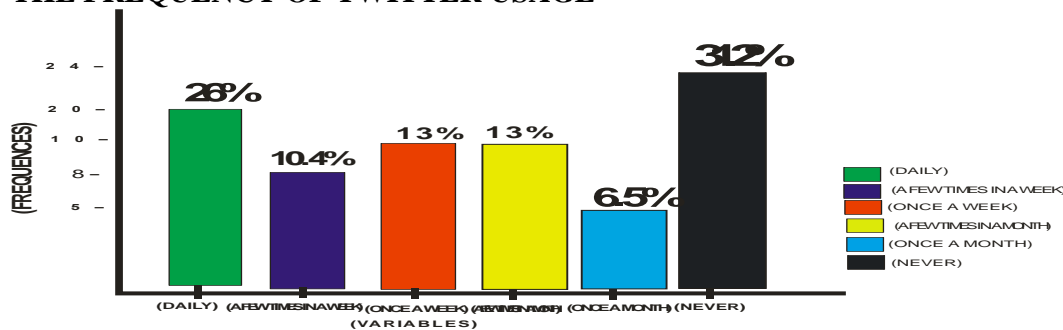


Table 8 shows that majority of the respondents constituting (53.2%) never use LINKEDIN. Thus, we concluded that it will not be effective for firms to reach their target audience through this social network “app” alone.

**Table 9: The Frequency of Twitter Usage**

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Daily	20	26.0	26.0
A few times a week	8	10.4	36.4
Once a week	10	13.0	49.4
A few times a month	10	13.0	62.3
Once a month	5	6.5	68.8
Never	24	31.2	
Total	77	100.0	100.0

**THE FREQUENCY OF TWITTER USAGE**



From Table 9, we concluded that it will not be appropriate for firms to reach their target audience through this social network “app” alone.

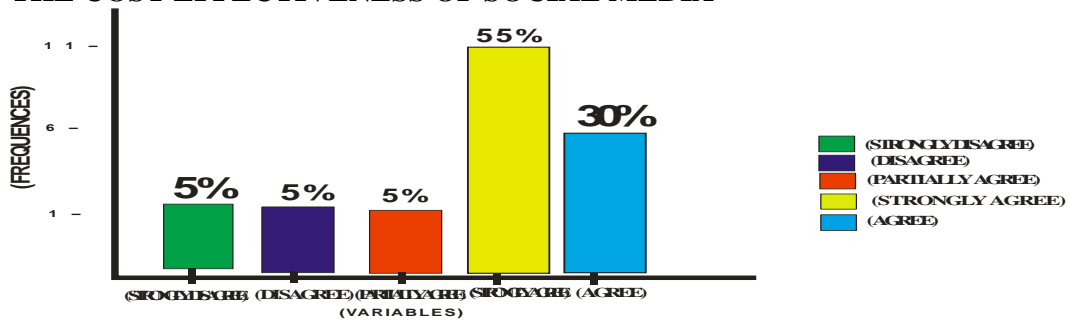
**Establishing if Social Media has Reduced Firm’s Operating Cost**

This section provides the results of various respondents view on whether social media has reduced firm’s operating cost.

**Table 10: The Cost Effectiveness of Social Media**

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	1	5.0	5.0
Disagree	1	5.0	10.0
Partially agree	1	5.0	15.0
Strongly agree	11	55.0	70.0
Agree	6	30.0	
Total	20	100.0	100.0

**THE COST EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

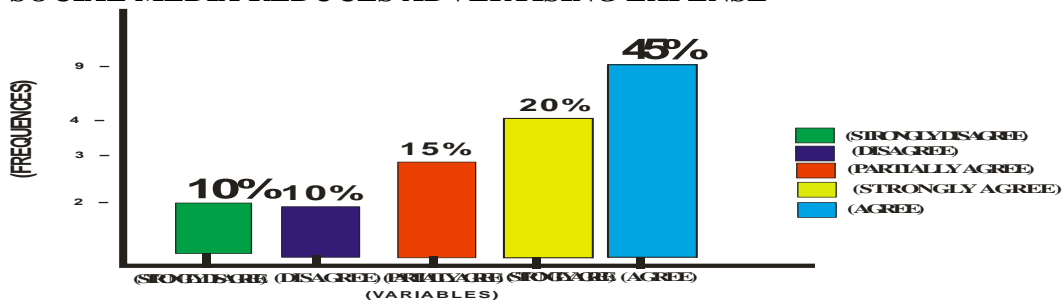


This clearly concludes that a large number of the respondents believe that social media is cost effective as compared to the traditional system.

**Table 11: Social Media Reduces Advertising Expense**

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	2	10.0	10.0
Disagree	2	10.0	20.0
Partially agree	3	15.0	35.0
Strongly agree	4	20.0	55.0
Agree	9	45.0	
Total	20	100.0	100.0

**SOCIAL MEDIA REDUCES ADVERTISING EXPENSE**

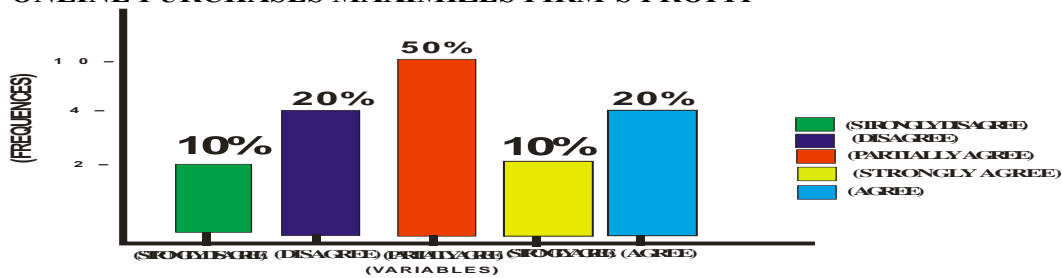


In conclusion, the table highlights the fact that social media reduces advertising expenses of firms.

**Table 12: Online Purchases Maximizes Firm’s Profit**

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	2	10.0	10.0
Disagree	4	20.0	30.0
Partially agree	10	50.0	80.0
Strongly agree	2	10.0	10.0
Agree	4	20.0	
Total	20	20	20

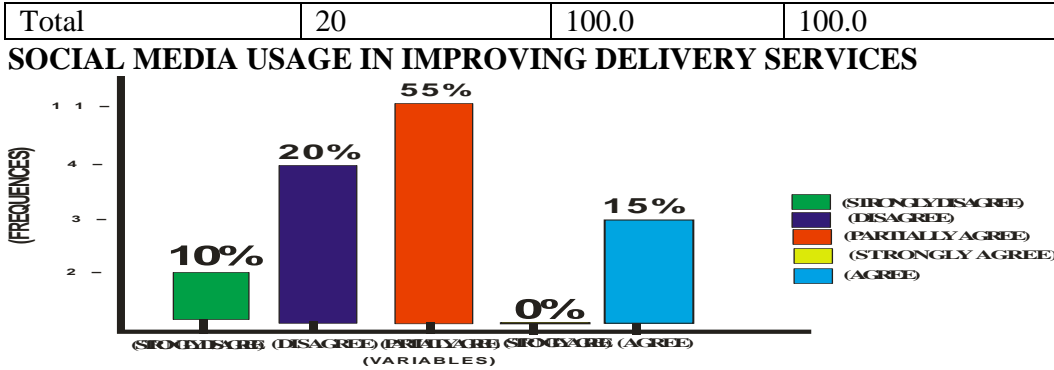
**ONLINE PURCHASES MAXIMIZES FIRM’S PROFIT**



In conclusion it can clearly be seen that 50% are of the view that online purchases thus have a positive effect on firm’s profitability.

**Table 13: Social Media Usage in Improving Delivery Services**

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	2	10.0	10.0
Disagree	4	20.0	30.0
Partially agree	11	55.0	85.0
Strongly agree	0	00.0	10.0
Agree	3	15.0	



From Table 13, it can be deduced that usage of social media has indeed improved service delivery to customers.

**Discussion of Research Findings**

- **Awareness and Usage Patterns of Social Media Tools to Users**

From the study it was realized that the most popular and frequently used social network was Facebook. This finding reinforces Mayfields (2008) position that these are websites where people can build their personal profiles connect and share information with their friends and that the most popular social network websites are Facebook, LinkedIn and Myspace. However, field study revealed that LinkedIn is not a popular and frequently used.

Schaeffer (1999) is of the view that this popularity emanated from the fact that the internet offers a channel where buyers and sellers are able to complete transactions cheaply, instantaneously and anonymously whilst overcoming geographic and time barriers.

- **Establishing if Social Media has Reduced Firm’s Operating Cost**

It was deduced that social media is cost effective as compared to the traditional system when employed as a firms marketing channel. From the data analysis it was realized that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the electronic age has reduced advertising expense, had maximized firms profit and had reached more prospects as compared to the traditional system. Webber (2009) further goes on to say, social media are distinct from industrial or traditional media, such as newspapers, televisions, and film. They are relatively inexpensive and accessible to enable anyone (even private individuals) to publish or access information compared to industrial media, which generally require significant resources to publish information. His statements confirms that social media helps in reducing advertising expenses of firms.

Furthermore, Kiggundu (2002) is of the view that e-commerce brings about a reduction in distribution costs through the elimination of intermediaries. Since online transactions involve very little costs e-commerce can also bring about a reduction in

transaction costs. This view of Kiggundu (2002) reinforces the position that online purchases have maximized firm's profit.

Also, according to MCLvor, Humpreys and McAleer (2000) internal and external processes can also be integrated to lower transactions costs. As worldwide companies are adopting more collaborative relationship with key suppliers in product development, key business process now require cross-functional information sharing on a wide range of issues. This means that firms can utilize e-commerce to expand distribution channels at lower costs.

MCLvor *et al* (2000), further says these low costs can be achieved through the reduction of clerical procedures and paper handling. Thus, affirming majority of respondent's view, that agreed to the statement that social media has reduced firms transportation cost considerably.

### • **Analyzing the Impact of Social Media on Customer Relationship**

It was discovered that the general perception held by respondents was positive. Majority concluded that social media has helped in building and sustaining customer relationship.

Respondents fifty-five percent (55%) strongly agreed that social media usage has improved delivery services to customers.

This statistics affirms the position of MCLvor *et al* (2000) who stated that e-commerce accelerate ordering, delivery and payment for goods and services while reducing operating and inventory costs for most firms. Schaeffer (1999) further affirms this benefit of social media when he stated that the internet offers a channel where buyers and sellers are able to complete transactions cheaply, instantaneously and anonymously whilst overcoming geographic and time barriers.

Karavdic (2002) stated that personalized product offerings combined with free market access provide the customer with a wider availability of hard-to-find products. Added to this wider selection of items, customers can test products online before a decision is made to purchase.

This interconnectedness comes at a lower cost and on demand thus, providing a more efficient method to respond to customer needs and wants (Straub, 2001). The above statements confirms that social media helps in responding to the needs of customers.

Statistics revealed that majority of respondents constituting forty-five percent (45%) agree that social media has created an opportunity for customers to interact with the firm as Schaeffer (2003) agrees that one of the greatest benefits of doing business online rests in its ability to promote relationship building with customers and partners. Schaeffer (2003) further contends that the nature and content of information that can be shared has broadened in scope. He states that the multi-media nature and real time capabilities of the internet are fostering an environment that is conducive for relationship building.

**Summary of Major Findings**

The background of the study revealed that in recent times social media has been the backbone and lifeline of e-commerce globally. Thus, it is imperative that marketers and firms adopt social media as a marketing strategy in reaching to their target audience effectively. It is therefore necessary for marketers and firms to tap into the endless opportunities social media has to offer.

Furthermore, the research revealed that:

- 1: E-commerce has brought about a reduction in distribution costs through the elimination of intermediaries. Since online transactions involve very little costs, e-commerce has brought about a reduction in transaction costs.
- 2: It further revealed that the internet offered a channel where buyers and sellers are able to complete transactions cheaply, instantaneously and anonymously whilst overcoming geographic and time barriers.
- 3: From all the possibilities listed in the questionnaire it was realized majority of respondents strongly agreed that the electronic age has reduced advertising expense, has maximized firm's profit and has reached more prospects as compared to the traditional system.
- 4: That, firms and marketers in their quest to build brand value will have to adopt social network in their communication strategy alongside the traditional way of disseminating information to ensure that they reached their target audience efficiently.
- 5: that the respondents had a positive view about social media. The respondents revealed that the multi-media nature and real time capabilities of the internet have fostered an environment that is conducive for relationship building between firms and customers. However, it was revealed that a large number of respondents partially agreed that they were delighted in using the social media specifically, the blog for their transactions. The blog was not always timely with information needed by customers.

**Conclusion**

It can be concluded that the daily usage of content generation "Apps" such as Facebook builds engagement between customers and firms. Once this relationship has been established through these techniques, loyalty will follow.

In addition, the study concludes that e-commerce accelerates ordering, delivery and payment for goods and services while reducing operating and inventory costs for most firms.

Lastly, it is concluded that social media can be used to increase customer loyalty through its ability to communicate directly with customers.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations outlined below are suggested as follows:

- 1: That social media be used by most firms since through social media businesses can communicate information in a flash, regardless of geographical locations.
- 2: That firms need to integrate social media in their communication strategy since social media allow firms to tailor their content for each market segment and give the businesses the opportunity to get their messages across more widely than ever before. Indeed, once a piece of content goes viral there is no limit to the amount of people it could potentially reach at no extra cost for the business.
- 3: That Job vacancies in E-Commerce to be published in various Social media platforms due to the increase in patronage in this era.
- 4: That firms must publish transactions in a very common and understandable manner and language in order to be easily accessed by the public.
- 5: Finally, It is also recommended that, firms should disseminate information and communicate to their customers through Facebook and other social media platforms to ensure effective reach of messages. In addition, we recommend that firms use these social media sites as a channel for communicating system failures to generate loyal customers.

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