# The Use of Digital Media as Communication Channel During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Prospects for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

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# ABSTRACT

The seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lock down measures brought about a lot of changes in the life style of individuals. Online communication amongst businesses and their Customers has become the new normal as consumers can now order and receive their daily needs conveniently at their homes. The major aim of the study was to ascertain whether the MSMEs in the TRNC actually joined people in many other places to ameliorate the pandemic situation by making effective use of the digital media in buying and selling during and after the lock down measures. Five research questions and three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted the survey research design using respondents in the whole of TRNC as the population of study. Three out of the five regions were randomly selected from where a sample of n= 397 respondents were also selected using the simple random sampling technique.

A self-designed questionnaire in the five-point Likert format was administered on the respondents. The items focused on issues such as the digital communication media mostly used in interacting and the challenges met. The data were collected and analyzed using the test for significant difference. Furthermore, the data obtained was used in making statistical inferences about the population represented by the sample. A reliability test was done to find the reliability Cronbach alpha of the questions asked and the results indicate: α. .90. The ratings are based on the use, opinion, and experiences of the respondents on the digital communication channels used in interacting during the Coronavirus pandemic. Among the discoveries made was that, during the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs predominately preferred to use digital media

as a means of communication in TRNC and others. The study therefore makes recommendation for further studies.

**Keywords:** digital media, digital communication, coronavirus, online marketing, North Cyprus.

# ÖZ

COVID-19 pandemisinin ciddiyeti ve karantina önlemleri, bireylerin yaşam tarzlarında birçok değişikliği beraberinde getirdi. İşletmeler ve müşterileri arasındaki çevrimiçi iletişim, tüketicilerin artık günlük ihtiyaçlarını evlerinde rahatça sipariş edip alabilmeleri nedeniyle yeni normal haline geldi. Çalışmanın temel amacı, KKTC'deki KOBİ'lerin, karantina önlemleri sırasında ve sonrasında dijital medyayı alım satımda etkin bir şekilde kullanarak pandemi durumunu iyileştirmek için başka birçok yerde insanlara katılıp katılmadığını belirlemekti. Çalışmayı yönlendirmek için beş araştırma sorusu ve üç hipotez formüle edilmiştir. Çalışma, araştırma evreni olarak KKTC'nin tamamında yanıt verenlerin kullanıldığı anket araştırma tasarımını benimsemiştir. Beş bölgeden üçü, rastgele örnekleme tekniği kullanılarak n= 397 katılımcıdan oluşan bir örneklemin seçildiği rastgele ele alınmıştır.

Katılımcılara beşli Likert formatında kendi tasarlanan bir anket uygulanmıştır. Buradaki öğeler, etkileşimde en çok kullanılan dijital iletişim ortamı ve karşılaşılan zorluklar gibi konulara odaklanmıştır. Veriler toplanmış ve anlamlı farklılık testi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Ayrıca elde edilen veriler, örneklemin temsil ettiği anakütle hakkında istatistiksel çıkarımlarda da kullanılmıştır. Sorulan soruların Cronbach alfa güvenirliğini bulmak için bir güvenirlik testi yapıldı ve sonuçlar şunu gösteriyor: α. .90. Derecelendirmeler, katılımcıların koronavirüs pandemisi sırasında etkileşimde kullanılan dijital iletişim kanallarına ilişkin kullanım, görüş ve deneyimlerine dayanmaktadır. Yapılan keşifler arasında, COVID-19 karantinası sırasında MSME'lerin ağırlıklı olarak KKTC ve diğer ülkelerde bir iletişim aracı olarak

dijital medyayı kullanmayı tercih ettikleri vardı. Bu nedenle çalışma, daha sonraki çalışmalar için önerilerde bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** dijital medya, dijital iletişim, coronavirüs, online pazarlama, Kuzey Kıbrıs.

# DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Ogechi.

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My profound gratitude goes to the Eastern Mediterranean University for giving me the opportunity to embark on this academic journey and for providing the necessary conducive environment and facilities. I am immensely thankful to my academic adviser for the advice and encouragement provided throughout the program. To all my professors who taught in the various courses, I will ever remain grateful. In a most special way I appreciate my supervisor, Assist. Prof. Dr. Raziye Nevzat, for her enormous support, encouragements, and most professional expertise throughout the project. I also wish to express my appreciation to friends who gave me both physical and moral support while doing this project. I am immensely indebted to my family for the unconditional love and support. To my jury members I say thank you.

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| | |
|---|---|
| ARPAN | Advanced Research Project Agency Network |
| DSR | Digital Social Responsibility |
| EVD | Ebola Virus Disease |
| EWOM | Electronic Word of Mouth |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IoT | Internet of Things |
| KKTC | Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti |
| MSMEs (KOBI) | Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises |
| PC | Personal Computer |
| SARS | Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome |
| SEM | Structural Equation Modelling |
| SMS | Short Message Service |
| SNS | Social Networking Sites |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for Social Science |
| TRNC | Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus |
| TV | Television |
| USB | Universal Serial Bus |
| VCR | Videocassette Recorder |
| W3C | World Wide Web Consortium |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

# Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Since the dawn of human civilization, communication has been essential parts of human society. Mass media and communication have evolved through several transformations especially with technological reforms. Communication has advanced from the traditional forms of communication such as folk tales and music, dances, songs, and other cultural displays, all aimed at passing information from one person to the other, one generation to the other, and or one group to the other. Technology introduced mediation between humans and computers such that there are several means of communication people employ today, not only for information gathering and keeping in touch with others.

Although old media channels such as Radio, Television, and News-prints still shoulder critical position in information dissemination, Web 2.0 social networking sites, also known as social media, are seen to be considerably more powerful. With interactive online social media platforms made possible by the invention of Web 2.0, there has been a significant shift in media concentration. Information handling and control have moved from a few individuals' hands and from few sources to diverse sources; therefore, the importance of using the media in sharing information and communication in times of crisis cannot be ignored. Corresponding with the shifts in media concentration and use, social networking, advertising, and business

communication are equally at optimal levels, especially in the last decade, because of most of these digital platforms' easy access and user-friendly nature. Thus it becomes trendy that businesses and their customers communicate through digital media effortlessly.

The ability to compose, chat, and share content are the main features that have driven the utilization of the digital spaces in the pandemic period. Interactive digital media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, where social networking transactions occur, have become very hotspots for communication. These interactive media channels become more popular by the day because they have convenient features such as an instant feedback mechanism that allows the individuals and groups to be communicated and interacted with, to react, and respond accordingly in a two-way feedback method. Since their invention, interactive digital media have been central to the possibility of sustained social-economic, political, and religious activities (Biocca, 2002). Most businesses, big and small, have adopted them (interactive media) to communicate with their customers resulting in what is popularly known today as business communication.

The year 2019 ended badly with the scourge of the Coronavirus outbreak, what seemed to be a joke that started in Wuhan, China, at the tail end of the year later spread like wildfire to other parts of the globe by the year 2020. World Health Organization (WHO) reported the COVID-19 situation was a public health emergency for everyone and affirmed that it is a pandemic on March 11th, 2020 (WHO, 2020). According to Rezabakhsh et al. (2020), the Coronavirus pandemic or COVID-19, also called the novel Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection, is a highly pathologic, wide-spread

virus. This virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome in human beings has emerged as a serious public health issue with high morbidity and mortality rates. As of May 3rd, 2021, there were One Hundred Seventy-two Million Five Hundred Twenty-five Thousand Three Hundred Forty-four (172 525 344) laboratory-confirmed cases of the infection, and three Million One Hundred Ninety-eight Thousand Five Hundred Eighty-two (3,198,528) reported deaths. By the beginning of June 2021, a total of One Billion, Six Hundred Thirty-eight Million, Six Thousand Eight Hundred Ninety-nine (1,638,006,899) vaccine doses have been administered (WHO, 2021).

With the virus spreading rapidly without any known cure, health experts found it overwhelming to handle. The rapid rate of its spreading could be attributed to globalization, the flow of information, goods, and services carried out by humans across political and geographical boundaries. Thus countries began to experience the heavy impacts of the virus on every side of the society. In the same vein, scholars such as Anzai (2020), Sarkodie, and Owusu (2020) and Lin, et al., (2021) have assessed the impacts of the pandemic on global health, economy, environment, and overall development and concluded that the pandemic (COVID-19) has done so much harm on every other sector of human society. To mitigate the further transmission of the virus, government agencies and civil organizations embarked on campaigns for social distancing, good hygiene, and self-isolation (quarantine) for those with possible contact with pre-infected victims (Olapegba et al., 2020).

While the safety measures taken by world leaders and health experts aim to curb the spread of the virus, Mhalla, (2020) argues that the magnitude of the quarantine and strict social distancing measures has significantly affected life generally even though

it helps in controlling the virus. Regarding the impacts of these measures, one would not expect a free flow of goods and services in this type of situation where people who should be moving up and down to carry out these operations are sitting at home. Therefore, individuals and business establishments have cried out over the impacts of the pandemic that most significantly affect the MSMEs. Again, continuous rise in numbers of infected persons and the fear that none infected person could be infected at any time made the usual lively commercial activities and business process come to almost a halt. Businesses and organizations have had serious challenges, especially in communicating with their customers for engagements that would typically require person-to-person or face-to-face communication.

Fortunately, we are in an era when the whole world is enjoying the mass media, which have been found to encourage the gathering of new accessible data, improving information, consciousness, and reducing face-to-face human interaction. The mass media assume a critical part in correspondence between specialists, researchers, general health practitioners, and funding agencies for a fast worldwide response in the course of the pandemic (Karasneh et al., 2020). As the existential global pandemic of COVID-19 started, different media channels are instrumental in getting daily reports and updates concerning the spread of the virus, testing centers, numbers of people infected, hospitalized, isolated, and deaths (Tsoy et al., 2021). Furthermore, media have been a convenient way of getting people entertained, informed, and engaged in their everyday businesses and other human endeavors.

Online media and communication play tremendous roles in changing how businesses reach their customers and get feedback in this age of information and digital

transformation. The above assertion is observable in the current crisis of coronavirus, whereby interactive social media are used in several channels and forms for doing business. Lucy (2021) believes that for businesses to thrive in 2021 and the future, they need to react with dynamism to changing demands of the digital age. She further adds that the changes include finding means for their customers to window-shop online and communicate with the business and, in so doing, harmonizing competing demands for both worth and ethical shopping options.

In the outbreak of the Coronavirus, there are findings made that are pointing towards the role of digital interactive media tools for communication. For instance, Bao et al. (2020) react to the increasing use of data visualization during the pandemic to communicate and transmit the trend of the virus outbreak. Furthermore, digital platforms presented real-time information through visual graphs that were non-existent or not used before the pandemic (Bao et al., 2020). Furthermore, Mason et al. (2021) add that roles and effects of social interactive media platforms keep increasing because, when social isolation is a common practice, social media provides opportunities for people to relate with others without having bodily contact.

One of the examples of how digital communication has been carried out during the Coronavirus crisis, according to Robbins et al., (2020), is in use of digital tools like WhatsApp and telegram in communication by clinical groups in order to report, manage, and organize staff schedules and service provision to control high levels of staff sickness. Furthermore, social media has become a crucial part of professional communication whereby platforms such as Facebook and Twitter host large groups of people in need of communication and information about the virus. Still in the health sector alone, as the

pandemic continues to spread, several threads were created to discuss topics essential for healthcare practitioners and the general public (Robbins et al., 2020).

In addition to the above fact, there have been serval innovative e-learning tools in the health sector and every sector, aimed at facilitating the upskilling, information sharing, and communication to tackle the COVID-19 virus effectively. A good example is the fast improvement of communication apps such as Zoom, Webex Meet, Google Meet, and other e-learning and digital communication tools like and Microsoft teams. Although most of these channels existed even before the pandemic started, they have gained more recognition and acceptance as a substitute to or as pseudo channels for communication in times of crisis.

This study seeks to investigate how the Micro, Small, and Medium-scale Enterprises (MSMEs) communicate with their customers through online platforms in Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In particular, the study will center on the MSMEs in the (TRNC) and how effectively they utilized and are still utilizing digital communication strategies in social media to mitigate the devastating effects of person-to-person or face-to-face interaction breakdown caused by the pandemic. The study will also look at the challenges of using digital media for communication encountered by the MSMEs within the period of lockdowns.

## 1.2 Motivation of Study

Advancement in modern technology has been the only way to mitigate the problems caused by various natural disasters and adversities the world has ever faced. The COVID-19 pandemic is one of such situations after world health experts termed it a thing of concern globally. Everyone is making efforts to ensure that life continues

during the lockdown and after. Researchers have been working round the clock to discover or improve ways of doing virtually everything to beat down the impacts of the pandemic.

In so many ways, interactive media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and others have been beneficial to businesses, governments, organizations, individuals, students, and everyone in terms of communication worldwide. Indeed, online communication did not start with the pandemic. Still, studies have revealed that its adoption has become more acceptable during the pandemic, with the shift from face-to-face or persons-to-persons meetings and engagements to totally virtual meetings. Undoubtedly, digitalization is still a myth and an impossibility in some areas or parts of the world. Indeed, businesses in such places and consumers suffered untold hardship at the pandemic's peak. Therefore, it is interesting to the researcher to determine how the MSMEs in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus used online media to communicate, interact, and solve their day-to-day problems. The researcher is also motivated by the desire to investigate the following:

- The readiness of both the MSMEs to embrace the digital communication trends.
- The viability of using social and digital media in their sales promotion or advertisement of their goods and services.
- What challenges are the MSMEs faced with in the online communication process?
- The willingness of the MSMEs to continue with digital online communication after the pandemic.

## 1.3 Problem of Study

The seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the implementation of some safety measures, which led to other challenging situations all over the world. On March

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8. 2020, the first Coronavirus positive case was dictated in Northern Cyprus (TRNC Ministry of Health, 2020). Since then, the Island has been in either partial or complete lockdown orders, making people stay in their homes for some time. A situation like this obviously must have affected the people, MSMEs mostly since their goods and services were no longer being patronized. In many other parts of the world, the current pandemic necessitated increased online communication, including business-to-business and business-to-customer communication.

Although many studies have been done on interactive social media during the Coronavirus pandemic for networking, and business communication, most had their focus on consumer behavior. Therefore, this study pays more attention to how the MSMEs in Northern Cyprus communicate, do transactions, advertise, and improve their competitive value and customer relationship in the COVID-19 pandemic. It is necessary to find out the challenges these businesses encounter or might have encountered in digital communication channels. Finally, the researcher intends to verify the various online communication media predominantly used in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in business communication during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1.4 Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to identify how much the MSMEs in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus have been able to accept and use online communication channels during the Coronavirus pandemic in their businesses. The purpose of the study in specific terms, was:

- To ascertain how much digital media served as an option for carrying out various business activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- To determine the extent to which online media are accepted and adopted by MSMEs as a communication channel in the crisis situation.

- To find out the main medium predominantly used for business communication purposes during the pandemic.

- To identify the challenges and prospects involved in using online forms of communication by the MSMEs in TRNC.

- To ascertain whether MSMEs use online digital communication channels in advertising their products and services.

## 1.5 Scope/ Limitation of the Study

This study covered only the MSMEs the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus. The area of interest is the online communication activities of the MSMEs during the pandemic. While investigating this, it is also interesting to determine whether the businesses use these same medium (digital media) for their adverts, awareness campaigns, and general business communication. The study limited to the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, which is the area of the study. Furthermore, this study is limited to the period of the Coronavirus pandemic which started in the final quarter of 2019. In addition, the study is limited to looking at a few social networking application namely Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter as channels of communication by the MSMEs. Therefore, while the data collected for this research is compiled from a sample of MSMEs and their customers in the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, the findings may not be concluded as facts representing all demographics and other levels of businesses in other parts of the world.

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

Since there is an excellent use of the Internet and social networking sites in the current digitalized world, the findings of this work will be of great value to users of the online

media channels as it will help in online media literacy education. Furthermore, the study's findings will help showcase the trends in social media and online communication to make business owners mindful of their problems and prospects before using them. The results and recommendations will be instrumental in motivating media content creators and designers of social media apps to enhance their apps and sites for better use. Furthermore, there is the hope that the findings will make available critical data to serve as a reference point for future researchers in the academic field. It will also be helpful for business purposes. It will inform media managers on how to package online communication strategies on specific platforms to reach even wider audiences. Finally, this study will be most beneficial to Micro, Small, and Medium-scale businesses, especially in the TRNC, that have been severely dealt with by the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic by educating them about the pros and cons of digital social media.

## 1.7 Research Question

In the course of this study, attempts are made to understand how digital media as communication channels were used during the COVID-19 pandemic for the purpose of business transactions or business communication by the MSMEs in maintaining correspondence with their customers and challenges and prospects involved in using them in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The study therefore seeks to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1.** What medium of communication is predominantly used by the MSMEs in TRNC?

**RQ2.** Did MSMEs in the TRNC benefit from social media in communicating with their customers?

**RQ3.** What medium of communication channel does the MSMEs mostly use for their advertising their products?

**RQ4.** To what extent have the MSMEs in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus have been able to embrace the use of online marketing?

**RQ5**. What are the major challenges faced by the businesses and their customers in using the digital media of communicating during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## 1.8 Research Hypothesis

The work is aimed at finding out if and how the MSMEs in the TRNC use digital media for communication and the challenges they face using digital media during the COVID-19 pandemic. To realize this aim, the following hypothesis will be tested:

**H1.** During the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs predominately preferred to use digital media as a means of communication in TRNC.

**H2.** MSMEs benefited from social media to communicate with customers during the COVID-19 lockdown in TRNC.

**H3.** During the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs preferred to use Facebook as a means of advertising their products in TRNC.

## 1.9 Assumptions of the Study

Since the internet and digital communication technologies have been found to be parts of daily life of the society, this research is carried out with the following basic assumptions:

1. That the vast majority of people in the TRNC have fully adopted and adapted to the new communication channels of the digital media.

2. That in the COVID-19 pandemic period, communication, and activities of the MSMEs was still carried out through the use digital media.

3. The research is also carried out with the assumption that while the digital communication channels are believed to be easily accessible and available for everyone, there are however some challenges in the utilization of these channels.

# Chapter 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a review of the literature materials that have relevance to the present study. For easy discussion, existing scholarly literature on the impact of online media in the present global communication process, most importantly with regard to communication in times of crisis such as the current Coronavirus global pandemic are reviewed. A literature review is important in academic research work such as the one under study. According to Boote and Beile (2005) a review of literature allows the researcher to carry out a comprehensive assessment, explanation, as well as explanation of other works associated to current study. Rowley, and Slack, (2004) equally posit that a literature review is a summary of a subject field that supports and provides backings for a specific research question and needs to draw on diverse range of sources including articles from academic professional journals, books, and web-based resources. To engender literature for this study, secondary scholarly sources such as peer reviewed articles, books, and relevant published online and offline resources are used so as to make clear the issues as they relate to the current study.

In this chapter, there are highlights of the history of the Internet as the primary driver of online media and communication, Media Convergence, and its role in changing the dynamics of the global communication process as discussed by other scholars. Definitions of some of the keywords used in work are presented in this chapter to

portray the context of the issue under study. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the impact of digitalization in contemporary human society concerning the Coronavirus crisis and other facets of our world. To understand why some people choose to accept new technological inventions and others vehemently refuse to accept or remain skeptical about them, a review of scholars' position on the two main opposing views (Optimism and Pessimism) will also be attempted. This section will also take a look at previous works on the use of digital media by micro, small, and medium-scale enterprises. Finally, this chapter presents a conceptualization of related theories, which will guide this work, and some empirical works relevant to the study are equally reviewed.

## 2.2 The Internet

As the major driver of all digital communications and activities, several researchers and scholars have written about the Internet since its invention; therefore, this work will review such scholarly works to shade more light on the topic under study. Of all significant innovations of man in the 20 1st century, the Internet remains one of the unique inventions of humankind.

McLuhan and Powers (1989) had made a remark predicting the future of a world changed by the use of technology where people and their cultures are transformed. The Internet gained massive recognition quickly, transforming human society, bridging the divide between platforms, and making communication very easy. Describing the Internet, Clarke (2004) points out that "from a technical standpoint, the term Internet means a particular group of computer networks that are interconnected by means of a particular set of protocols usefully called 'the Internet Protocol Suite,' but which is

frequently referred to using the names of the two central protocols, 'TCP/IP." He further describes two terms to explain more about the net by stating that:

> "The term 'internet' (with a lower-case 'i') refers to any set of networks interconnected using the Internet Protocol Suite. Many networks exist within companies, and indeed within people's homes, which are internets, and which may or may not have a connection with any other network. The Internet (with an upper-case 'I'), or sometimes 'the open, public Internet', is used to refer to the largest set of networks interconnected using the Internet Protocol Suite (Clarke, 2004)."

(For the sake of this work, writing Internet with upper-case "I" is the one talked about). In its universal nature, the Internet is that technology undoubtedly, with unique features, not only for acquiring information but also for communicating. The net has provided new dimensions for doing almost everything, including commerce.

Since the invention of the Internet, more and more people have gained free access to data online and have used them in their day-to-day activities. Consequently, online communication has gotten more mainstream to the extent that one would speculate that the traditional media will eventually fade away one day. Websites and web pages can communicate large numbers of Internet users, creating enormous business opportunities, especially MSMEs. Practically any individual who can read through and compose messages can utilize the Internet. These days, many individuals are connected by the Internet to get the most recent news worldwide, look for information, and buy products (Storm et al 2017). As a result, the features and process of doing business in all nations have changed quickly and drastically. Irrefutably, scholars like Broens, et al., (2017), Lu, and Yu, (2019), Mostafa, et al., (2019), and Grandhi, et al,. (2020) all agree that the Internet, together with mass electronic media have changed communication practices and strategies. To this end, it is essential to trace the history

and growth of the Internet and see how it has aided transformation in the form of digital communication.

## 2.2.1 History/growth of the Internet and Digital Media

For the sake of this work, it is vital to trace the evolution and growth of the net and digital media in relation to communication. According to Dutton (2009), the beginning of the Internet can be traced to late 1960s and early 1970s when the United States Defense Department started the ARPA Network (the Advanced Research Project Agency Net) in a bid to connect a range of military and research institutions in the USA. The term (Internet) simply means a "network of networks" (Dutton, 2009).

Hence, the Internet can be regarded as a global network of interconnected computers and servers operating by a standard protocol or as a worldwide system of interlinked networks and computers, which allow data to be shared between the different nodes of this network (The Internet Society 2009). The Internet was restricted to interpersonal communication to a great extent until 1991, when Tim Berners-Lee announced the World Wide Web to get materials on the net. From that point, the Internet became a medium of communication and information dissemination, different from the regular the Tv, radio, and newspaper (Irish Times, 2000). Vedel (2006) adds that the "W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) was created to act as an industry consortium keen on building consensus around web technologies" (Vedel, 2006).

However, according to Leiner et al., (2003), the very initial knowledge of social communications conducted through networking was a number of memos written by J.C.R. Licklider of MIT in August 1962 discussing his "Galactic Network" concept. Slater III, (2002) on the other hand, counts the period he calls the "Victorian Internet"

period as far back as the 1840s as part of origin and history of the Internet. He argues that in the telegraph, the then scientists used signals conducted over wires and were established over vast distances and can be regarded as a process of internetworking of the telegraph components. Nonetheless, Slater III, (2002: pp 6) agrees with the idea of the previous scholars by acknowledging the Internet as "A network of networks, joining many governments, universities and private computers together and making available facilities for the use of E-mail, bulletin boards, file archives, hypertext documents, databases, and other digital means" (Slater III, 2002: pp 6).

Before the beginning of the net, the word was in the text-based era because net users depended on text alone. The lunch of the W3C, however, introduced a graphical user interface known as the web browsers, offering tremendous opportunities for organizations and individuals beyond the text-based era. Flew (2008) nonetheless tries to differentiate between the Internet and the WWW by pointing out that the net refers to a compendium of all digital devices linked together by networks and characterized by the ability of each one of them to share content and communicate through the networks. In contrast, the web is a collection of digital pages that users can view using a web browser.

Since the lunch of the W3Cs, the population of Internet users has amplified from 16 in December 1995 to 5 billion as at 2021 Q1 (Internet World Stats, 2021). The population stated above includes individuals, companies, universities, researchers, governments, and institutions. However, this tremendous increase in the use of the Internet provides potentials for MSMEs to communicate with their customers and targeted audience, building relationships between buyers and sellers like never before. In the light of the

above, fig 1 below illustrate the history of the Internet from the early days to the age of social networking. While fig 2 shows the statistics of world Internet usage as at the first quarter of 2021.
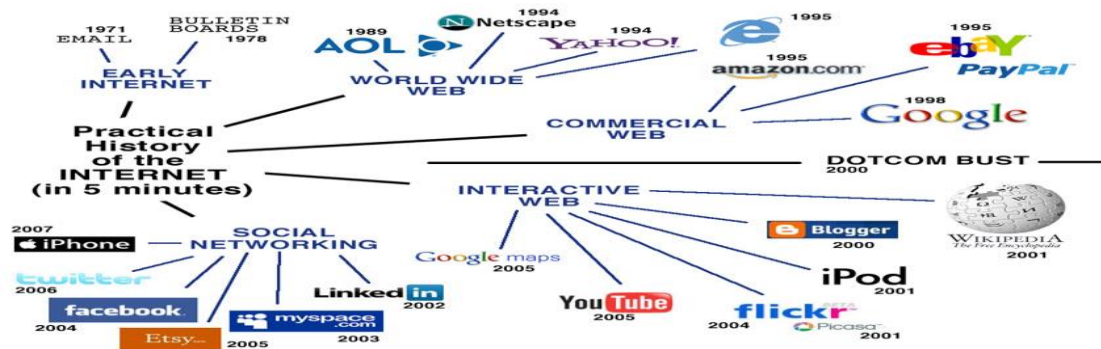


Figure 1: History of the Internet from the early days to the age of social networking. Source:  http://developmentoftheinternet420.weebly.com/brief-history.html

| WORLD INTERNET USAGE AND POPULATION STATISTICS 2021 Year-Q1 Estimates | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **World Regions** | **Population ( 2021 Est.)** | **Population % of World** | **Internet Users 31 Dec 2020** | **Penetration Rate (% Pop.)** | **Growth 2000-2021** | **Internet World %** |
| Africa | 1,373,486,514 | 17.4 % | 590,296,163 | 43.0 % | 12,975 % | 11.7 % |
| Asia | 4,327,333,821 | 54.9 % | 2,707,088,121 | 62.6 % | 2,268 % | 53.6 % |
| Europe | 835,817,917 | 10.6 % | 728,321,919 | 87.1 % | 593 % | 14.4 % |
| Latin America / Caribbean | 659,743,522 | 8.4 % | 477,869,138 | 72.4 % | 2,544 % | 9.4 % |
| Middle East | 265,587,661 | 3.4 % | 188,132,198 | 70.8 % | 5,627 % | 3.7 % |
| North America | 370,322,393 | 4.7 % | 332,919,495 | 89.9 % | 208 % | 6.6 % |
| Oceania / Australia | 43,473,756 | 0.6 % | 29,284,688 | 67.4 % | 284 % | 0.6 % |
| WORLD TOTAL | 7,875,765,584 | 100.0 % | 5,053,911,722 | 64.2 % | 1,300 % | 100.0 % |

Figure 2: Statistics of world Internet usage as at the first quarter of 2021. Source: https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm

The Internet, as pointed out in the previous paragraph, has provided potential opportunities for the transformation of different facets of modern society; given the above fact, Poon and Jevons (1997) point out that the Internet not only changed the interaction process of business establishments but also transformed ways of conducting business. In agreement with Poon, and Jevons (1997) opinion, Srinivasan et al., (1997), Gunasekaran et al., (2006) and Charlesworth, (2009) submit that communication for the sake of sales of goods and services are carried out in the WWW

sphere in a way that involves active cooperation and participation between a vendor and their potential customers. The idea of cooperation and participation here falls in line with Pickard's (2008) opinion on democratizing technology and the Internet in particular. He suggests creating an alternate normative model that would majorly look at how individuals and groups use the Internet to achieve political goals through democratic actions.

While (Pickard's, 2008) emphasized democracy on the Internet online sphere for political participation and cooperation, his analogy may also apply to the use of the Internet for communication, collaboration, and participation between businesses (MSMEs) and their customers because of its interactive nature. The interactivity of this new media is not typical of traditional media channels that only give a one-way option of communicating, for instance, radio broadcast and newsprint media. On the other hand, the online media of the Internet technology allow for full multimedia interactive simulations, graphics, and illustrations to convey information and activities almost instantly, and at the same time give options for person to person instant communication (Berthon, et al., 1997, Wynne et al., 2001).

## 2.3 The Digital Media, Digital Age, and Culture

The rapid development in communication and information resources over the past two decades has seen the human society branded with such names as a digital society, digital age, network society, smart cities, and lots more, all because of these innovative technologies available. According to Castells, (2004), "Technology is typically defined as the process of using technical knowledge to set measures for performance in a reproducible way, that changes in interaction with the other aspects of society" Furthermore, technology has its own dynamics, linked to the situations of scientific

discovery, technological innovation, application, and spreading in society at large (Castells, 2004). However, ideas and views of scholars from divergent schools of thought are reviewed in this section in order to avoid "technological determinism", a theory developed by Thorstein Veblen with the assumption that technology determines the cultural principles and social construction of the society. In the words of Fuchs (2012), "Technology remains an innovation (enabling and constraining) the way societies are". Fuchs further emphasizes concerning media and technology that:

> A critical theory of media and technology is based on dialectical reasoning This allows the causal relationship of media/technology and society to be seen as multidimensional and complex: a specific medium/technology has multiple (at least two) potential effects on society and social systems that can co-exist or stand in contradiction to each other. (Fuchs 2012).

Within the context of this opinion, Fuchs provides two ways of understanding the linkage between media technology and society below:
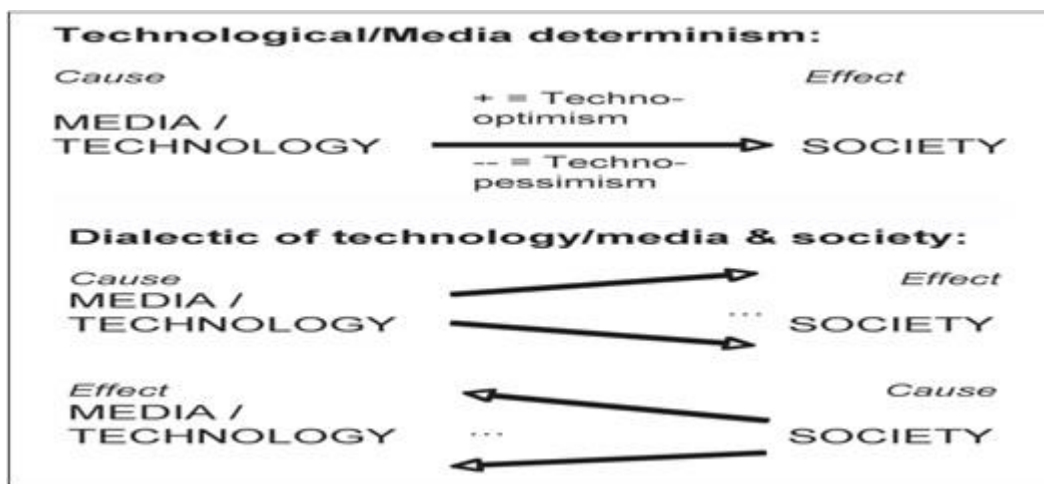


Figure 3: Two logics of the relationship between media technology and society.
Source:  Fuchs 2012

Having said that, the 21$^{st}$ century is characterized by the prevalent use of technology and, facilitated by the pervasive nature of the Internet, though historically traceable back to the mid-20$^{th}$ century to the extent that our society is in the period often seen

as the digital age, new media age, or computer age. According to Klinenberg and Benzecry (2005) the digital age is a time of significant transformation whereby meanings of cultural products are changed when they are created and disseminated via digital channels. Wang, and Torrisi-Steele, (2016) support the above assertions by saying that at times the era in which we are is referred to as the age of information or computer age. This idea showcases the pervasiveness of computing and the abundant use of technology in all facets of human endeavor.

As such, digital communication is a defining norms of the current human undertakings, actions, and culture. Early digital technology ideas saw the rise of cyberspace and the culture that follows to be either utopia or dystopia. The utopian view meant that cyberspace allowed infinite potentials. On the other hand, the dystopian view sees cyberspace as an avenue for technology's oppression, dehumanization, and enslavement of users. Optimism and Pessimism are the normative dimensions most recently used to allude to the propensities of people to admit things beneficial will occur and to expect that awful things will occur, respectively.

People who believe their objectives can be accomplished notwithstanding the challenges they may experience are said to be optimistic. They are inclined to believe that whatever issues may come in their direction, they will actually want to oversee and resolve them. On the other hand, Pessimism is the inclination to anticipate adverse results, a situation where people generally view future encounters badly. Pessimists are inclined to contemplate beforehand the likely adverse results of whatever issues, mishaps, difficulties, or troubles are put in their direction (Chang, (2002) and Macan,

et al., (2005).

In line with the above, the two main opposing views on the effects of technology on human society however, Fuchs, (2012) argues that the techno-optimistic and techno-pessimistic opinions have the problem of being interested only in single aspects of technology thereby making the impression that there are only one-sided effects. These two dimensions exist without a sense of flaws and the interactions of technology and society, therefore can be termed as technological deterministic forms of argument He concludes.

The divergent views of scholars notwithstanding, the impact of digital technology on human culture are felt in the existential Coronavirus crisis. However, a better explanation of the two paradigms can be made as follows:

**(a) Techno optimism-** The quote from Dyson (2004) "Technology is a gift of God, after the gift of life it is perhaps the most tremendous of God's gifts. It is the cradle of civilization, of arts and science", is a good start to the conceptualization of techno-optimism and understand the views of techno-optimists like Brynjolfsson, et al., (2015) who are cautiously optimistic about the impact of technological evolution on employment and income inequality. Techno optimism is the belief that technology can make the world better off. Similar to the observation above is the view of Krier, and Gillette, (1985), who state that 'technological optimism' relies not just on breakthroughs in technology to provide life support for humanity but assumes 'a growing accumulation of breakthroughs' can meet the demands of the population growth (Krier and Gillette, 1985). Diana (2016) points out in support of the techno-

optimist view that there is the belief that technology can continually be improved and improves people's lives, making the world a better place.

**(b) Techno pessimism-** Techno pessimism however is a belief that technology is the reason why there is a broken relationship between the balance of society and nature Yaqoob, (2014). Sacasas, (2011) and Campbell (2017) quote Leo Marx, a leading historian of technology and American culture as arguing that while technological optimism had been the default mode of American culture throughout most of its history, technological pessimism asserted itself to an unprecedented degree in the second half of the twentieth century. Technological pessimism is the notion of depression and grief that technology brings upon society (Campbell 2017). People who hold the view that technological innovations should be embrace more slowly, making room for social and economic adaptation similar to what we have seen in the past are regarded as techno-Pessimists (Portland alliance 2020). In the words of Dienstag, (2009);

> "Pessimists do not deny the existence of progress in certain areas, they do not deny that technologies have improved or that the powers of science have increased. Instead, they ask whether these improvements are in-separately related to a greater set of costs that often go unperceived. Or they ask whether these changes have really resulted in a fundamental melioration of the human condition" (Dienstag, 2009).

An understanding of these two views on technology and digitalization and their relationship with culture is vital to this research as it will accord the reader the opportunity to see the direction of the online media and their uses during the COVID-19 pandemic most especially by business owners and individuals in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

### 2.3.1 Digital Media

Digital media, which are very much in use now as an important communication channel, have been associated with several changes in both peoples' habits and the general culture and communication patterns of the society. Hayles, (2012) asserts that "there are epigenetic changes affecting us, associated with digital media which include pushing us in the direction of swifter communication, more intensive and diverse information flow, more assimilation of humans and intelligent technologies and more interactions of language code". By the early 1980s, camcorders were invented to allow users to record homemade videos. At that stage, people shared video content by lending videotapes to friends and families without retouching or editing the videos (Lardner, 1987).

The late 1990s saw the replacement of the VCR tapes by memory cards, USB flash drives, and internet storage which made the transfer of media files easier, and from then, users could edit footage and send them across devices almost instantly. At the moment, computers, smartphones, tablets, and lots of other smart devices have been invented and are called digital media devices. These have allowed users to be creators and developers of Ultra High Definition videos and high definition audio to pass information to audiences and allow them to react and communicate with the creator (Robertson, 2014).

Reacting to impacts of technology on people's habits Şentürk, (2021) thinks that habits around the world have changed greatly due to recent technological developments in the area of communication. People constantly respond to news reports on blogs, and they often share posts on social media, he concludes. In the view

of Murugesan (2007), Web 2.0 era is fundamental in the shift towards a more social, interactive, responsive, and collaborative platforms with people-centric features. These give users the power to participate in the information and data dissemination process. Owusu-Ansah and Van der Walt, (2021) are of the view that the digital era is a period of the rise of digital technologies that give more room for efficient communication, processing, storage, review and transmission of information.

The rise of digital tools, contents, ways of communication, doing business, and other computer-mediated activities which have replaced the previously known analog systems is what in this work is referred to as digital culture. Digital culture may have different meanings. Udapudi (2019) points out that it boils down to people's interaction with technology in their daily work and lives. In recent time's concepts such as cyber-life, digital divide, globalization, and many more have emerged out of digital culture, pointing to how the net and society have influenced each other.

However, it is important to note that cultivating digital culture is of two stages: self-evolution and the evolution of the larger unit (the society). Kamath, (2019) explains this by stating that digital self-evolution is developing a digital mindset to fit into the changing world of technology. The development of a society that is consciously and conspicuously using technology is the overall evolution. The Idea of digitalization of every facet of modern society has led to mass digital self-evolution and digital mindset, thereby creating a culture of digitalized societies. Ying (2020) asserts that digitalization is the most significant trend that has brought a jaw-dropping change in every society worldwide. Ying (2020:pp.2) further explained that digitalization is an influence on culture. Simply put, it is a culture shaper that involves the diffusion of

new ways of life with compulsory imbibition with social meanings for it to take root (Ying 2020:pp.2). Gere (2008, pp 15) in Punathambekar and Mohan (2019) is of the view that to speak of the digital age is to call up the whole process of spontaneous communication, pervasive media, and worldwide connectivity that constitutes much of our present-day experience (Gere 2008, 15).

In association with the blurring of known and previously established boundaries of the world, the human society is experiencing new forms of communication. Through globalization, micro-communities are developing in ways once thought unmanageable. Accepting the impact of globalization made possible by digital technologies is difficult for some critics however, but a stark reality to face by everyone (Broner, and Ventura, 2016). For instance, digital currencies such as Bitcoin, Ripple, Etherium and Dodggcoin have in the past months exemplified the impacts of digital financial globalization on our society. Given the current situation, the breadth and weight of digital technology in the modern human society remains an issue worthy of discussion.

### 2.3.2 Internet of Things (IoT) and Internet Based Applications

For clarity sake, it is important to understand the concept of internet or web based application as they are vital for the explanation of digital media and how they affect the society.

From retail and supply chain management applications to home automation, wearables, and healthcare devices, there have been the impact of internet in the daily gadgets and applications used. The Internet of Things (IoT) also called the Industrial Internet is a novel technology whereby a web of devices are capable of interacting

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with each other using internet based applications and software (Lee and Lee 2015).

In terms of communication, there have been huge involvements of the internet based applications especially in the business sector. These applications promise and provide great potentials and capabilities, therefore business owners big and small all over the world are looking for new ways to capitalize on the myriad of opportunities they present (Huh et al., 2017). In the current COVID-19 pandemic, contact tracing, monitoring of the virus as well as other necessary activities highlights the present value and justification for using internet based applications.

Madakam, et al., (2015) point out that there had been the vision of a global structure made up of physical objects networked via the net that would enable anytime, anyplace connectivity for anyone and anything. The internet based devices therefore can be regarded as devices that can allow communications between human-to-human and human-to-things. The above fact indicates that the IoT is a game changer that has brought just about everything together in and intelligent way especially during the existential COVID-19 period more than ever before.

**2.3.3 Convergence in Media and Communication during COVID-19 Pandemic**

According to Barker, (2003) "contemporary digital life is a convergence culture that refers to the breakdown of boundaries between both technologies and corporations" Digital convergence therefore encompasses both adjustments in the way media texts are produced and in the way they are consumed. Convergence is the propensity for technologies that were originally unrelated to become more closely integrated and even unified as they develop and advance (Barker, 2003). For example computer, telephones Television, watches and social media platforms began as separate and

mostly unrelated technologies, but have intermingled in many ways into complementary segments of a telecommunication and media industry, sharing common components of digital electronics and software.

In the current crisis, we have experienced more and more convergence of media to the extent that a child born in this period (COVID-19 necessitated new normal), might grow up not knowing the difference between a TV program aired directly from their television and the on-demand channels available even in his/her mobile phone that allows them to even multitask and switch between online media. According to Jenkins (2006), three types of convergence happen in the form of:

(i) Technological convergence: A technological convergence allows for the use of devices that are made with multiple functionalities.

(ii) Industrial convergence: Companies are combined together to create a cooperation that forms media conglomerates across multiple media types.

(iii) Media convergence: Media convergence deals with how media is consumed by users, this includes multitasking abilities of switching between different forms of online media (Jenkins 2006).

Convergence as explained by Maina, (2014) is "the interlinking of computing and other information technologies, telecommunication networks, and media contents that were largely independent originally" This in the words of Broadbent, and Bauwens, (2008) "opens the way to an exponential series of combinations, such as SMS on the TV; TV on the mobile phone; digital pictures moving from the PC, to the TV, to the mobile phone, and so on". The interlinkage of digitalized systems started as a result of the major changes in modern times whereby businesses, societies, and individuals

have gradually adopted and adapted to far-ranging digital technologies which no doubt have transformed lifestyle. Moreover, the media industry has experienced the greatest of all the transformation giving room to a modern global economy which is characterized by the five interrelated features as pointed out by Castells (1993).

As at the time of writing his book, Castells outlined the following as characteristics of the modern global economy as follows:

(i) Information and applied knowledge: This he (Castells) sees as the most important of the five features in the modern economy. As productivity gets more and more complex, value of knowledge and informational component becomes for significant.

(ii) Move from material production to information processing activities: The new global economy is also influenced by digital manipulation of symbols which contributes to a growing economic activities and the quality of information, is a key strategy in productivity.

(iii) The move from standardized mass production to flexible customized production: This is what Bell (1973) regards as post-industrial society era characterized by the move away from industrial manufacturing to service industries focused on information technology. Castells adds that information technology is the base for adaptability and flexibility in the response to change and diversified markets.

(iv) The global scale nature of the new global economy: Castells regards this as the fourth dynamic of the new economy for the fact that economic practices and thinking are carried out globally, also all national economic systems and economies become characteristic features of the global system.

(v) Technological revolution: Technology remains the main driver of the new world economy. Telecommunications, microelectronics and informatics together with

all digital technologies enable large amounts of data, super-fast processing of information needed to create flexible production process.

As observed, the convergence of technology is what gave rise to the new ways of communicating by which social media and other digital media thrives during the COVID-19 crisis. There are virtually all the three forms of convergence (Technological, Industrial, and Media) as classified by Jenkins (ibid 2006), and the five characteristics of the modern global economy according to Castells (ibid 1993) playing out in the present time of COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2.4 Social Networking Sites (SNS)

The social networking sites are Internet based services that are made for the purpose of getting users engaged in the virtual public sphere. In these sites, a network of users is created when a user follows or adds another user into his/her friends and *vice versa*. To best describe the nature of social networking sites, Abhyankar, (2011) suggests that SNS be seen as a structure on the Internet where individual or organizations are connected by one or more specific types of interdependency such as business transactions, kinship, common political interest, belief, and knowledge. Bergman, et al,. (2011) see SNSs as popular and fast growing, in terms of the population of people using them. They add that the popularity is because these sites allow the users to be managers of their own profiles such that one can chose to bear any name, gender, and profession on the virtual sphere.

According to Chen, (2013), social networking sites have thrived since their invention and have significantly offered web based access to millions of users. Furthermore, the success of social networking sites as we have observed in the past years has tremendous business implications as brands and organizations now troop to different

SNSs in order to expand and extend their services in the virtual public sphere (Chen, 2013).

While the previous scholars sited are optimistic about the impact of the SNSs, there have been several critiques of the social networking sites. For instance Oberst, et al, (2017) state that there are negative impacts of the SNSs that point to maladaptive use of the sites which they are of the view that it is a potential mental health problem that can affect the well-being and psychological functioning of children, adolescents, and young adults. Furthermore by using SNS people are believed to be satisfying their needs to belong but stand a risk of suffering from anxiety when they realize they do not belong but are missing out on important experiences shared.

### 2.4.1 Social Media

Social media is a term used most times in place of social networking sites. Social media is a computer-based technology that enables the sharing of information, ideas, and thoughts through the establishment of virtual networks and communities (Dollarhide 2021). Rather than dwell on this singular definition of social media like the one above, it is better to understand that the concept of social media has no commonly accepted definition. Kietzmann, et al., (2011) posit that the use of social media is the employment of web-based and mobile technologies in creating platforms that are highly interactive by which individuals and communities communicate, discus, create, and modify user-generated content. Gikas, and Grant, (2013) add that by design, social media is net-based and offers users rapid electronic communication of content including personal data, documents, videos, and photos and can serve as a place to save and retrieve data.

Stone, and Wang, (2019) point out that over the last 25 years, communication has rapidly advanced to include digital forms of communication, in particular, social media. Although more "analog" systems of communication (e.g., face-to-face conversations) remain important in everyday life, it is nonetheless important to understand how social media has shaped and reshaped the way people communicate and interact with one another. Social media offers people a two-way communication and many-to-many information dissemination. "With a torrent of messages, social media users communicate and share information through various channels designated by social media, like blogs, microblogging (Twitter),social network sites (Facebook), and video sharing sites (YouTube)" (Teng,et al,. 2015). Social media activities are carried out through the use of installed applications and software on an Internet connected computer, tablet, or smartphone.

### 2.4.2 Social Media Use in Crisis

Social media has been found to be a convenient way of communication by individual as well as organizations in times of crisis. Among other communication tools available, social media is believed to be the one that can be deployed to communicate and disperse information in a short time and with no cost. Reacting to communication on social media in crisis, Ng, and Lean (2012) assert that social media potentials have expanded far beyond the functions they were intended for which were mainly social communication and networking among friends. They are now used more for aspects of communication like in crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the journalism dimension, scholars such as Stuart (2015), in reaction to social media use in crisis with particular reference to the London Bus Bombing of July 7 2005 agree that social media enable ordinary citizens to take part in reporting issues in

real time. With that growing number of easy-to-handle and user-friendly devices, and the ease at which one can upload videos and pictures, those who find themselves at crisis scenes automatically turn into journalists. The point to make clear from the statement above is that the various platforms of the social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Path, Flickr, Instagram, Tumblr, Reddit and YouTube, have been obviously in use at crisis like this.

As far as Mäkinen, and Wangu Kuira, (2008) are concerned, social media use for information dissemination and communication have seen a high raise since the 2008 Kenyan postelection crisis whereby social media tools such as Facebook, twitter wikis, weblog, YouTube and flicker were used to organize/share information and raise money. "Social media offered narratives by citizen reporters and digital activists that were more divergent than the opinions presented in the mainstream media and represented grassroots reactions during the crisis" (Mäkinen, and Wangu Kuira, 2008).

On the impact of social media in the COVID-19 pandemic Goel, and Gupta, (2020) state that Donning innovative roles, social media has captured new horizons and has come to play a central role in continued medical education, dissemination of scientific information, peer review, online discussions, and many more during the current pandemic. González-Padilla (2020) add that never before in human history has it been possible to communicate so quickly during a pandemic, and social media platforms are the key piece for the dissemination of information.

### 2.4.3 E-commerce on Social Media

The utilization of the social media platforms for communication and correspondences like sharing business data, keeping up business connections and managing deals

assumes a vital part in the present business communication practices. The current trend is often interchanged with terms such as online business marketing or E-commerce and is carried out on social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram Twitter, Myspace, and WhatsApp.

Online business communication has become a topic for discussion in every business, and has increasingly played significant roles in many company's multi-channel business strategy (Lee, 2020). In recent times, the business environment has become one which entails employing mass digital business communication strategies in order to utilize the ever growing population of online buyers and cyber-business-to-business platforms (Gayathri, (2021). For the sake of this work, online business communication will frequently be interchanged with E-commerce.

In the words of Eid and El-Gohary, (2013) "Communication on social media for business has emerged as one of the key factors in bolstering an organization's competitive advantage". Similarly, online business as Gilmore et al., (2007) pointed out makes use of these same technologies specifically as a logical extension to fulfil the traditional market practices of creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers. It is therefore important to understand that there are different definitions to the concept of online Business communication and as such, that gives room for different opinions on the concept. However, El-Gohary (2010) is of the view that online business communication can be seen as a new form of business practice associated with using the Internet and technology to communicate, buy, sell goods, render services, and advertise goods and services. In line with the above understanding of the concept of E-commerce, it is agreeable to state that the trend provides the

prospect for MSMEs to communicate, connect, and conduct business at various levels. Furthermore, it is the perception of the researcher that there are opportunities for MSMEs developing business concepts and enhancing their business communication techniques through the use of social media as the communication channel, especially after the new normal necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social media business communication is a form of communication that involves building brand awareness in the online interactive social networking sites (Dwivedi et al. 2021). According to Tuten, (2020), social media business communication is the utilization of social media technologies, software and channels to communicate deliver, create and exchange contributions that have value for an organization's stakeholders. On a similar note, Saravanakumar, and SuganthaLakshmi, (2012) had agreed that companies have quickly realized that social media works as a viable communication channel for both businesses and their customers. They further add that 39 percent of companies use social media services as their primary digital tool to communicate with their customers, and that proportion is likely to increase to 47 percent within the next four years (Saravanakumar, and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). Zarrella, (2009) distinguishes television, radio, and newspapers as static broadcast technologies belonging to the old traditional media, from the new web technologies. The features of the new technologies include; blogging, posting contents, twitting, direct messaging and more. This analogy goes a long way in elucidating the idea surrounding social media use for business communication most especially in the current Coronavirus global pandemic.

According to Silvia, (2019), business communication on social media is a very

important twist to business communication. It is good not only for gaining revenue, but also helps to reduce the cost of communication activities unlike the conventional business practices. Furthermore, advertising through social media is regarded as one of the most affordable means of reaching out to customers and allowing them make contributions that might grow the business. Thus most companies have keyed into social media with the recognition that majority of their customers have profile in one social media platform or the other (Silvia, 2019).

It is important for a business to understand the channels they use in business communication and advertising. Social media has therefore been seen as a helpful channel for businesses since there are millions of different types of consumers using the social media platforms. Social media communication strategies vary according to the platform used (Dolan, et al., 2017). The three most popular communication platform to look at in the study as regards to communication during COVID -19 crisis include: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Subsequent paragraphs will be used to look at the three social media platforms considered for this work. However, Statista.com (2020) indicates through a graph below, the benefits of using social media for communication and marketing and concludes that it has drastically changed the business practices in times of the Coronavirus crisis.
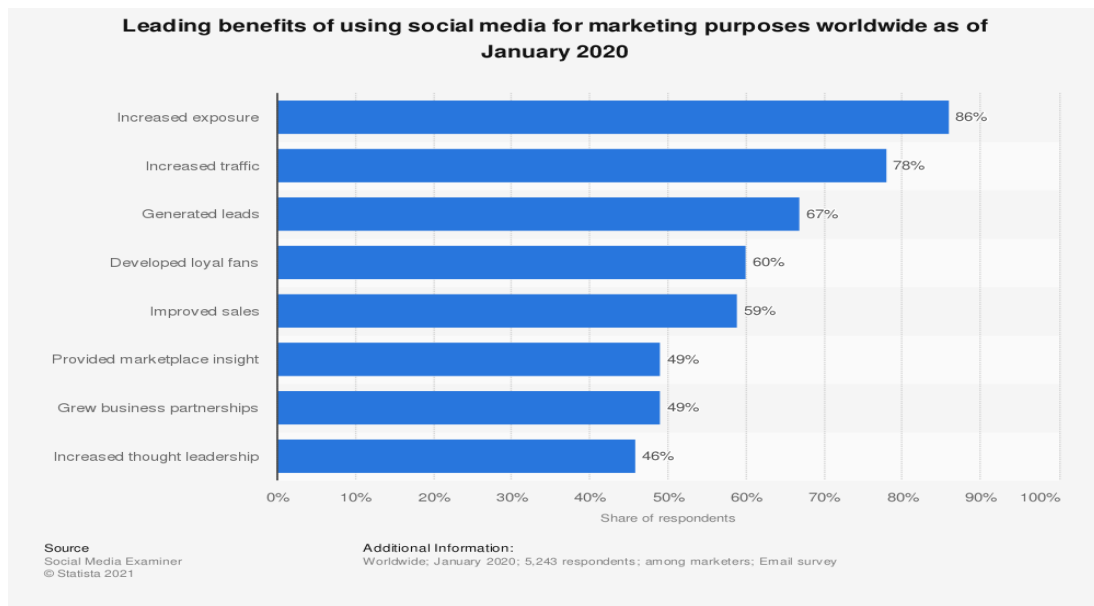
Figure 4: Graph showing leading benefits of social media business communication worldwide as of 2020. Source: www.statista.com.

### 2.4.3.1 Use of Facebook for Business

Facebook remains one of the social media platforms that have revolutionized communication. Founded in February 2004, Facebook has grown from being just a social utility website to a major platform for online business communication. In the view of Kawaf, and Istanbulluoglu, (2019), Facebook remains the most popular social media with more than 2 billon active users monthly as of December 2019. Cox and Park (2014) observed that the popularity of Facebook has continued to increase by an average of 29% each year since its inception with changes from being just an avenue for people to communicate via wall posts, photos, live chats, and statues updates, to a business communication place for individuals and organizations. Statista.com (2021) asserts that Facebook is the biggest social network worldwide with approximately 2.85 billion monthly active users as of the first quarter of 2021 as shown in the figure below:
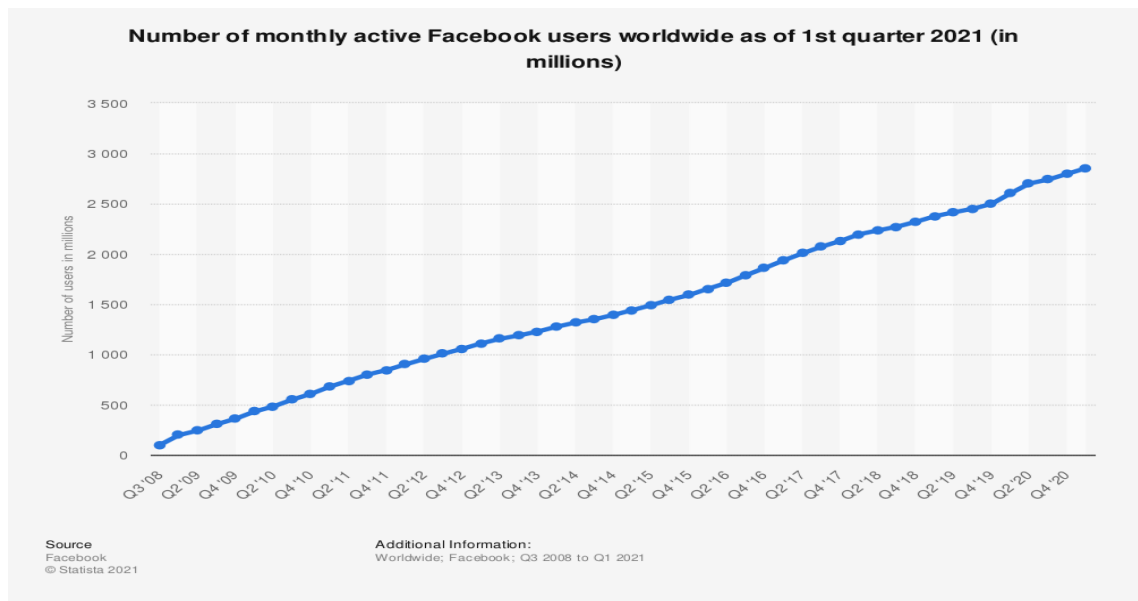
Figure 5: Graph showing monthly active users as of the first quarter of 2021. Source: www.statista.com.

Freeman, et al., (2014) had stated that the bulk of contents on Facebook come from individuals' personal profiles, but the site embraced companies and brands since November 2007. The Facebook brand pages work the same way personal pages work but users have to click like-button in order to be receiving updates, contents and news feeds from the brands. Smith et al., (2012) see business communication on Facebook as a unique way that gives businesses the chance to engage and communicate with their consumers and to inspire them to share and circulate affirmative opinions that will proliferate the visibility of the business.

When businesses post images, videos, quizzes, links, and other digital and interactive media texts on Facebook timelines, they use them to get the attention of their followers. Thus promoting their products and services in form of banner style advertising, letting the users see their products in interactive posters at the side of their profiles (Curran, et al., 2011). The users who follow brands engage with the brands' page by sharing contents as well as commenting and sending direct messages to the brands. The

activities of users who engage with brands' pages help in spreading messages across the social networks (Birkbak, and Carlsen 2016). Aided by the use of Edge Rank algorithmic editorial voice of Facebook which determines what is shown on users' Top-News drawing, people get informed on different factors relating to the Edges (Bucher, 2012). Statista.com (2020) presents details of worldwide use of social media platforms by marketers as of January 2020 to communicate with their customers, indicating that Facebook is the highest platform with 94% for business communication on social media in the figure below;



**Leading social media platforms used by marketers worldwide as of January 2020**

| Platform | Share |
|----------|-------|
| Facebook | 94% |
| Instagram | 76% |
| LinkedIn | 59% |
| Twitter | 53% |
| YouTube | 53% |
| Pinterest | 25% |
| Messenger bots | 13% |
| Snapchat | 5% |
| TikTok | 5% |

Share of respondents

Source
Social Media Examiner
© Statista 2021

Additional Information:
Worldwide; January 2020; 5,243 respondents; marketers; Email survey
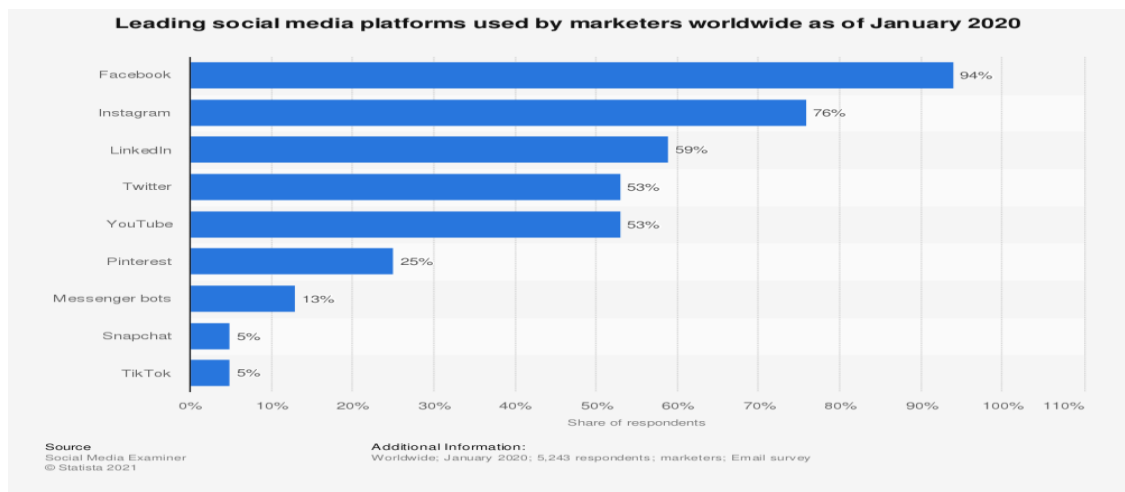
Figure 6: Graph showing platforms used by marketers worldwide as of 2020. Source: www.statista.com.

McQuerrey, (2019) on the other hand thinks that while Facebook is an effective way of interaction between businesses especially small scale businesses and their customers, however there are five disadvantages of Facebook business communication that marketers must embrace which includes: Loss of control, cost of maintenance, competition, professionalism, and advertising costs. These make up part of the challenges of using social media as communication channels in crisis like in the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2.4.3.2 Use of Instagram Feeds for Business

Gaid, (2021), is of the view that Instagram business communication is a type of online business in which business enterprises use Instagram platform to promote and advertise their business. He further adds that Instagram presents a range of different plans and strategies used to achieve all kinds of goals a business has. Just like Facebook as discussed in the previous section, Instagram is one other social media site that has gone mainstream in the online interactive media sphere. The social networking site is serving as a means of social communication as well as a business communication platform. Instagram is the second most visited social networking site behind Facebook with an estimation of nearly 1.2 billion users by 2023 as projected in the figure bellow from Statista.
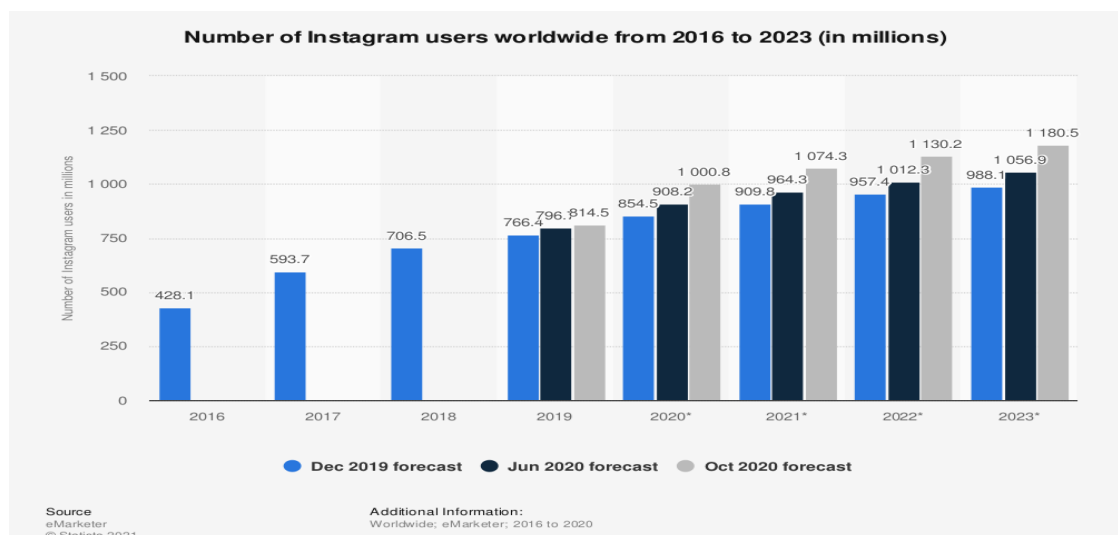


Figure 7: Graph showing number of Instagram users from 2016 to 2023. Source: www.statista.com.

Mohsin, (2021) maintains that Instagram has been growing immensely over the years and continues to broaden its horizons, from once being just a photo sharing app for holidaymakers to now an appealing platforms for influencers, advertisers, and brands.

Neher, (2013), and Stelzner, (2016), Agree that Instagram has evolved into a widely used business communication channel for companies not only for the reason that it has fast growing population of users, but also because of the features, underscoring the trend of visual content in social media business communication. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, Instagram has been a very handy tool of communication for individuals as well as businesses and organizations.

**2.4.3.3 Use of Twitter for Business**

Since the launch in 2006, Twitter has become one of the forms of social media micro-blogging that lets its users "tweet". With over 187 million daily users, Twitter has been seen in a rather techno optimistic view to be one of the technologies that have shaped the way modern humans communicate and interact. Murthy, (2018) agrees and adds that it is undisputable that as a communication platform, Twitter has increasingly infused itself into daily life regardless of one's geographical location. Kwak, et al,.(2010) are of the view that twitter exhibits structural characteristics of both an information network and a social network. O'Reilly, and Milstein, (2011) add that though twitter began as a service for people to post personal updates, it has turned out to be a vital channel for content sharing. Furthermore, they conclude that through twitter people share media, making it a critical asset for showcasing products and services. Twitter has grown into a pool for constantly updating information streams consisting of links, short status updates and eyewitness news (Anger, and Kittl, 2011).

Communication and business marketing on twitter has become a trend in recent times, this is why Zhang,et al., (2011) describe twitter as a typical, functional, and popular social media service, which makes it a good starting-point for businesses to enter the social media arena and one of the best social tools empowering brands to connect with

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their customers. Andzulis et al., (2012), Sashittal and Jassawalla (2019) in Cripps, et al., (2020) see twitter's use in industrial markets as a more recent phenomenon with firms using twitter in the management of communications and business interactions and transactions with customers.

As at the 3rd quarter of 2020, twitter had a tremendous growth. Advertisements on twitter equally grew significantly with advertisers engaging lager audience and increased product launches, driving revenue to $936 million, up 14% year over year (Twitter.com). the figure below indicates statistics of monetizable daily active usage on twitter from 2018 to Q3 2020 according to twitter.
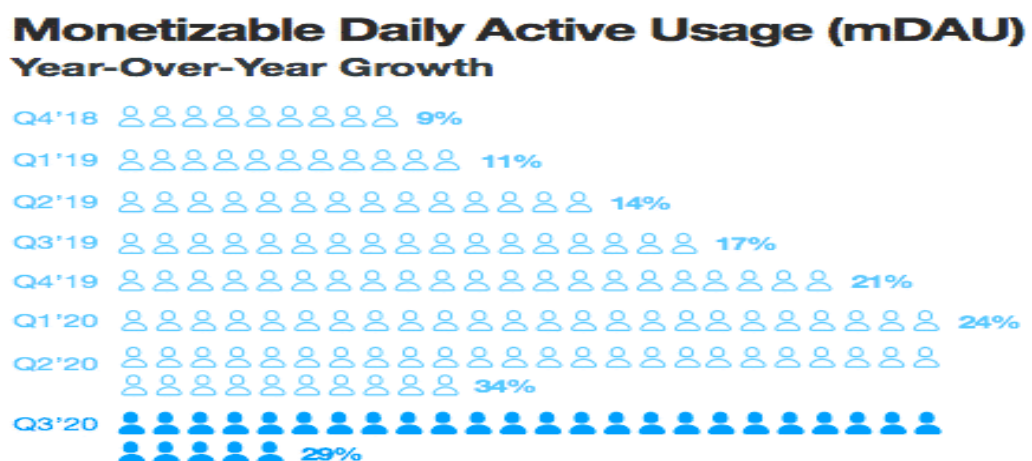


Figure 8: Monetizable daily active usage on twitter Q2018 – Q3 2020. Source: www.twitter.com.

E-Marketer.com had predicted that Twitter would grow by 2.8% in 2020, but with the outbreak of Coronavirus pandemic, the prediction changed to the growth of 8.4%. In the figure bellow they presented statistics of twitter users worldwide from 2019 and a projection to 2024 to show the growth in twitter use.

**Twitter Users Worldwide, 2019–2024**
*millions, % change, and % of internet users*
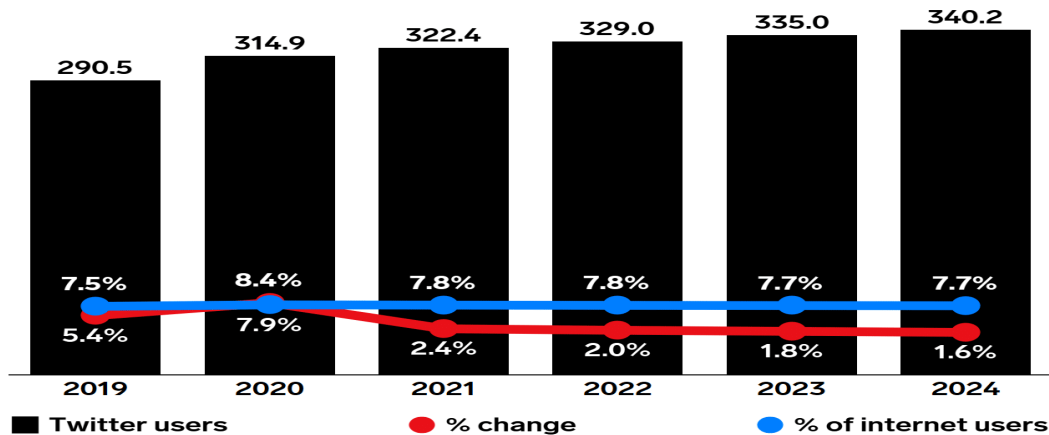
Figure 9: Monetizable daily active usage on twitter Q2018 – Q3 2020. Source:
www.emarketer.com

## 2.5 Challenges in the Use of Digital Media

Digitalization in general has made space, culture, time and distance irrelevant when it comes to communication and interaction. New Media technologies have been very effective in the production of high-quality contents, sharing of the contents to a large number of audience and at the same time giving the audience the power to make contributions. Achieving the above mentioned has not been without challenges. However, digital media have taken a center stage in human life such that modern day new media technologies make it almost impossible to imagine our contemporary society without them (Gbam, 2017). In every sector of the human society, digital technologies have gradually been infused. All through this work, there have been instances and illustration of the prospects of digital media for the society, however, subsequent paragraphs will be used to highlight the major challenges to the use of digital media.as follows:

Firstly, digital divide stands as a challenge to the use of digital media technologies. In the words of Bagchi, (2005) is the gap between users and non-users of digital technology. Cullen, (2001) equally described digital divide as the breach in the use of digital technologies especially internet enabled communication sites and applications. Furthermore, they point out that there exists the gap in most countries between those with ready access to tools of information and communication. Várallyai, et al., (2015) posit that digital divide is an extremely important issue to be discussed as it remains a major challenge for organizations, governments, and individuals. They further suggested that there should be solutions for eliminating disparities in the use of digital technologies to enable everyone have access to information regardless of the demographics. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, most regions and demographics are still left behind in using digital technologies and this is a serious challenge for businesses especially the MSMEs.

Another factor is data security issues we experience with continual increase in the use of novel Internet connected applications, smart digital devices and sensors have given rise to the term Internet of Things (IoT). The Internet of Things according to Bertino, and Ferrari, (2018) have made possible the collection, storage and process of large amounts of data also referred to as Big Data. Sivarajah et al., (2017) point out that digitalization has in recent times begotten overwhelming amounts of complex and heterogeneous data pouring resulting to a Data deluge. As Big Data is said to be a collection of private information of both individuals and organizations, Goodman (2021) opines that it can be very difficult to keep these data safe. The heaping together of several data from different individuals, companies, and organizations has left many scholars worried about peoples' privacy. A single breach in the data storage, and

processing of these data can lead to vast amounts of private information going into wrong hands. In the COVID-19 period, more and more data are accumulated and stored by government agencies, organizations as well as individuals it is therefore not out of place for some individuals to be skeptical about using the digital media channels.

Furthermore, media manipulation also constitutes a serious challenge for the use of digital media. Media texts like videos, photographs, and audio are easy to be modified with that use of digital tools making it difficult for an average audience to figure out what is fake and what is real. Marwick, and Lewis, (2017) see media manipulation as a concept that covers an array of practices whereby people circulate contents on the mainstream media in order to make their views known to the world. With new digital media taking the position of the mainstream media, social media platforms have formed a fertile ground for people to present their views. According to Ferrara, et al., (2020) the current COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented setting for manipulations, abuse and spread of misinformation, with the possibility of causing damaging real-world consequences. Media manipulations can affect how both the MSMEs and their customers see and use the digital media especially now that plenty of information is available to people who are already overwhelmed by the COVID-19 lockdown.

Social media and digital communication tools are no doubt facilities helping to ease the problems of social distancing and isolation. Thus, increasing numbers of individuals are beginning to prefer the use of digital communication devices and channels to the real-life communication. In recent times, scholars like Mihailidis, (2014) have researched on the type of connection people get in the digital sphere. In his work, Mihailidis, discovered that people on social media most especially young

people are continually disconnected from the traditional social environment. The fact is that right now we have the most sophisticated means of real time communication in existence, with the capability to stay connected to everyone and everything, wherever we are in the world, yet even more and more people struggle in normal day to day interaction and engagement with other people (Stevenson, 2018).

Fake identity is also becoming a serious issue in the digital communication technology use. Most social media platforms allow users to use hidden identities and as such some people see that as opportunity to use these media to achieve negative intentions. Goodman (ibid, 2021) agrees that people are much more likely to behave anti-socially if they don't think that there will be any consequences. Bullying, trolling, stalking, threatening, and insulting behavior have all increased dramatically with the rise of the internet. Krombholz, et al., (2012) also state that the potentials of social media sites are often misused by malicious users to extract sensitive private information of unaware users.

Ultimately, digital media channels when used ethically provide a common ground for content creators as well as the audience. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, achieving positive use of digital media for communication by MSMEs boils down to the user standing in between the prospects and challenges as outlined above.

## 2.6 COVID-19 Pandemic and the Media

Three different types of media have been useful for information dissemination. Since the Coronavirus pandemic outbreak, the three categories of media namely the Print media, Broadcast media, and Internet media have been utilized by most organizations as channels to inform and enlighten the public and their audience. Ever since the first

case of the COVID-19 virus, there has been the need for good communication channel for information purposes as well as business. For some groups of individuals, the Print and Broadcast media which make up the mainstream media (Television, newspapers, and radio) have been their major source of getting information. While on the other hand, some others get informed and communicate through the Internet media (Mauri-Ríos, et al., 2020).

Information and updates about disease (Epidemic, or pandemic) are rapidly circulated and shared on the media, (mainstream and social networking sites) for instance, the outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in 2014. The Ebola virus engendered so much media coverage and news which underscored the role media play in providing information concerning an outbreak and the risks involved to the public (Sell, et al., 2017). Right from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, web-based data and information are used by the general public to inform, connect, and entertain one another. "Infodemiology or information epidemiology" first used by Eysenbach, (2002) to describe the study of determinants and distribution of health information and misinformation has come in handy and is in line with the context of this research. Infodemiology serves as guide for health experts and patients to the information they get from the Internet.

According to Ahmad and Murad (2020) while the field of infodemiology has explored information patterns on the Web and in social media for over a decade, the Coronavirus is seen as the very first global disease outbreak to be studied through the net. There is, however, limited evidence about whether and how the social media infodemic has effectively affected social media users" (Ahmad and Murad 2020). Shah (2018)

believes that social media evolution over the past years has aided access to information and communication between people much faster than ever before. According to Ali, et al., (2019), "social media presents a promising yet competitive communication landscape for health practitioners and organizations during the rapid spread of an emerging infectious disease and a major source of information providing a singular platform for both consumption and generation of news and opinion."

Whether it is a simple picture, tweet or post, we are promptly made aware of different issues around the world that we wouldn't be aware of before. Online (social) media have played vital roles in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic since the outbreak of the virus. Health institutions, educational institutions, and even entertainment industries have relied on online media to conduct and carry out their activities. In the words of Benetoli et al., (2019) people are increasingly using social media to interact with others about health conditions, create awareness on matters concerning health around the world and treatment options.

The main reason for the rise of online media is the advantage of communicating quickly, efficiently and effectively as it accommodates larger scale of platforms and individuals. Al-Surimi K et al, (2017) in agreement and reaction to social media use in the health sector, see social media as a cost-effective means of controlling and preventing infectious diseases. They add that having real-time dissemination tools are vital to alert relevant public health surveillance systems and establishments. Furthermore, such tools help to provide information about taking the right and needed actions to control and curb the potential damaging effects of viral infectious diseases. Online media and Internet-based information can play a vital role in real-time

reporting to empower active public health surveillance systems for checking and fighting infectious diseases (Al-Surimi K et al, 2017).

Media and in fact online media remain fundamental source of obtaining information in times of crisis as seen in the current Coronavirus pandemic. For several reasons, scholars such as Fuchs, (2020) have pointed out five types of media communication or mediation that apply to different situations such as crisis and conclude that the online media belongs to the "Quinary Communication Technologies". Fuchs, (2020; pp 3) explained that life in the COVID-19 pandemic situation has necessitated human adaptation to new ways of life and using the Quinary Communication Technologies is one that is inevitable. In the table below, Fuchs (2020; pp 5) highlights various means of communication, and the roles they play in everyday life.

| | Role of mediation by technology | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Primary communication technologies | Human body and mind, no media technology is used for the production, distribution, reception of information | Theatre, concert, performance, interpersonal communication |
| Secondary communication technologies | Use of media technology for the production of information | Newspapers, magazines, books, technologically produced arts and culture |
| Tertiary communication technologies | Use of media technology for the production and consumption of information, not for distribution | CDs, DVDs, tapes, records, Blu-ray disks, hard disks |
| Quaternary communication technologies | Use of media technology for the production, distribution and consumption of information | TV, radio, film, telephone, Internet |
| Quinary communication technologies | Digital media prosumption technologies, user-generated content | Internet, social media |

Figure 10: Table indicating types of media technologies, their roles, and examples.
Source: Christian Fuchs: Everyday Life and Everyday Communication in
Coronavirus Capitalism

The table designed by Fuchs (2020) indicates that the current online media use allows for user-generated contents and a free person to person interaction through audio-

visual conferencing on the Internet and social networking sites, which is why the digital online media has been an important part of life during the COVID-19 pandemic. In agreement to the above view, Jones, (2020) also observe that life during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has seen people spending more time on the sofa and consuming vast amounts of media. This media consumption as Jones, posits is inclusive of mainly advertising and business contents which in most cases target a particular group of individuals in the society. However, Jones showcased media consumption in the age of COVID-19 according to the age bracket or generation of consumers as shown in the figure below:
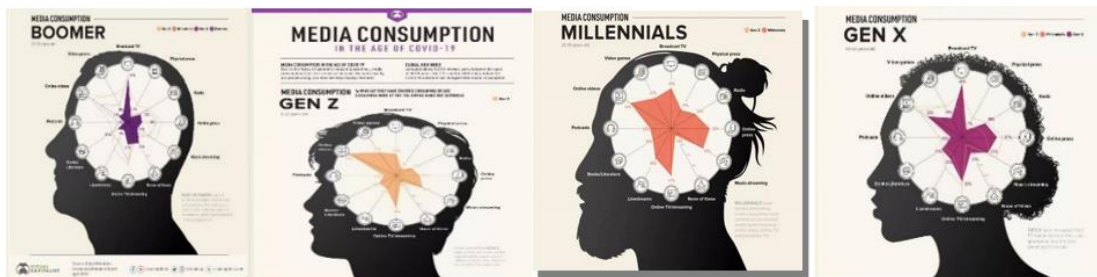


Figure 11: Media consumption in the age of COVID-19. Source: https://www.visualcapitalist.com

The above figure illustrates media consumption in the COVID-19 period. With the entire world faced with the challenge of bringing COVID-19 pandemic to an end, Social isolation policies have had a remarkable effect on the media consumption patterns of people. Interactive communication in particular empowers media users from different demographics to communicate or interact with people while isolating.

## 2.7 E-commerce and Consumer Habits

Basically MSMEs in the TRNC are made up of all small businesses in the Island such as coffee shops, supermarket, grocery shops, and restaurants etc. These business outfits according to Samuel (2015) dominates the economy of Cyprus as a whole, which

makes Cypriot governments (North and South) strive to work in line with regulatory framework that provides conducive investment, innovation and entrepreneurship landscape for people to start up business. While it is true that the MSMEs help strengthening the economy of a country, they however lack widespread presence and are most times unable to extend their services beyond their locality (Kurnia, et al., 2015). Adopting the new e-commerce strategies such as digital marketing and Know Your Customer (KYC) on social media becomes necessary. The use of ecommerce technologies make these possible for the MSMEs and enable them to access larger markets without expanding their physical presence most especially in the pandemic period.

The growth of technology has impacted on the global economy and commerce. There are tremendous effects of the use Internet and smart devices to the extent that people have easier ways of accessing information. Habits and preferences of individuals have also been affected by the current trend, when it comes to shopping online, some scholars such as Mansur, et al,.(2019) argue that despite the massive proliferation of online activities in Indonesia for instance, there is no significant impact on shopping through the internet. As Mansur, et al,.(2019) further state, whereas the country ranks highest in Internet usage in the whole of Southeast Asia, there is still the problem of acceptance of e-commerce by people of the region. Their assertion cannot be used as a general view or opinion since it looks at the Southeast Asia and Indonesia in particular. However, the above observation indicates that there are problems relating to either individual behavior towards adapting to the current trend and the adoption of e-commerce, or the process and channel employed by the enterprises trying to reach them.

In reaction to consumer behavior on the use of e-commerce, Koufaris, et al,. (2001) opine that getting a consumer to make purchase via the online platforms is the major aim of using e-channels in business, however, getting the customer to repeat the process of online transaction after a first experience is dependent on two attitudinal variables which are: Perceived control and shopping enjoyment. The two variables mentioned above point to consumer behavior and attitude towards online channels of buying and selling. Consumers tend to be in control when they have vast access to information about the product and services they want.

Vast information access includes feedbacks from other consumers who have used the product or service. The consumer in this case decides to opt in or out of a transaction when they are satisfied or dissatisfied by the ratings and reactions the get about the product. On the other hand, shopping enjoyment as Koufaris, et al,. (2001, ibid) state refers to the feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment consumers get from a shopping experience. As online shopping experience differs from physical shopping experience, the expression of a consumers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction on the online platforms helps to determine the behavior of the consumer.

## 2.8 E-commerce and Consumer Habits During COVID-19

The Coronavirus pandemic brought about many changes globally in the last two years. One major change is the alteration in consumer behavior among individuals. While we are meant to look at consumer behavior in the online digital channels, it is important to point to other consumer behavioral changes during the pandemic. Guthrie, et al (2021) reacts to hoarding as consumer behavioral change brought about by COVID-19 pandemic at its early stages. Furthermore they conclude that unusual purchasing behavior such as stockpiling items out of fear or panic is a common

reaction to the uncertainty of future availability of the products.

With a massive shift to the online digital sphere, businesses and their customers are no doubt mostly operating online. Alver, and Kurtisi, (2021) are of the view that during the Coronavirus pandemic, purchasing behaviors have been affected by social environments especially that of the online social networking platforms. Furthermore, they add that the decision consumers make (especially young people) are mostly dependent on the information they collect from their online reference groups, work groups and even family online groups. A look at consumer behavior in the "year of the pandemic" by the Bank of Cyprus and KPMG International Limited provides an insight to the changes that occurred in individual card spending across several industries. The findings of the Insight indicate that there are changes in consumer preferences and behavioral patterns across Cyprus. Furthermore, through the research, it was discovered that local consumers in Cyprus have already embraced the trend of using digital communication channels most especially intheir daily transactions with goods and service providers. (https://home.kpmg/cy/en/home/insights).

## 2.9 Conceptualization of the MSMEs

The acronym MSME as used throughout this study is a representation of the terms Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises. Usually, SME which stands for small and medium enterprise is often used to represent all small businesses, (Keskġn, et al 2010). However there is the need to straighten out the categories as they apply to this study.

**(i)** **Micro enterprise -** Micro enterprise is a term used to represent businesses that employ few people. Banerjee, (1998) describes a micro enterprise as a very small business operated by a low-income individual. In the words of Midgley (2008), cited in Lateh et al., (2017), micro enterprises are known as small businesses

owned and run by poor people or groups of poor people with the help and support of a sponsoring organization. Most micro enterprises are specialized in rendering and providing goods or services for their local communities. James (2021) concludes that an enterprise is regarded as micro enterprise when it is operated with fewer than 10 people and is started with a small amount of capital advance from a sponsoring body.

(ii) **Small** and **Medium Enterprise –** Liberto (2020) asserts that a small and medium enterprise is a kind of business that maintains revenues, assets or a number of employees below a certain threshold. HAIT (2021) similarly points out that the concept is based on the amount of sales and establishment is capable of making. HAIT, further explains that the idea of small and medium enterprise varies in terms of revenue generated, size of the business and even at times the location of the business. A small and medium enterprise according to Sarokin (2019) may be seen as any business with the maximum of 250 individuals working as employees in the business.

From the definitions made by the various scholars sited above, it is deducible that the MSMEs in the TRNC make up a large group in the business sector of the area. Coffee shops, restaurants, laundry mats and supermarket scattered all over the are fall in either the micro or small and medium scale businesses.

## 2.10 Theoretical Framework

Theories have been used by scholars over the years to help in understanding certain phenomenon. Furthermore, theories are suppositions or systems of ideas made to explain a phenomenon based on general principles of the way the world works. Mass communication theories therefore, are used to explain the effects of the usage of mass

media and to know how media is shaping the minds of the people and how media are shaped by media operators. Communication and media studies, researchers have developed, promoted, and worked with several theories in carrying out studies such as this. Previous Studies have used and employed a number of theories but this literature review will consider some of such theories as they concern the present study.

**2.10.1 Diffusion of Innovation Theory**

Firstly discussed by the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde in 1903, the diffusion of innovation theory is mostly regarded as a valuable change for guiding technological innovation where the innovation itself is adjusted and made available to meet the needs of adopters at all levels. Tarde (1903) had plotted the S-shape diffusion curve which was however, followed by Ryan and Gross (1943) who presented the adopter categories that were later used in the current theory popularized by Everett Rogers in 1962 (Kaminski, 2011). Sanson-Fisher, (2004) is of the view that "one theoretical approach to understanding how change may be achieved is Rogers' diffusion model in which he argues that certain characteristics of the innovation itself may facilitate its adoption". Dearing, (2009) opines that early theorizing from the start of the 20th century was slowly overwhelmed and replaced by post hoc empirical research that described and elucidated the diffusion processes. By the 1950s, diffusion researchers had started applying the knowledge learned about naturalistic diffusion in tests of process interventions to affect the spread of innovations.

The diffusion of innovation theory examines how people receive new inventive thoughts and how they settled on the conclusion towards it. The hypothesis strongly depends on Human capital. As indicated by the theory, advancements ought to be broadly embraced to achieve improvement and sustainability. According to Lundblad,

(2003), Rogers' model has four main elements that fused together to form the theory of diffusion of innovation and they include: the innovation, communication channel, time, and the social system as indicated in the figure below;
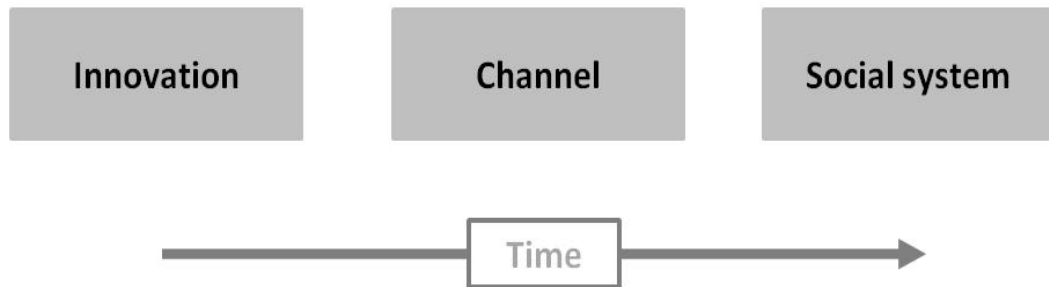


Figure 12: Four-elements-of-diffusion-of-innovation. Source: https://www.communicationtheory.org

In an online article by communicationtheory.org, the four elements of the theory are explained as follows:

- **Innovations** – Is an idea, a practice, or an object observed as novel and not formerly seen or known by an individual. It can also be an urge to do something new or bring some social change.

- **Communication Channel** –The communication channels take the messages from one person to another. It is through the channel of communication that Innovations are passed on to people. Communication channel can be in any form such video graphic, word of mouth, SMS, and any sort of literary expression.

- **Time** – Time is the length of period it takes before the people embrace and adapt to the innovations in a society. It refers to time taken to get used to new ideas.

- **Social System** – Unified system joined together in order to resolve the issues for a common goal. Social system refers to all kinds of components which make up the society such as political institution, religion institutions etc (communicationtheory.org).

The diffusion of innovation theory helps structure questions of acceptance of social media by public relations practitioners by stressing the significance of elements of the innovations, the communication channels involved in the diffusion, the decision processes of adopters overtime, and the social systems in which adopters live and work (Moreno, et al., 2015). As one of the most influential theories employable in communication especially as it relates to the topic under study, we will look at the relevance of the theory to this research.

The focus of diffusion of innovation theory is on the ways by which information about an innovation new or old is disseminated, this explains why the diffusion of innovation is relevant to the topic under study. Firstly, the four elements of diffusion of innovation theory as outlined previously can be applied in the current COVID-19 crisis to understand how much of the digital communication technologies have be embraced and allowed to diffuse into the modern society. A simple understanding of the concept and views of the proponents of this theory indicates that the theory refers to the process that follows on as societies accept and adopt new ideas, technological products, practices, philosophy, and so on. The research therefore has interest in the case of MSMEs and their customers' use of digital communication channels in the TRNC which in turn represent the general global community. While it was the normal thing to visit stores and do the normal shopping, since the pandemic digital communication channels have diffused into the society. The use of digital media in communication between the consumers and businesses has increased due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2.10.2 Uses and Gratification Theory**

Uses and Gratifications theory, was first used in the 1940s by Lazarsfeld and Stanton (1944) the theory presents an alternative for explaining why people use media and the different kinds of gratification they receive. Uses and gratifications theory is expiation of how groups, individuals, society, and institutions use the media and how they equally function in diverse applications (Kaur et al., 2020).

Uses and gratification theory as a theory of Mass Communication is an audience centered approach that lays emphases on "what people do with media, in contrast to what media do to people" (Nachrin, 2020). According to Korhan, and Ersoy, (2016), the uses and gratification theory is a perspective useful for exploring how individuals communicate on a daily basis using various communication channels. Introduced by Elihu Katz in 1970, the main characteristic of the theory is the active audience paradigm. Uses and gratification tries to see how people get satisfaction from the media channels they use. During the 1964 United Kingdom election, Blumler and McQuail studied and developed the uses and gratification theory in the bid to characterize people's motivation to follow the election outcomes by watching political programs (Blumler, and McQuail, 1969).

As the title of the theory indicates, the audiences are actively and intentionally making the choice of what they watch, in what platform or channel they watch it. It is the active audience nature that gives room for the freedom of choice especially in the new interactive media. Ruggiero, (2000) adds that "the idea of an active audience has steadily moved from an assumption to obvious reality such that, Internet audiences are so active now that we seldom refer to them as ''audiences'' instead, we call them

''users,'' in keeping with the letter and spirit of the uses and gratification paradigm''.

Media use can be looked at from two perspectives which include: content gratification, and process gratification. Content gratification is focused on the contents of media program and the satisfaction users get by accessing them. Process gratification on the other hand deals with the experiences the users get from using a particular media channel or platform (Eginli and Tas, 2018).

In relation to online business communication on social networking sites, Quan-Haase and Young (2010) believe that in most social media sites, people get content gratification on business communication adds the so due to the fact that these sites (social media) offer their users features that allow them to interact and give instant feedback, thus the users can thereby make in-depth inquiry and search and in some cases virtually use the product. Lee, (2019) Agrees by pointing to Samsung's "Experience app" which gives their "would be customers" access to try the Galaxy S10 virtually in their own android devises before deciding whether to buy the device or not. Furthermore, while the "Experience app" does not come with a feedback mechanisms, Samsung encourages their customers to use any of their interactive media channels to air their views about the device he concludes (Lee, 2019).

Right from the beginning of communication technologies, the major aim of media industries have been to effectively pass information across to different groups of people. The owners of media industries presented contents to the public who are passively consuming the contents without any contribution. New interactive media of the digital technologies however changed the whole communication process making the audiences active participants in the communication process (Yu, 2006). Within the

above understanding, the active users became selective in the use of the media channels thereby choosing what content to access and through what channel to access it.

This study employed the uses and gratification theory as one of the theoretical lenses for understanding the use of digital communication channels such as the social media platforms by the MSMEs and their customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Different media channels provide different types of contents to people of different demographics. It is important to point out that it is the use to which people put these media channels that determine the effects they have on the users. As it relates to the issue under study, uses and gratification theory can be applied to understand the impacts, prospects, and challenges of online business communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, on the MSMEs as well as their customers.

**2.10.3 Media Domestication Theory**

Domestication has been conceptualized as a framework to understand how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play certain roles people's daily lives. British scholar Roger Silverstone together with his team at Brunel University was the first in 1992 to use the concept of domestication in describing how Information and Communication Technologies penetrated people's lives and homes. The domestication theory of media presents the idea of technology consumption in homes and beyond. Quite similar to the first theory applied to this study (the diffusion of innovation theory), Media domestication as a theory is basically emphasizing how media and communication technologies have been interwoven in our lives and day to day activity. Karlsen, and Syvertsen, (2016) argue that the domestication process is not described as linear by its' proponents in the same way as in diffusion theory.

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However, in principle, the approach recognizes the possibility that adoption may fail and technologies may be rejected (Karlsen, and Syvertsen, 2016).

Hartmann, (2013) described domestication approach as a way used by diverse research areas in studying mobile technologies. Hartmann, (2013 ibid) further explained that domestication approach came up from a dominant British media studies which centered on studying how new media enters the household. However, a "Norwegian science and technology study used domestication in a wider sense of appropriation of technologies in diverse settings (by the state, within a company, etc (Hartmann, 2013).

Martínez, and Olsson, (2021) are of the view that at least two overarching directions can be seen from the idea of domestication. On the one hand, researchers have used the concept in studies of continuously new media technologies. On the other hand, it has been used in studies of social and cultural shaping of media technologies in social contexts. Therefore the notion of domestication is a pointer towards how media technologies always become subject to social and cultural shaping and reshaping by their users (Martínez, and Olsson, 2021).

Although the concept is metaphorical, domestication theory is a productive idea for examining the sense-making processes behind the incorporation of media technologies into everyday life. For Quandt, and Pape, (2010) the introduction of new digital media and mobile communication devices, into the lives of media users in postindustrial countries have changed considerably. Their view is that the metaphorical use of domestication in communication and media allows us to treat media technologies as living organisms that are cohabiting and occupying the domestic space with us.

Serensen, (2006) used the word transformation of the "wild" technology into "tamed" household technology to further explain the ideology of domestication. In the process of domestication of media technologies, both the user and the technology are affected and transformed.

Apart from understanding how digital media devices such as smartphones and computers have gained strong hold in both private and public domains, Domestication theory of media technology is in line with the topic under study. However, the fluidity and dynamic nature of the current digital spaces underscores the interest of scholars in the process of domestication in media communication. As a theory employed in advertising, public relations, and marketing, domestication is a consumer behavioral theory and in the contest of this study it gives way to understand the situation and communication process by the MSMEs and their customers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2.10.4 Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) Model**

As Social media have become leading channels for information dissemination. In times of crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic social media platforms can be useful means of communicating and reaching a vast majority of people. The Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) Model emerged in a bid by communication scholars like Jin, and Liu, (2010) and Liu et al (2015) to develop a communication model to understand how societies relate with social media, mainstream media and online and offline publics; before, during and after crises. This model according to the proponents provides a way to look at how organizations react during disasters, get situational awareness of current disaster conditions, and sort for a collaborative approach to crisis management. SMCC proponents postulate that

there are several types of audience in the social media in times of crisis which include Influential audience, Followers, and Inactive members.

Furthermore, this model explains how information on issues like the COVID-19 crisis is shared on the social networking sites. Indirectly, these information spread from social media content creators who are influential and have gained large numbers of followers. The followers of these influencers thus access the contents and circulate them until they reach the inactive members, who as the name implies are not seeking such information from social media but are exposed to them indirectly (Kuruç and Opiyo, 2019).

SMCC model is found useful to the current study as it provides a good background to understanding how organizations and individuals coordinate and carry out their activities in times of crisis. Using the digital media communication tools, businesses and organizations have the option of going fully online in communication their customers through social media. Apart from making external communication possible, social media and other digital communication channels provide organizations a good way of reach their members and stakeholders during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Van den Hurk, (2013) agrees by stating that when using social media, organizations can respond to stakeholders' questions and concerns, potentially improving organizational understandings of stakeholders' crisis needs, providing greater clarity and preserving or enhancing organizational reputation.

## 2.11 Empirical Review

In this part of the literature review, the researcher takes a look at some of the previous studies done which have relationships with the topic being researched on:

**(a).** One of such works is the research carried out by Nguyen, Gruber, Fuchs, Marler, Hunsaker, and Hargittai, (2020) on *Changes in Digital Communication During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, Implications for Digital Inequality and Future Research.* The aim of the study was to address how the pandemic has changed people's use of the digital communication methods and the inequalities that might arise in these methods. The research data were drawn from 1,374 American adults for about 2 weeks after the lock down measures were implemented. The survey research method was employed to get data and the following findings were made:

- The researchers observed a huge increase in the use of digital technologies especially the interactive digital communication tools.

- The data indicate that 43% of the respondents used the text messaging more often while large percentage also used more of voice calls in communication.

- They also discovered that there is digital inequality. To support this, Nguyen et al (2020) stated that in the United States, a quarter of the population lack broadband Internet service at home and almost one fifth does not own a smart phone. Such people were more disconnected from their environment than others especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings above have some bearing on the current research. While it is assumed that the micro, small, and medium scale businesses may be well connected, some of their customers may be among the group of people that were cut off completely. With the stay at home order, such individuals might have suffered untold hardship due to

lack of communication and connection. On the other hand, increase in the use of the Internet for communication could mean an increase in the need to communicate with the businesses and their customers to solve basic domestic problems. The pandemic also opens up possibilities for, and affects how we use digital media in all other aspects of our lives. In conclusion, the researchers recommended that the study of people's communication and media behaviors is likely to increase.

**(b)** In a study carried out by Khalid, Alia, Khalid, Amgad and Ahmad (2020) on *Digital marketing during the COVID-19: Consumer Perspective*, they explored some paths for how the pandemic can affect consumer ethical decision making. An online survey was used to allow participants to reply to particular questions and indicate whether or not they had a view point. The area of the study was Amman, Jordan and the questionnaire was distributed to 500 MSME operators as the respondents. The MSMEs in the TRNC are made up of people who run small businesses such as coffee shops, restaurants, barbershops and businesses in this category as highlighted in the second chapter. The simple random sampling technique was adopted. The data were analyzed using the ANOVA and the T test.

Findings of the research indicate that:

- There is a significant difference between personalized digital communication and the age group of the consumers.
- The consumers who were employed are attracted towards personalized digital communication.

In conclusion, the researchers concluded that despite constant changes, improved communication for both consumers and employees is important. Secondly, the personalized digital communication has a significant impact on the consumer's preferences because getting personalized communication from companies and businesses tend to make consumers loyal towards the company. Again consumers prefer the companies to show some empathy towards them. The recommendations posed by the researchers are as follows:

That companies or businesses should listen to their customers and strive to fulfil their needs and wants accordingly during the pandemic. However this is only achievable with effective communication channels, and the utilization of the digital media tools available.

(c) In another study carried out by these researchers titled; *Consumer Engagement with Digital Social Responsibility in social media, A case study of COVID-19 situation in Thailand*, the purpose of the study was to examine the relationships of electronic word of mouth (EWOM) intentions and customer engagement with digital social responsibility in social media with attitude towards DSR as the antecedent during the COVID-19 social distancing situation in Thailand. The study was a quantitative research whereby the study data were collected through survey questionnaire. The researchers used a sample of 123 respondents who are social media users and who have experience with firms' online social responsibility initiatives. The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used for data analysis and the following findings were made:

- Attitude towards Digital Social Responsibility in social media has a significant positive impact on customer engagement with DSR and ewom intention.

- Electronic word of mouth intention mediates the effects of the attitude towards DSR in social media on customer engagement with DSR.

The researchers concluded that the most efficient and speedy way to implement social responsibility initiative is by online communication. Their recommendation was that businesses should carefully develop digital social responsibility strategies and plans to promote consistent information, satisfy the expectations of each stake holder, and build public trust.

As a matter of fact, it is expected that some consumers may be reluctant to adopt the online communication with a business because of lack of trust. This might be one of the challenges facing online businesses.

## 2.12 Summary of Literature Review

Having gone through the various scholarly works, from the forgoing, it is obvious that the use of digital communications and interactive media especially the social media platforms have been on the rise and even more in the time of the Coronavirus pandemic. In a more elaborate way, we have seen that the Internet, right from its invention has been at the center of the digital communication technology evolution and the culture that comes out of it. Nonetheless, while majority of people believe in the positive effects of these digital technology tools on the society, some others argue and stand in the opposing end. The interactive social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter however, are believed to have become part of modern human culture thereby infusing into every aspect of mans' endeavor. This work has applied the knowledge and views of proponents of the communication theories reviewed in this work as solid foothold for understanding the topic under study.

# Chapter 3

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

This research was set out to understand how digital media as communication channels were used during the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges and prospects involved in using them for micro, small, and medium enterprises in the TRNC. This chapter is aimed at discussing the procedures and techniques by which data were collected for the study. Therefore, this chapter to be specific, looks at the population and sample selection  methods of data collection, instrument for the collection of data and data analysis.

## 3.2 Research Motivation and Background

The outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic has been seen as a major global health crisis in the 21st century. While there have been several other illnesses such as the Ebola hemorrhagic fever, which affected more than 28 000 people and led to 11 000 deaths (Baize, et al 2014) and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which spread speedily mostly in Asian countries and affected over 8422 with 916 deaths globally (Chan-Yeung, and Xu, 2003). Since the discovery of the first case of Coronavirus in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on the 8th of March 2020, several preventive measures have been implemented to ensure safety and wellbeing of people.

Lockdown and movement restrictions have been off and on, depending on the situation and the directives of the TRNC ministry of health. As the virus continues to impact the physical and mental health of people, so are economic, and social life impacted too. As the idea and use of digital communication channels is not a novel phenomenon, the periods of COVID-19 lockdown lead to increase in the use of these channels. To this end, worried by the communication breakdown due to restriction on face to face interaction, this research is also carried out to figure out the extent at which micro, small, and medium scale enterprises (MSMEs) embrace and utilize the digital communication channels in response to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic communication restrictions.

## 3.3 Research Methodology

In the course of this study, attempts are mead to understand how digital media as communication channels were used during the COVID-19 pandemic for the purpose of business transactions by the MSMEs and challenges and prospects involved in using them in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The study therefore seeks to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1.** What medium of communication is predominantly used by businesses in TRNC?

**RQ2.** Did MSMEs in the TRNC benefit from social media in communicating with their customers.

**RQ3.** What medium of communication channel do the MSMEs mostly use in advertising their products?

**RQ4.** To what extent do digital media serve as a means of marketing by MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic period?

**RQ5**. What are the major challenges faced by the businesses and their customers in using the digital media of communicating during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## 3.4 Research Design

In this work, a questionnaire is designed and used as a quantitative research method. Apart from secondary data cited throughout the work, the study adopted the survey research design aimed at collecting relevant data through the ratings made by the MSMEs in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus used as the a primary data. The ratings given by the respondents were based on their practical use, observations, and opinion on the use of the online communication media during the Coronavirus pandemic. The data obtained were used in making statistical interpretations about the general population represented by the sample.

A research design according to Durrheim, (2006) opines that a research design is an important framework for action that serves as a link between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research. Equally, Dannels, (2018) adds that a research design is a plan that provides the underlying structure to blend all elements of a quantitative study so the results are credible, free from bias, and maximally generalizable. Being a quantitative research means the study is based on numerical data which are used to prove the assumption of the researcher that digital communication has been embraced by a vast majority of people.

A quantitative research according to Given (2008). Furthermore, Quantitative research may be considered as a way of thinking about the world. It is essentially deductive: measurements are made, analysis is applied, and conclusions are drawn.

## 3.5 Area of Study

Cyprus is located in between three continents of Europe, Asia, and the Africa. Seen as the third largest island in the Mediterranean, the island is situated 40 miles south of Turkey. The island is divided into two autonomous parts, North and South (northcyprus.cc). This study was carried out in The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) with its capital in Northern Nicosia. The TRNC is comprised of a total of 1357 square miles and estimated population of 372,486 as at the last census 2018. There are five regions in the TRNC which include Güzelyurt in the West, Girne (Kyrenia) in the North, Karpaz in the East, Gazimağusa (Famagusta) on the eastern coastline, and Lefkoşa (Nicosia) (citypopulation.de). The TRNC prior to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has been a very busy area with beautiful tourist sites and a large number of big, medium and small-scale businesses.

## 3.6 Population of Study

The population of the study is made up of a cluster of MSMEs from three districts randomly selected out of the five districts mentioned above.

## 3.7 Sampling Size and Technique

The sample of this study is made up of 397 individuals who answered as either MSME owners or someone representing them (like workers) in the TRNC. The said individuals who serve as the respondents used for the study were selected through a simple random sampling technique.

## 3.8 Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument employed in data collection was a researcher developed rating scale titled "The use of digital media as communication channel during crisis, challenges, and prospects Rating Scale. The instrument consisted of 43 items structured in statement form to elicit responses which helped to identify elements of the use of the

digital media by the MSMEs. The main research questions were grouped into five clusters with a minimum of four items in each under such variables as MSMEs' attitude towards the use of digital media channels (acceptance and embrace), Channels most used and preferred, and challenges they encounter. The Likert type 5 point rating scale was adopted with the following rating values of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The scales are weighted 5,4,3,2 and 1. Respondents were requested to make a tick in the right hand column under the statement of their choice to show the extent of their agreement, neutrality, or disagreement to the statements. The ratings made by the respondents constituted the basis for understanding and identifying the use of digital media for communication in the COVID-19 pandemic period in the area of study.

## 3.9 Validation of Instrument

The instrument was validated by department of communication and media studies and approved by the graduate institute's ethics committee both of Eastern Mediterranean University. The experts helped to ensure the face validity of the instrument. Some items were modified while some were deleted or replaced with better options and translated to Turkish Language to avoid possible language barrier. A reliability test was done to find the reliability Cronbach alpha of the questions asked and the results indicate: α. .90.

## 3.10 Method of Data Collection

The researcher solicited the assistance of some Turkish Cypriot friends, students and his colleagues who helped in the distribution and collection of the instruments. The researcher however, personally administered a good percentage of the instrument which ensured a high rate of the return of the instrument. On the whole 397 copies of the questionnaire were used for data analyses.

## 3.11 Method of Data Analysis

The analysis of data collected for this study was done using the Statistical Package for

Social Science (SPSS) program.

# Chapter 4

# DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the researcher presents the survey results and findings of the study based on the research questions posed and the hypotheses formulated. It contains the description of the statistical analysis of the data obtained from the sample of MSMEs in the TRNC.

## 4.1 Findings and Analysis

Out of the $n = 500$ questionnaires distributed, it was only 397 that was properly filled and returned. According to Idrus & Newman, (2002), for social sciences research, a 50% rate of response is considered sufficient. Thus, our 79% rate of response is considered appropriate since it is more than 50%. Thus, data analysis was based on $n = 397$ responses. The responses from the respondents are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of questionnaire and rate of response

| Questionnaire | Respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Number issued | 500 | 100 |
| Number returned | 397 | 79 |
| Number not returned | 103 | 21 |
| Total | 500 | 100 |

## 4.2 The Demographics of the Survey

Tables were used to present the personal characteristics of the respondents.

### 4.2.1 Respondents Age

Table 2: Respondents age

| Age | Number | Percentage |
|-----|--------|------------|
| 16-18 | 37 | 9.3 |
| 19-21 | 77 | 19.4 |
| 22-24 | 89 | 22.4 |
| 25-35 | 118 | 29.7 |
| 35+ | 76 | 19.1 |
| Total | 397 | 100 |

From Table 2 above, out of the total respondents, $n =37$ respondents representing 9.3% are between 16-18 years old, $n = 77$ respondents representing 19.4% are between 19-21 years old, $n = 89$ respondents representing 22.4% are between 22-24 years old, $n =119$ respondents representing 29.9% are between 25-35 years old, while the $n = 76$ respondents representing 19.1% are between over 35 years old.

### 4.2.2 Respondents Gender

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to gender

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 217 | 54.7 |
| Female | 180 | 45.3 |
| Total | 397 | 100 |

From Table 3 above, out of the total respondents, $n = 180$ respondents representing 45.3% were female, while the $n = 217$ respondents representing 54.7% were male.

### 4.2.3 Education Background of respondents

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to the level of education

| Education Background | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Middle school | 5 | 1.3 |
| High School | 36 | 9.1 |
| Undergraduate | 188 | 47.7 |
| Masters | 133 | 33.8 |
| PhD | 32 | 8.1 |
| Total | 397 | 100 |

The above table reveals that 5 (1.3%) respondents were middle school diploma holders, High school holders were $n = 36$ respondents representing 9.1% percent, $n = 188$ (47.7%) respondents were undergraduate diploma holders, $n = 133$ (33.8%) respondents were Masters diploma holders, while $n = 32$ (8.1%) were Ph.D.'s degree holders.

## 4.3 Analysis of the Responses of the Respondents to the Use of Technological Innovations and Online Media

Tables were used to present the responses of the respondents to the use of technological innovations and online media.

### 4.3.1 Information on When the Respondents Started Using Computers

Table 5: Information on when the respondents started using computers

| Question | Responses | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| When did you start using a computer? | Less than 10 years | 179 | 45.1 |
| | 10-15 years old | 127 | 32.0 |
| | 16-21 years old | 58 | 14.6 |
| | 22-27 years old | 19 | 4.8 |
| | 28-35 years old | 12 | 3.0 |
| | Total | 397 | 100 |

Table 5 above responds to the question "when did you start using a computer?" From the table, $n = 179$ (45.1%) of the respondents said they were between less than 10-15 years old when they started using the computer, $n = 127$ (32%) of the respondents said they were between the ages of 10-15 years when that started using the computer, $n = 58$ (14.6%) of the respondents said they were between the ages of 16-21 years old when that started using the computer, $n = 19$ (4.8%) of the respondents said they were between the ages of 22-27 years old when that started using the computer, while $n = 12$ (3.0%) of the respondents said they were between the ages of 28-35 years old when that started using the computer.

**4.3.2 Information on When the Respondents Started Using the Computer**

Table 6: Information on when the respondents started using the internets

| Question | Responses | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| When did you start using the internet? | Before 2005 | 168 | 42.3 |
| | Between 2005-2009 | 124 | 31.2 |
| | Between 2010-2013 | 76 | 19.1 |
| | Between 2014-2017 | 20 | 5.0 |
| | After 2018 | 2 | .5 |
| | Total | 397 | 100 |

Table 6 above responds to the question "when did you start using the internet?" From the table, $n = 168$ (42.3%) of the respondents said they started using the internet before 2005, $n = 124$ (31.2%) of the respondents said they started using the internet between 2005-2009, $n = 76$ (19.1%) of the respondents said they started using internet between 2010-2013, $n = 20$ (5%) of the respondents said they started using internet between

2014-2017, while $n = 2$ (0.5%) of the respondents said they started using the internet after 2018.

**4.3.3 Device Often Used by MSMEs to Connect to the Internet**

Table 7: Device often used by MSMEs to connect to the Internet

| Question | Devices | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Which device do you use to connect to the internet often? | Laptop | 120 | 30.23 |
| | Desktop | 33 | 8.31 |
| | Smartphones | 200 | 50.38 |
| | Tablets | 20 | 5.04 |
| | Others | 24 | 6.04 |
| | Total | 397 | 100 |

Table 7 responds to the question "Which device do you use to connect to the internet often?" Giving the data recorded in table 4.6, out of the four devices, Smartphone usage has the highest responses of $n = 200$ (50.38%), followed by a laptop with $n = 55$ (13.9%). 20 respondents and $n = 33$ respondents use tablet and desktop computers respectively in connecting to the Internet. Deducible from the above findings, one can rightly conclude that smartphones being hand-held devices are much portable which accounts for a large number of its usage.

**4.3.4 Evaluation of the Reasons for the Use of the Internet for Communication**

Table 8: Reasons for the use of the internet for communication

| Question | Reasons | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Why do you prefer to use the Internet for communication? | Because it is cheap | 32 | 8.06 |
| | For easy access | 88 | 22.16 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Due to its Interactive features | 60 | 15.11 |
| | Due to its global presence | 61 | 15.37 |
| | Two or more reasons | 156 | 39.20 |
| | Total | 397 | 100 |

Table 8 responds to the question "Why do you prefer to use the internet for communication?" $n = 32$ (8.06%), $n = 88$ (22.2%), $n = 60$ (15.1%), and $n = 61$ (15.7%) of the respondents said they prefer to use the internet for communication because it is cheap, it gives them easy access, due to its interactive features, and due to its global presence respectively. While the remaining $n = 156$ respondents (39.2%) selected more than one option given.

After a clear observation of the response on the demographics of the respondents and their use of technological innovations and online media, which makes up the parts A and B of the research questions asked, it was deducible that majority of the respondents fall in the category of early adopters of technological innovation. In the question "when did you start using a computer? Most respondents $n = 179$ (45.1%) indicated they had started using a computer before age 10, followed by $n = 127$ (32.0%) who started between 10-15 years old. The fact that majority of the respondents are early adopters can also be proved by looking at the question "When did you start using the Internet? $n = 168$ (42.3%) indicated they started surfing the net before 2005. This question also generated response from $n = 124$ respondents (31.2%) who responded to have started using the net between 2005-2009.

However, statement that some individuals are very slow to adapt to change and that some individuals lack confidence in online marketing attracted huge responses meaning that some of the population of TRNC falls in the categories of late majority and laggards.

While the above observations cannot be generalized to the overall population of the TRNC since the sample is made up of the MSMEs operators in the area, it however gives a clue that most of the people in the area fall in the early adopters category, which according to adaptation bell curve of Everett Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory seen in the previous chapter is one of the five adopter categories in the technology adoption life cycle. The cycle is made up of innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Mirthinti 2020).

## 4.4 Analysis of Research Question Items

### 4.4.1 Research Question One

What medium of communication is predominantly used by the MSMEs in TRNC?

Table 9: Medium of communication is predominantly used by the MSMEs in TRNC

|  | SA | A | N | DA | SD | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I use social media to communicate with my customers. (müşterilerimizle iletişime kurmak için Sosyal medyayı kullanıyorum.) | 192 | 127 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 4.46 |
| I use WhatsApp to communicate | 208 | 124 | 16 | 16 | 18 | 4.28 |
| I use Facebook to communicate | 162 | 167 | 23 | 15 | 16 | 4.16 |
| I use Instagram to communicate | 145 | 110 | 50 | 25 | 28 | 3.89 |
| I use Twitter to communicate | 95 | 99 | 71 | 35 | 49 | 3.45 |
| I use Television / Televizyon to communicate | 16 | 32 | 82 | 108 | 92 | 2.31 |
| I use The radio to communicate / Radyo | 16 | 21 | 84 | 116 | 93 | 2.25 |
| I use Telegram to communicate | 49 | 41 | 89 | 84 | 79 | 2.70 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I use Individual marketing apps to communicate / Kisisel pazarlama uygulamaları | 41 | 50 | 77 | 103 | 71 | 2.67 |

Tables 9 indicate the extent to which the MSMEs use social media to communicate to their customer and the platforms of communication majorly used by these MSMEs. The mean value of 4.46 indicates that the majority of the MSMEs use social media to communicate with their customer. Additionally, mean values reveal that the predominant channel of communication used in these MSMEs is WhatsApp (mean value of 4.28), Facebook (mean value of 4.16), and Instagram (mean value of 3.89).

## 4.4.2 Research Question Two

Did MSMEs in the TRNC benefit from social media in communicating with their customers?

Table 10: Benefit of social media to MSMEs in the TRNC in communicating with their customers

| | SA | A | N | DA | SD | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Digital media are the major means of doing online marketing. | 198 | 153 | 29 | 6 | 2 | 4.39 |
| Digital media make transactions possible across nations. | 184 | 169 | 27 | 6 | 2 | 4.36 |
| Digital media make information accessible to many customers at a time | 166 | 157 | 42 | 14 | 11 | 4.16 |
| People do not need to leave their homes to go shopping during the pandemic | 103 | 113 | 78 | 65 | 29 | 3.15 |

Table 10 above responds to how MSMEs in the TRNC benefit from social media in communicating with their customers. From the table, the majority of the respondents agreed that MSMEs in the TRNC benefit from social media in communicating with their customers as the mean value ranges from 4.36 to 3.15. The majority of the

respondents agreed that Digital media are the major means of doing online marketing, it makes transactions possible across nations, it makes information accessible to many customers at a time, and with it, people do not need to leave their homes to go shopping during the pandemic.

### 4.4.3 Research Question Three

What medium of communication channel does the MSMEs mostly use for their advertising their products?

Table 11: Medium of communication channel MSMEs mostly use in their advertising their product

|  | SA | A | N | DA | SD | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Television is mostly used for advertising. | 97 | 151 | 56 | 52 | 36 | 3.56 |
| The radio is the medium most used for advertisement these days. | 29 | 48 | 114 | 125 | 70 | 2.59 |
| The businesses in TRNC mostly use their private digital application for advertisement. | 50 | 58 | 90 | 123 | 66 | 2.75 |
| Most businesses use WhatsApp for advertisement. | 102 | 106 | 95 | 61 | 26 | 3.51 |
| Most businesses now use Facebook for advertising their businesses. | 117 | 168 | 71 | 29 | 8 | 3.91 |
| Most businesses use Instagram for advertisement. | 93 | 125 | 95 | 43 | 35 | 3.51 |
| Most businesses use Twitter for advertisement. | 61 | 111 | 87 | 99 | 29 | 3.20 |
| Most businesses use content personalization to reach targeted customers. | 128 | 173 | 52 | 18 | 20 | 3.95 |

Table 11 above responds to the medium of communication channel that the MSMEs mostly use for advertising their products. From the table, the majority of the respondents agreed that the medium of communication channel that the MSMEs mostly use for their advertising their products are the use of content personalization to reach targeted customers (mean value of 3.95), followed by Facebook (mean value of 3.91), Television (mean value of 3.56), Instagram mean value of 3.51), and WhatsApp (mean value of 3.51).

**4.4.4 Research Question Four**

To what extent have the MSMEs in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus have

been able to embrace the use of online marketing?

Table 12: Extent to which the MSMEs in the TRNC embrace the use of online
marketing

|  | SA | A | N | DA | SD | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am aware of the online marketing going on since the COVID-19 pandemic. | 162 | 173 | 27 | 12 | 20 | 4.13 |
| I have only been buying most of my needs online | 34 | 47 | 89 | 158 | 59 | 2.58 |
| Online marketing is mostly used by people in the region | 74 | 130 | 86 | 76 | 24 | 3.39 |
| Most people prefer online marketing to in-store buying and selling | 83 | 92 | 122 | 73 | 22 | 3.36 |
| Buying and selling have become easier for both the buyer and seller | 122 | 187 | 56 | 21 | 3 | 4.04 |
| I feel more relaxed with online marketing than in-store | 65 | 77 | 133 | 78 | 39 | 3.13 |
| Most businesses use online marketing strategies. | 133 | 171 | 55 | 25 | 9 | 4.00 |

Table 12 above responds to what extent the MSMEs in the Turkish Republic of

Northern Cyprus has been able to embrace the use of online marketing. From the table,

the majority of the respondents agreed that MSMEs in the TRNC benefit have been

able to embrace the use of online marketing as the mean value ranges from 4.13 to

2.58.

**4.4.5 Research Question Five**

What are the major challenges faced by businesses in using digital media of

communicating during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Table 13: The major challenges faced by the businesses in the use of digital media of communicating during the COVID-19 pandemic

|  | SA | A | N | DA | SD | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| There is a network problem always. | 32 | 60 | 149 | 118 | 31 | 2.86 |
| Some areas have no network coverage. | 43 | 76 | 145 | 84 | 40 | 2.99 |
| Some individuals are very slow to adapt to change. | 119 | 152 | 81 | 32 | 8 | 3.87 |
| Some individuals lack confidence in online marketing. | 103 | 186 | 79 | 18 | 7 | 3.92 |
| Transportation or shipping adds to the cost of production. | 98 | 106 | 151 | 31 | 5 | 3.67 |
| Areas without internet coverage are not reached. | 84 | 130 | 131 | 40 | 5 | 3.67 |
| There has to be a lot of advertising to convince customers. | 86 | 142 | 142 | 15 | 5 | 3.64 |

Table 13 above provides responses to the question "What are the major challenges faced by the businesses in using the digital media of communicating during the COVID-19 pandemic?" From the table, the majority of the respondents agreed that the major challenges faced by the businesses in using the digital media of communicating during the COVID-19 pandemic are some individuals lack confidence in the online marketing (mean value of 3.92), Some individuals are very slow to adapt to change (mean value of 3.87), transportation or shipping adds to the cost of production (mean value of 3.67), areas without internet coverage are not reached (mean value of 3.67), and there has to be a lot of advertising to convince customers (mean value of 3.64).

## 4.5 Testing of Hypotheses

### 4.5.1 Hypothesis One

**H0$_1$:** During the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs predominately did not prefer to use digital media as a means of communication in TRNC.

**Hi$_1$:** During the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs predominately preferred to use digital media as a means of communication in TRNC.

ANOVA with the aid of SPSS was adopted to test the above hypothesis. The result of the ANOVA was presented in Table 14 below:

Table 14: ANOVA result hypothesis one

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Group | 9.476 | 4 | 2.369 | 3.533 | .008 |
| Within Groups | 223.928 | 334 | .670 |  |  |
| Total | 233.403 | 338 |  |  |  |

The outputs in the table above reveal that the null hypothesis is rejected at a 0.05% significant level and the alternative hypothesis (which stated that during the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs predominately preferred to use digital media as a means of communication in TRNC) was accepted. Thus, we conclude that MSMEs predominately preferred to use digital media as a means of communication in TRNC during the COVID-19 lockdown.

**4.5.2 Hypothesis Two**

**Ho$_2$:** MSMEs did not benefit from using social media to communicate with customers during the COVID-19 lockdown in TRNC.

**Hi$_2$:** MSMEs benefited from social media to communicate with customers during the COVID-19 lockdown in TRNC.

ANOVA with the aid of SPSS was adopted to test the above hypothesis. The result of the ANOVA was presented in Table 4.16 below:

Table 15: ANOVA result hypothesis two (social media benefit)

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 32.685 | 45 | .726 | 2.208 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 114.157 | 347 | .329 |  |  |
| Total | 146.842 | 392 |  |  |  |

The outputs in the table above reveal that the null hypothesis is rejected at a 0.05% significant level and the alternative hypothesis (which stated MSMEs benefited from social media to communicate with customers during COVID-19 lockdown in TRNC) was accepted. Thus, we conclude that MSMEs benefited from social media to communicate with customers during the COVID-19 lockdown in TRNC.

**4.5.3 Hypothesis Three**

**H0₃:** During the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs preferred not to use Facebook as a means of advertising their products in TRNC.

**Hi₃:** During the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs preferred to use Facebook as a means of advertising their products in TRNC.

ANOVA with the aid of SPSS was adopted to test the above hypothesis. The result of the ANOVA was presented in Table 4.17 below:

Table 16: ANOVA result hypothesis three (Means of advertisement)

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 50.703 | 45 | 1.127 | 4.125 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 95.599 | 350 | .273 |  |  |
| Total | 146.302 | 395 |  |  |  |

The outputs in the table above reveal that the null hypothesis is rejected at a 0.05% significant level and the alternative hypothesis (which stated that During the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs preferred to use Facebook as a means of advertising their products in TRNC) was accepted. Thus, we conclude that During the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs preferred to use Facebook as a means of advertising their products in TRNC.

## 4.6 Correlation Analysis

Table 17: Correlations Analysis

|  |  | Digital media | Social media benefit | Means of advertisement |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Digital media | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .154** | .287** |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | 0.002 | 0.000 |
|  | N | 397 | 397 | 397 |
| Social media benefit | Pearson Correlation | 0.154** | 1 | 0.507** |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.002 |  | 0.000 |
|  | N | 397 | 397 | 397 |
| Means of advertisement | Pearson Correlation | 0.287** | 0.507** | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.000 |  |
|  | N | 397 | 397 | 397 |

Note **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the output of the correlation matrix in Table 4.18 below the benefit of social media and means of advertisement have a positive significant correlation with the use of digital media which is in line with a priori expectation. Nevertheless, the results of the correlation suggest that the issues of correlation among the variables are of less concern.

## 4.7 Discussion of findings

The First hypothesis tested that during the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs predominately did not prefer to use digital media as a means of communication in TRNC. The ANOVA analysis was utilized in the testing of the hypothesis. The null hypothesis that during the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs predominately did not prefer to use digital media as a means of communication in TRNC was rejected at 0.05 level of significance, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implies that during

the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs predominately preferred to use digital media as a means of communication in TRNC. This was also confirmed by the analysis of research question one which reveals that the majority of the MSMEs uses social media to communicate to their customer and the channel of communication predominately used by these MSMEs are WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.

These results are in line with the views of Soomto and Oduah. 2020, who discovered that social media during the pandemic has been utilized by public relations practitioners and organizations to receive feedback and maintain good dialogue from customers, organizations, actions groups,  people, communities, and governments. Furthermore, the findings of the first hypothesis can be directly supported by the proponents of the diffusion of innovation theory of communication employed in this work whereby the digital media are diffused into the society forming a new normal in the pandemic period.

The second hypothesis tested that MSMEs did not benefit from using social media to communicate with customers during the COVID-19 lockdown in TRNC. The ANOVA analysis was utilized in the testing of the hypothesis. The null hypothesis that MSMEs did not benefit from using social media to communicate with customers during COVID-19 lockdown in TRNC was rejected at 0.05 level of significance, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implies that MSMEs benefited from social media to communicate with customers during the COVID-19 lockdown in TRNC. This was also confirmed by the analysis of research question two which reveals that the majority of the respondents agreed that MSMEs in the TRNC benefitted from social media in communicating with their customers. They supported the assertions

that digital media are the major means of doing online marketing, make transactions possible across nations, makes information accessible to many customers at a time, and with it, people have no need to leave their homes to go shopping during the pandemic.

These results are in line with the arguments of Coombs and Holladay, (2014) which opined that an organization can have direct communication with its customers and people in a manner that is more interactive through social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. Again, the uses and gratification theory of communication is made manifest by this finding, it shows that while the MSMEs used the digital media to do their business, the customers who buy from them also had the gratification of being able to communicate and buy the products they want.

The third hypothesis tested that during the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs preferred not to use Facebook as a means of advertising their products in TRNC. The ANOVA analysis was utilized in the testing of the hypothesis. The null hypothesis that during the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs preferred not to use Facebook as a means of advertising their products in TRNC was rejected at 0.05 level of significance, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implies that during the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs preferred to use Facebook as a means of advertising their products in TRNC. The above was also confirmed by the analysis of research question three which reveals that the majority of the respondents agreed that the medium of communication channel that the MSMEs mostly use for their advertising their products is the use of content personalization to reach targeted customers, followed by Facebook.

These results are in line with the arguments of Alavarez (2012) that Facebook remains an incontestable leader notwithstanding the existent of tons of social media platforms, and is not coincidentally called "the paradox of our era." Organization starts to build staunch audience/followers by creating a company webpage or its products or a new group, trails the disclosures (news) about the campaign/commodity in issue, in addition, provides answers to questions; and replies to comments. The importance of social media channels of communication cannot be complete without Facebook as a powerful tool.

# Chapter 5

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Conclusion

The data for the study was collected with a structured set of questionnaires which was administered to the MSMEs in the TRNC selected for the study. Both Inferential and quantitative statistics were employed in the data analysis. The research questions were analyzed with tables. While ANOVA analysis was used to test the stated hypotheses for the study. The findings of this research are therefore in line with the research hypothesis and then communication theories applied to the study. Additionally, the communication theories guiding this study also helped us to understand the reason and need for the use of digital media for communication during the pandemic. Based on the data analysis, the findings from the study are summarized below.

During the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs predominately preferred to use digital media as a means of communication in TRNC. Additionally, the findings reveal that the majority of the MSMEs use social media to communicate to their customers and channel of communication predominately used by these MSMEs are WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. The MSMEs benefited from social media to communicate with customers during the COVID-19 lockdown in TRNC. This finding supports the choice of (Uses and Gratification) theory in this study as it indicated that the MSMEs use the digital media channels for their own benefit and gratification. Furthermore, the Uses and Gratification paradigm is also played out in the process by the fact that the

MSMEs have the liberty to select the platforms they desire and choose what they wish to do with it. The use and choice of Facebook or Instagram advertisement and inclusion of WhatsApp link or number for calls is an example of how the MSMEs use digital media.

Also, the findings of the study supported the assertions that digital media are the major means of doing online marketing, make transactions possible across nations, makes information accessible to many customers at a time, and with it, people do not need to leave their homes to go shopping during the pandemic. This finding relates to the users of the digital media getting more familiar with the digital devices at home. In accordance with the Media Domestication Theory employed in this work, this finding explains why it is possible for people to eventually adapt to the new normal during the COVID-19 lockdown. The domestication stems from the fact that digital devices and media have become part of the household and the metaphor (domestication) is applied to technology just as pet animals are domesticated.

Also, the findings reveal that during the COVID-19 lockdown MSMEs preferred to use Facebook mainly as a means of advertising their products in TRNC. However, in addition to Facebook, the study found that other mediums of communication channels such as the use of content personalization to reach targeted customers, Television, Instagram, and WhatsApp were also utilized by the MSMEs in their advertising their products during the COVID-19 lockdown. This finding is in line with the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DIT) used as a guide to this study. As stated previously the theory explains how and why individuals receive new technological inventions and eventually conclude to embrace it or not. This finding has shown that the people in the

TRNC have embraced the various technological inventions that have gradually diffused into the society.

We discovered that MSMEs in the TRNC have been able to embrace the use of online marketing as the majority of the respondents agreed that most businesses use online marketing strategies and felt more relaxed with online marketing than in-store. In addition, the SMCC (Social Media Crisis Communication) model employed in this work can be related to this finding since the model provides a way to look at how organizations react during disasters, get situational awareness of current disaster conditions, and sort for a collaborative approach to crisis management.

Finally, the study discovered that the major challenges faced by the businesses in using the digital media of communicating during the COVID-19 pandemic are that some individuals lack confidence in the online marketing, some individuals are very slow to adapt to change, transportation or shipping adds to the cost of production, areas without internet coverage are not reached, and there has to be a lot of advertising to convince customers.

In conclusion, we found that social media channels have been proven to have gigantic prospects to elicit involvement (participation), correspondence, and commitment (engagement) in the processes of communication during a crisis by making postings to be interactive and discernible. Due to the lockdown caused by COVID-19, Facebook and other social media content became the most sought-after channels of communication by the public as major sources of information and relaxation; as such, making it a more convenient channel of information dissemination." Because of the

exposure to certain content on the social media channel, most individuals tend to believe and act in a certain way. "However, this finding resonates with the assumptions of Albert Banduras in his Social Cognitive Theory which believes that an individual's knowledge acquisition can be directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences; and that, when people observe a model performing a behavior, they tend to remember the sequence of events and use this information to guide certain behaviors. The findings also resonate with the assumptions of "technological determinism", a theory developed by Thorstein Veblen with the assumption that technology determines the cultural principles and social construction of society. In the words of Fuchs (2012), "Technology is a medium (enabling and constraining) the outcome of society".

## 5.2 Policy Implications of the Study

The results will be instrumental in motivating media content creators and designers of social media apps to improve their apps and sites for better use by businesses especially MSMEs. It will serve as exposure to businesses and customers who are yet to embrace the online social networking practice particularly during a crisis such as COVID-19, thereby improving their business base.

Furthermore, the findings of the study will help to showcase the trends in social media and online communication to make business owners mindful of their problems and prospects before using them.

Finally, since there is a great use of the Internet and social networking sites in the current digitalized world, the findings of this work will be of great value to users of the online media channels as it will help in online media literacy education.

## 5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, for an effective behavioral change to take place in the communication between Micro, Small, and Medium-scale Enterprises (MSMEs) and their customers through the use of online platforms in the event of any crisis such as the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the study strongly recommends the adoption of social media channels, particularly Facebook. The importance of social media channels of communication cannot be complete without Facebook as a powerful tool. It must be used properly during a crisis to obtain certain clarifications and messages across to different audiences.

During the pandemic or crisis, businesses particularly the MSMEs should endeavor to give a listening ear to their clients and ensure to meet their wants and demands appropriately by putting in place an effective channel of communication and the use of the available digital media platforms. Digital social responsibility plans and strategies that will enhance public trust, satisfy each stakeholders' expectation, and promote consistent information should be carefully evolved by businesses. This is because the absence of trust can make customers unwilling to communicating with businesses using digital media.

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# APPENDIX

**INSTRUCTION**: Please endeavor to complete the questionnaire by ticking the correct answer(s) from the options or supply the information required where necessary.

**TALIMATLAR**: Lütfen seçeneklerden doğru cevabı(cevapları) işaretleyerek anketi doldurmaya çalışın veya gerektiğinde gerekli bilgileri tedarik ediniz.

**Part A: Demographic Information / BÖLÜM A: Demografik Bilgiler**

**INSTRUCTION:** Please choose one answer unless otherwise specified on each question

**Talimatlar:** Lütfen her soruda aksi belirtilmedikçe bir cevap işaretleyiniz.

**1. Gender / Cinsiyet**

a) Male / Erkek ☐

b) Female / Kadın ☐

c) Other (Please specify)/ Diğer (Lütfen belirtiniz) ……………………

**2. Age range /**Yaş Aralığı

a) 16-18 ☐
b) 19-21 ☐
c) 22-24 ☐
d) 25-35 ☐
e) 35+ ☐

**3. What is your educational background?**
**Eğitim geçmişiniz nedir ?**

Middle School/ Ortaokul ☐
High school/ Lise ☐
Under graduate/Üniversite ☐

Graduate/Yüksek Lisans ☐

Doktora/PhD ☐

**Part B: Information about the use of technological innovations and online media**
**BÖLÜM: Teknolojik yeniliklerin ve çevrimiçi medyanın kullanımı hakkında bilgi.**

**4. When did you start using a computer?**
**Bilgisayar kullanmaya kaç yaşında başladınız?**

    a)   Less than 10 years /10 yaşından genç    ☐

    b)  10-15 years old /10-15 yaşında    ☐

    c)  16-21 years old/ 16-21 yaşında    ☐

    d)  22-27 years old / 22-27 yaşında    ☐

    e)  28-35 years old / 28-35 yaşında    ☐

    f)  36 years and above /36 yaşında ya da daha üstü    ☐

**5. When did you start using the internet?**
**Ne zaman internet kullanmaya başladınız?**

    a) Before 2005 / 2005'ten önce    ☐

    b) Between 2005-2009 / 2005-2009 arası    ☐

    c) Between 2010- 2013 / 2010- 2013 arası    ☐

    d) Between 2014-2017 / 2014-2017 arası    ☐

    e) After 2018 / 2018'den sonra    ☐

**6. Which device do you use to connect to the internet often?**
**Hangi cihazla daha fazla internete bağlanıyorsunuz?**
    a)   Laptop / Dizüstü bilgisayar    ☐

    b)  Desktop computer /Masa-üstü  bilgisayar    ☐

    c)  Smartphone /Akıllı telefon    ☐

    d)  Tablet / Tablet    ☐

    e)  Other (Pease specify)/ Diğer (Lütfen belirtiniz) …………………...

**7. Choose the option below that best describes why you prefer to use the Internet for communication (You may choose more than one option)**

**İnterneti neden İletişim için kullanmayı tercih ettiğinizi en iyi açıklayan aşağıdaki seçeneği işaretleyiniz. (Birden fazla seçenek işaretlenebilirsiniz )**

a) Because it is cheap / Ucuz olduğundan dolayı ☐

b) For easy access/ Kolay erişim imkanından dolayı ☐

c) Due to its Interactive features / Etkileşim özelliklerinden dola ☐

d) Due to its global presence / Küresel varlığından dolayı ☐

e) Other (Please specify)/ Diğer (Lütfen belirtiniz) …………………

**Part C: Research Question 1**
**Bölüm C: Araştırma Sorusu 1**

**What medium of communication is predominantly used by both businesses in TRNC?**

**KKTC'de hem müşteriler hem de işletmeler tarafından ağırlıklı olarak hangi iletişim aracı kullanılıyor ?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement in the table below
Lütfen her bir ifadeye ne ölçüde katıldığınızı veya katılmadığınızı aşağıdaki tabloda belirtiniz.

(5)- Strongly agree    (4) - Agree   (3) - Undecided    (2) - Disagree (1) - Strongly Disagree

(5)- Kesinlikle katılıyorum    (4) - Katılıyorum   (3) - Kararsızım   (2) - Katılmıyorum (1) -Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum

| | Statement / Beyan | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | I use social media to communicate with my customers. <br><br> müşterilerimizle iletişime kurmak için Sosyal medyayı kullanıyorum. <br> (Mikro, küçük ve orta ölçekli işletmelerin temsil ediyorsanız cevaplayınız | | | | | |
| 9 | I use WhatsApp to communicate | | | | | |
| 10 | I use Facebook to communicate | | | | | |
| 11 | I use Instagram to communicate | | | | | |
| 12 | I use Twitter to communicate | | | | | |
| 13 | I use Television / Televizyon to communicate | | | | | |
| 14 | I use The radio to communicate / Radyo | | | | | |
| 15 | I use Telegram to communicate | | | | | |
| 16 | I use Individual marketing apps to communicate / Kisisel pazarlama uygulamaları | | | | | |

**Part D: Research Question 2**
**Bölüm D: Araştırma Sorusu 2**

**To what extent do digital media serve as a means of marketing by MSMEs during the covid-19 pandemic period?**

**Dijital medya, covid-19 pandemi döneminde mikro, küçük ve orta ölçekli işletmelerin tarafından ne ölçüde bir pazarlama aracı olarak hizmet ediyor?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement in the table below.

Lütfen her bir ifadeye ne ölçüde katıldığınızı veya katılmadığınızı aşağıdaki tabloda belirtiniz.
(5)- Strongly agree     (4) - Agree   (3)- Undecided   (2) - Disagree (1) - Strongly Disagree

 (5)- Kesinlikle katılıyorum    (4) - Katılıyorum   (3) - Kararsızım   (2) - Katılmıyorum (1) -Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum

|    | Statement / Beyan | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|----|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 32 | Digital media are the major means of doing online marketing. Dijital medya, çevrimiçi pazarlama yapmanın en önemli yoludur. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 33 | Digital media make transaction possible across nations. Dijital medya, ülkeler arasında alışverişi mümkün kılmaktadır. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 34 | Digital media make information accessible to many customers at a time Dijital medya, bilgiyi aynı anda birçok müşteri için erişilebilir kılar |  |  |  |  |  |
| 35 | People have no need to leave their homes to go shopping during the pandemic Pandemi döneminde kişilerin alışverişe gitmek için evlerinden çıkmalarına gerek kalmadı. |  |  |  |  |  |

**Part D: Research Question 3**
**Bölüm D: Araştırma Sorusu 3**

**What medium of communication do the MSMEs mostly use for their advertising their products?**

**mikro, küçük ve orta ölçekli işletmelerin ürünlerinin reklamını yapmak için en çok hangi iletişim aracını kullanıyor?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement in the table below

Lütfen her bir ifadeye ne ölçüde katıldığınızı veya katılmadığınızı aşağıdaki tabloda belirtiniz.

(5)- Strongly agree    (4) - Agree    (3) - Undecided    (2) - Disagree (1) - Strongly Disagree

(5)- Kesinlikle katılıyorum    (4) - Katılıyorum   (3) - Kararsızim   (2) - Katılmıyorum (1) -Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum

| | Statement / Beyan | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | Television is mostly used for advertising. Televizyon çoğunlukla reklam amaçlı  kullanılır. | | | | | |
| 25 | The radio is the medium mostly used for advertisement these days. Radyo, günümüzde  en çok reklam için kullanılan ortamdır. | | | | | |
| 26 | The businesses in TRNC mostly use their private digital application for advertisement. KKTC'deki  işletmeler, reklam  için  çoğunlukla  özel  dijital uygulamalarını kullanıyor. | | | | | |
| 27 | Most businesses use WhatsApp for advertisement. Çoğu  isletme reklam için WhatsApp kullanmaktadır. | | | | | |
| 28 | Most businesses now use Facebook for advertising their businesses. | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Çoğu işletme artık işletmelerinin reklamını yapmak için Facebook'u kullanıyor. | | | | | |
| 29 | Most of the adverts are done on Instagram. | | | | | |
| | Reklamların çoğu İnstagram'da yapılır. | | | | | |
| 30 | It is the twitter that serves as the medium used for advertising. | | | | | |
| | Reklam için kullanılan ortam olarak hizmet veren Twiter'dir. | | | | | |
| 31 | Most businesses use content personalization to reach targeted customers. | | | | | |
| | Çoğu işletme, hedeflenen müşterilere ulaşmak için içerik kişiselleştirmeyi kullanmaktadır. | | | | | |

**Part F: Research Question 4**
**Bölüm F: Araştırma Sorusu 4**

**To what extent have the MSMEs and their customers in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus been able to embrace the use of online marketing?**

**Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti'ndeki mikro, küçük ve orta ölçekli işletmelerin ve müşterileri, çevrimiçi pazarlama kullanımını ne ölçüde benimseyebildiler?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement in the table below

Lütfen her bir ifadeye ne ölçüde katıldığınızı veya katılmadığınızı aşağıdaki tabloda belirtiniz.

(5)- Strongly agree    (4) - Agree   (3) - Undecided   (2) - Disagree (1) - Strongly Disagree

(5)- Kesinlikle katılıyorum    (4) - Katılıyorum   (3) - Kararsızim (2) - Katılmıyorum (1) -Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum

| | Statement / Beyan | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | I am aware of the online marketing going on since the Covid-19 pandemic. | | | | | |
| | Covid-19 pandemisinden bu yana devam eden çevrimiçi pazarlamanın farkındayım. | | | | | |
| 18 | I have only been buying most of my needs online | | | | | |
| | İhtiyaçlarımın çoğunu sadece internetten satın alıyorum | | | | | |
| 19 | Online marketing is mostly used by people in the region | | | | | |
| | Çevrimiçi pazarlama, çoğunlukla bölgedeki insanlar tarafından kullanılır | | | | | |
| 20 | Most people prefer online marketing to in store buying and selling | | | | | |
| | Çoğu insan çevrimiçi pazarlamayı mağaza içi alım satıma tercih eder | | | | | |
| 21 | Buying and selling have become easier for both the buyer and seller | | | | | |
| | Alış ve satış hem alıcı hem de satıcı için daha kolay hale geldi | | | | | |
| 22 | I feel more relaxed with online marketing than in store | | | | | |
| | Çevrim içi pazarlama ile mağazada olduğundan daha Rahat hissediyorum | | | | | |
| 23 | Most businesses use online marketing strategies. | | | | | |
| | Çoğu işletme çevrimiçi pazarlama stratejileri kullanır. | | | | | |

**Part G: Research Question 5**
**Part G: Araştırma Sorusu 5**

**What are the major challenges faced by the businesses and their customers in using the digital media of communicating during the Covid-19 pandemic?**

**Covid-19 pandemi sürecinde işletmeler ve müşterilerin dijital iletişim araçlarının kullanımında karşılaştığı ana zorluklar nelerdir?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement in the table below.

Lütfen her bir ifadeye ne ölçüde katıldığınızı veya katılmadığınızı aşağıdaki tabloda belirtiniz.

(5)- Strongly agree     (4) - Agree    (3) -Undecided    (2) - Disagree (1) - Strongly Disagree

(5)- Kesinlikle katılıyorum    (4) - Katılıyorum   (3) -Kararsızim   (2) - Katılmıyorum (1) -Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum

|    | Statement / Beyan | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|----|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 36 | Many people prefer to see the products they want to buy. <br><br> Bir çok kişi  satin almak istediği  ürünleri görmeyi tercih ediyor. | | | | | |
| 37 | There is network problem always. <br><br> Her zaman ağ  sorunu vardır. | | | | | |
| 38 | Some areas have no network coverage. <br><br> Bazı bölgelerde internet erişimi yoktur. | | | | | |
| 39 | Some individuals are very slow to adapt to change. <br><br> Bazı bireyler  değişime uyum sağlamakta çok yavaştır | | | | | |
| 40 | Some individuals lack confidence in the online marketing. | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Bazı kişiler çevrim içi pazarlamaya güven duymazlar. | | | | | |
| 41 | Transportation or shipping adds to the cost of production. | | | | | |
| | Nakliye veya ulaşım üretim maliyetlerine eklenir. | | | | | |
| 42 | Areas without internet coverage are not reached. | | | | | |
| | Internet kapsam alanı olmayan alanlara ulaşılamıyor . | | | | | |
| 43 | There has to be a lot of advertising to convince customers. | | | | | |
| | Müşterileri ikna etmek için çok fazla reklama ihtiyaç vardır. | | | | | |