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The Role of Innovation Social Media Strategies in Supporting Small Businesses during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study^(*)

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The Role of Innovation Social Media Strategies in Supporting Small Businesses during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the role of social media in supporting small businesses in Bahrain during the COVID-19 pandemic by studying the case study of the “Ezwa” campaign. The paper aims to analyze the planning process and the innovation strategies used by the campaign in social media and how the target audience interacted with these strategies. The researcher conducted a content analysis of the campaign’s posts on Instagram in addition to focus groups with the campaign’s team. The researcher used Rogers’ diffusion of innovation theory (1983) and McGuire’s (1989) dynamic theories matrix to analyze the data. The paper found that the campaign used a strategic plan based on research and strategic goals and objectives. The researcher found that the team used written messages with graphic backgrounds in 34.5% of the Instagram posts, written messages with photos in 9.5% of the posts, graphic design in 44% of the posts, and 12% of the posts used videos to convey the message. The researcher found that 70.2% of the posts used “offer” messages, while 29.8% of the posts used “demand” messages. The results demonstrated that the team used five significant innovation strategies on Instagram posts. 58.3% of the posts used a stimulation strategy, 23.8% of the posts used a noetic (attribution) strategy, 8.3% of the posts used an identification strategy, 4.8% of the posts used an empathy strategy, and 4.8% of the posts used a teleological strategy. The researcher found that all the posts (100%) got “likes”, 78.6% of the posts had comments, while 9.5% of the posts got “mentions”. The findings showed a high interaction with the campaign’s innovation strategies. The paper recommends that further research should be developed to study the impact of social media campaigns in solving social and economic problems in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era using multiple qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Keywords: Social media, Innovation, Communication Strategies, COVID-19 Pandemic, Small Businesses, Strategic Planning.

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected economic development, especially small businesses that have suffered to survive. This study aims to explore the role of social media in supporting small businesses in Bahrain during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper analyzes the case study of the “Ezwa” campaign that uses social media to support local small businesses in Bahrain to utilize social media to approach their target audience during the pandemic. Most of the past literature highlighted the important impact of social media during the pandemic. Moreover, most of the previous studies focused on the media strategies used by governments to raise awareness during the pandemic. Few studies have studied the Bahraini government’s efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic (AlSaqr, 2022; Al-Rashid, 2023). However, there is a considerable gap in the literature regarding providing case studies of the role of social media in supporting small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic in Arab countries. Thus, the contribution of this paper is that it is the first paper that highlights the role of social media strategies used by a non-governmental campaign that aimed to support the local small businesses in Bahrain using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Literature review:

Recent studies have highlighted the significance of the use of technology to support business during and after COVID-19. Bortoló, Valdés, and Nicolas-Sans (2023) stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused an evolution in the business use of Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, and New Technologies. Their research aimed to study the impact of new technologies on society to understand the use of Big Data for the creation and assessment of new products and businesses.

Severo, De Guimarães, Wanderley, Gueiros, and Jabbour (2023) explained that “Many impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were caused on people's health and the economy of countries in its first year”. They argued that the reduction of jobs and social distancing caused impacts on many organizations and changed consumption behaviors. Their research aimed to evaluate the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the use of social media, environmental awareness, sustainable consumption awareness, and social responsibility awareness of different generations in Brazil one year after the launch of the pandemic. As for the data analysis, the research used the structural equation modeling method from a final sample of 1120 respondents. The study highlighted that social media usage could positively influence environmental and social responsibility awareness.

Miah, Hossain, Shikder, Saha, and Neger (2022) explained that online communication had been crucial for the stability of any business during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. They indicated that the online-based business

used promotional activities through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. Their research investigated the impact of social media on online shopping behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of Bangladeshi consumers. They used a questionnaire to collect 350 data points from a purposive sample of Bangladeshi consumers. They used a partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach to evaluate the data and test the hypotheses. The results demonstrated that celebrity endorsement, promotional tools, and online reviews had a positive significant impact on online shopping behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of Bangladesh.

Pratama, Santoso, and Mustanirah (2021) explained that COVID-19 affected Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia. The study reviewed the current impact from the perspectives of SME owners during the COVID-19 outbreak. The study focused on the impact of large-scale social restrictions on SMEs' economic activities and outlined various recommendations for improving current responses to develop business strategies.

Haryati (2021) explained that the agricultural sector had been impacted by COVID-19 as well. The research aimed to map Business Model Canvas (BMC), identify the existing conditions of the business model, and understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the mushroom agro-industry. The research used a quantitative method in April-November 2020. The research found that a proactive strategy required the mushroom agro-industry to actively seize various opportunities in the fast-developing business environment by optimizing digital marketing, marketing strategy, and open partnership.

Another research conducted by Zamani, Rahman, Fauzi, and Yusuf (2021) aimed to identify problems caused by COVID-19 in the building construction industry and mechanisms to reduce COVID-19's negative impact. The researchers conducted interviews with twenty contractor companies that were engaged in building construction projects. The findings showed that COVID-19 caused operational and financial issues, while there was a need for financial aid and complete information to overcome those impacts.

Sardjono, Selviyanti, Tohir, and Azizah (2021) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic forced many organizations to redesign business processes. They suggested that the implementation of knowledge management based on knowledge graphs would enable agile integration between various sources of information.

Shen, Yang, and Gao (2020) found that COVID-19 had caused major disturbances to the global economy and the operations of many businesses in the manufacturing industry. This paper suggested that collaborative intelligent manufacturing technologies could help to address these challenges.

Taweel, Ajrash, and Fraywah (2020) indicated that COVID-19 resulted in a global health and economic crisis. The staying of people at home for weeks

led to the cessation of economic activity, the suspension of the wheel of production, and the disruption of various economic sectors. There was also an increasing impact on several economic sectors, such as the sectors of tourism, aviation, hotels, services, and energy in addition to the various industries of entertainment and sports.

Shararah (2020) argued that there was a need for a clear organizational framework that would combine the three sectors of society (the civil sector, the government sector, and the private sector) to cooperate. This cooperation aimed to offer proposals to provide real job opportunities that depended primarily on self-employment and providing job opportunities through launching small projects. They argued that despite all the initiatives made since the emergence of the Coronavirus to support and develop small projects in Egypt, these efforts were random. The researcher used a theoretical descriptive approach. The results of the paper showed the need to support small and micro projects and focus on helping the groups affected by COVID-19.

Ritz, Wolf, and McQuitty (2019) examined small businesses' participation in digital marketing and integrated the do-it-yourself (DIY) behavior model and technology acceptance model (TAM) to explore the motivations and expected outcomes of such participation. The researchers conducted an online survey with 250 small business owners. The results showed the importance of digital marketing to support the small business industry.

Ilona, Melmusi, Pratiwi, and Zaitul (2019) investigated the relationship between technology context and social media adoption among small and medium enterprises. The research sample included 28 small and medium enterprises in Indonesia. The research highlighted the significance of social media in coping with rapid technological development and suggested various implications and recommendations.

Soegoto and Eliana (2018) explained that the utilization of digital technology and the internet in electronic commerce (e-business) offered an efficient way for businesses to work with vendors, partners, and consumers through extranets. The research used a qualitative method that highlighted significant insights and recommendations. The study suggested the significance of innovative strategies in coping with the competitive social media environment.

He, Wang, Chen, and Zha (2017) argued that social media had become an online platform for businesses to market products/services and manage customer relationships. They indicated that little research had been published regarding decision-making factors for social media adoption by the owners of small businesses. The researchers conducted interviews with 27 small businesses. The research recommended several factors to develop effective social media for small businesses.

A study conducted by Jones, Borgman, and Ulusoy (2015) aimed to explore the role and economic impact that the internet, specifically websites and social media, had on small businesses. The research used a case study methodology based on two surveys and semi-structured interviews with the owners of five small companies in the western mountain region of Maine. The paper found that there had been several benefits from the use of websites and social media sites, such as an increase in awareness, enhanced relationships with customers, and co-promotion of local businesses that contributed to the image of small businesses.

Carmichael and Cleave (2012) highlighted the role of social media advertising for small businesses. They used a case study approach by observing the users who interacted with Facebook advertisements. The results showed that social media advertising could be effective for a small business.

To sum up, the past literature highlighted that the use of social media has been crucial for small businesses, especially during COVID-19. However, there has been a considerable gap in the literature regarding providing case studies of the role of social media in supporting small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic in Arab countries. Besides, there has been a lack of studies that used content analysis to analyze innovation strategies to support local small businesses in the non-governmental sector in Bahrain. Therefore, the contribution of this paper is that it is the first paper that provides an in-depth case study of the role of social media in supporting small businesses by analyzing the case study of the “Ezwa” Campaign in Bahrain.

Theoretical Background:

This section offers a brief explanation of the significant theoretical background that will be beneficial in analyzing the findings.

Diffusion of innovation:

Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory (1983) is one of the most cited contemporary theories in communication planning. Rogers defined diffusion as, “The process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (Rogers, 1995, p.5). According to the diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 1983), “people considering whether to adopt an innovation progress through five steps that parallel the hierarchy of effects in the domino model” (Austin & Pinkleton; 2011, p.326). These steps contain knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. This model emphasizes the impact of previous experience, the needs of the target audience, and the norms and values of society on the diffusion of innovation. Therefore, the communication planner should take into consideration the needs of the target audience and the cultural values of society. Based on this model, Donovan & Henley (2003) explained that it is beneficial to use mass media to raise awareness of new ideas and at the same time, use

personal interaction to persuade the target audience (P.113). Therefore, the strength of social media as an innovation channel is that it combines the impact of both mass and interpersonal communication, as it conveys the message to a large population and establishes interpersonal interaction with the target audience.

McGuire’s (1989) dynamic theories matrix

McGuire’s (1989) dynamic theories matrix focuses on two kinds of appeals: logical appeals and affective appeals. Austin & Pinkleton (2011) explained that “logical appeals serve as useful strategies for publics who have an interest in a topic and some motivation to ponder it” (Austin & Pinkleton; 2011, p.313), while “emotional appeals serve as useful nudges for undecided or uninterested target publics” (Austin & Pinkleton; 2011, p.319). Austin & Pinkleton (2011) offered an adaptation of McGuire’s (1989) dynamic theories matrix (Table 1). The full explanation of the used strategies will be explained in the findings section.

Nature of Motivation State		Need for Stability		Need for Growth	
		Active	Reactive	Active	Reactive
Cognitive	Internal	1. Consistency (cognitive dissonance)	2. Categorization	5. Autonomy	6. Problem solver
	External	3. Noetic	4. Inductional	7. Stimulation	8. Teleological
Affective	Internal	9. Tension-reduction (fear appeals)	10. Ego-defensive	13. Assertion	14. Identification
	External	11. Expressive	12. Repetition	15. Empathy	16. Contagion (bandwagon)

Table 1: McGuire’s (1989) dynamic theories chart (Adapted in Austin & Pinkleton (2011) with permission from Public Communication Campaigns (2nd ed., Table 2.2, p. 54), R. E. Rice & C. K. Atkin (Eds.). Copyright c 1989 by Sage Publications, Inc).

Methodology:

Research goals:

The paper aims to achieve the following goals:

- To study the role of social media in supporting local small businesses in Bahrain by analyzing the case study of the “Ezwa” campaign in Bahrain.
- To study the process of planning and implementing the “Ezwa” campaign.
- To study the innovation strategies used by the “Ezwa” campaign in social media.
- To study the interaction of the target audience with the strategies used by the campaign in social media.

Research questions:

The research aims to answer the following big question:

- What is the role of social media in supporting local small businesses in the “Ezwa” campaign in Bahrain?

The researcher addresses this question by raising the following sub-questions:

RQ1: To what extent has the “Ezwa” campaign used strategic planning?

RQ2: What are the innovation strategies used by the “Ezwa” campaign on social media?

RQ3: How did the target audience interact with the campaign’s strategies on social media?

Research Sample and Methods:

The research focuses on the “Ezwa” Campaign, which is a social campaign that was established on Instagram in the period between 29 March and 11 June 2020. Eight members conducted the “Ezwa” campaign as a university project during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team used social media for several reasons. The first reason was the limited resources of the “Ezwa” campaign because it depended on the voluntary efforts of its members. Second, social media was beneficial for interacting with the target audience during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the social distance and closure procedures.

The researcher conducted multiple qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide an in-depth analysis of the role of social media in supporting local small businesses in Bahrain. To begin with, the researcher conducted several online focus groups with the team to study the campaign’s plans and strategies. Moreover, the researcher got access to the questionnaires that were conducted by the team as part of their strategic plan. In addition, the researcher implemented a content analysis of the campaign’s posts on Instagram. The researcher analyzed all the posts published by the campaign (84 posts) to study the innovation strategies used by the team and analyze how the target audience interacted with these strategies.

Research verification:

The researcher used several methods to ensure the validity of the research. The use of multiple research methods helps improve the quality of results and achieve “data sources triangulation”. Yin indicated that in case study research methodology, “the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon” (Yin, 1994, 92). As for the quantitative analysis, the researcher used content analysis categories based on a well-established theoretical framework. Moreover, another academic reviewed these categories and repeated the content analysis. According to Holsti’s formula, the percent agreement was 92%, which showed the high reliability of the results.

Findings:

This section aims to answer the research question on the role of social media in supporting local small businesses in the “Ezwa” campaign in Bahrain.

This section offers a detailed discussion of the findings concerning the research questions.

RQ1: To what extent has the “Ezwa” campaign used strategic planning?

- PEST Analysis:

The team explained that the “Ezwa” campaign used a strategic plan that started with conducting (PEST) analysis where political, economic, social, and technological factors were taken into consideration as follows,

Political factors: The Bahrain Government supports local small businesses, and several government entities have provided financial and training support during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Economic factors: The COVID-19 pandemic harmed small businesses and caused the closure of some small businesses.

Social factors: Bahraini society acquired a cooperative culture that motivated people to support local small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technological factors: During the COVID-19 pandemic, technological resources helped the owners of local small businesses to market themselves more cheaply and easily.

- SWOT Analysis:

Moreover, the team conducted a SWOT analysis where they pointed out strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as follows,

Strengths: The cooperation of the team’s members with the owners of local small businesses enhanced the campaign; the team's members consisted of media and public relations students who utilized communication strategies to market local small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic

Weaknesses: The campaign’s team consisted of university students and had no allocated budget or resources.

Opportunities: The campaign acquired various opportunities to cooperate with several sponsors and use social media to market local small businesses as a low-budget communication tool.

Threats: The campaign faced competition from other campaigns as most big companies used social media heavily to promote their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Goals and objectives

The team’s members explained the campaign’s goals as follows,

- The campaign aims to support the local small businesses in Bahrain during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The campaign aims to create a positive attitude in Bahraini society towards local small businesses in Bahrain during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objectives

They explained that the campaign aimed to achieve the following objectives:



- To increase the awareness of the Bahraini youth of local small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To encourage the Bahraini youth to interact with the social media activities arranged by the campaign in two months.
- To encourage the Bahraini society to buy from local small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Formative research:

Before starting the campaign on Instagram, the team conducted a quantitative questionnaire to understand the perceptions of the Bahraini society towards local small businesses. Based on the diffusion of innovation model, it is essential to understand the needs of the target audience before developing innovation strategies. The team used a random sample of 384. The team achieved the following results,

- As for gender, 78.5% of the participants were female, and 21.5% were male.
- When the team asked the participants about their perceptions of local goods, 22.6% of the participants described the local products launched by small businesses as “excellent”, 43.5% of the participants described them as “very good”, 27% of the participants described them as “good”, 4.8% of the participants described them as “average”, and 1.2% of the participants described them as “less than average”.
- When the team asked the participants about their perceptions of the prices of local goods, 19.6% of the participants stated that the local businesses provided products with reasonable prices, 70.2% of the participants said that the local businesses provided products with reasonable prices to some extent, while 10.2% disagreed.
- As for the quality of the local products, 55.6% of the participants agreed that the local businesses provided good-quality products, 41.4% of the participants agreed that only some of the local businesses provided good-quality products, while only 3% of the participants disagreed.
- When the team asked the participants about their perceptions of providing support for local small businesses, 87.6% of the participants agreed that they thought of supporting the local businesses by purchasing their products, while 12.4% of the participants disagreed.
- When the team asked the participants if they were willing to buy from local businesses, 71.7% of the participants agreed that they were willing to buy from local businesses, 25.6% of the participants stated that they were not sure, while 2.7% of the participants stated that they were not willing to buy from local businesses.
- As for the things that would motivate the target audience to purchase from the local businesses, 36.2% of the participants stated that the quality of the product motivated them to purchase, 20.2% of the participants

stated that they were attracted to the unique products, 15% of the participants stated that they were attracted to the products with competitive prices, while 14.2% of the participants stated that they were attracted to the promotional offers that addressed their roles in supporting the Bahraini products.

- As for the barriers that prevented the participants from purchasing the products from local small businesses, 35% of the participants stated that the price of the products was the main barrier, 19% of the participants stated that the quality of the product was another barrier, 24.8% of the participants stated that that the barrier was related to both the price and the quality of the product, while 8.8% of the participants stated other barriers such as cultural barriers and peer influences.

Branding the campaign:

The team explained that the campaign had the name “Ezwa” which means in Arabic “Community support” and it was visually a symbol of cooperation and social support. They provided positive messages and practical solutions in cooperation with voluntary and private sectors in Bahrain. The team adopted the slogan “You can make a difference”. The team explained that they used mainly social media because it was difficult to imply personal contact during the first stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. They conducted virtual meetings with the owners of local small businesses in Bahrain to understand their needs. The team explained that their cooperation with the owners of local small businesses was mutual as the campaign marketed their brands and at the same time, the owners of the small businesses provided the campaign with prizes and rewards to motivate the target audience. The team explained that when branding the campaign, they focused on positive values of cooperation and community participation which are significant Arabic and Islamic cultural values.

These results showed that the campaign used a strategic approach that started with a situation analysis and formative research to understand the needs of the target audience and address the cultural values and norms. Then, the team branded the campaign based on the needs of the Bahraini society using positive values in their messages.

RQ2: What are the innovation strategies used by the “Ezwa” campaign on social media?

The team explained that the use of social media was beneficial to implement innovative strategies that the target audience could interact with during the COVID-19 pandemic. They indicated that they focused on Instagram because it had been the most popular social media channel in Bahrain. The team explained that the use of Instagram enabled them to use interactive messages and innovative strategies and reach the target audience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Qualitative analysis of the strategies used by the campaign on Instagram

Based on McGuire's (1989) dynamic theories matrix, the team used five significant innovation strategies as follows,

Empathy strategy:

The team used an "empathy strategy" that "can appeal to people's altruism and desire to feel good for helping others they care about" (Austin & Pinkleton; 2011, p.323). They used the slogan "You are the one who can make a difference" to make the target audience feel good by helping others. Austin and Pinkleton (2011) explained that "this approach can appeal to people's altruism and desire to feel good for helping others they care about" (p.323).

Noetic (attribution) strategy:

The team used a noetic (attribution) strategy to encourage the participation of the target audience in the campaign by associating the organization with the values of the target audience. Austin and Pinkleton (2011) explained that the noetic approach "relies on highlighting an association that gives the target public and the organization some common ground on which to share their perspectives, to encourage the target public to view the organization or its proposed behaviors in a more favorable light." (p.316). The "Ezwa" campaign highlighted the Islamic values of community participation. It is a value that the organization shares with its target audience. It is a strong Islamic value to cooperate and help each other. It is derived from the concept of Islamic "Ummah", where Muslims everywhere should support each other. Social responsibility is highly respected in Islamic values.

Stimulation strategies:

The team used stimulation strategies to motivate the target audience to interact with the campaign's messages. Austin and Pinkleton (2011) noted that "stimulation strategies appeal to people's curiosity or their desire to help create or preserve something with an exciting payoff" (p.319). The team achieved this strategy by using interactive posts and videos and offering prizes and rewards for the interacted target audience.

Teleological strategy:

The team used a teleological strategy that "means heavenlike, and the approach relies on showing what the world would look like if a problem already had been solved" where "the target public is shown the ideal result of implementing a desired behavior, along with a script advising how to make the ideal result become reality" (Austin & Pinkleton; 2011, p.319). The team used an Instagram serial called "One Minute with a Story of a Local Business" that showed the target audience the ideal result of supporting the local small businesses on the economy and the wellbeing of society.

Identification strategy:

Moreover, the campaign used an identification strategy by using role models to convey the messages to the target audience. Based on McGuire’s (1989) dynamic theories, people usually “look to other role models who embody positive characteristics” (Austin & Pinkleton, 2011, p.323). The campaign used interactive posts and videos where role models emphasized their support for local small businesses to encourage the target audience to adopt the same behavior.

Quantitative content analysis of the campaign on Instagram:

Based on the qualitative analysis of the key communication strategies, the researcher implemented a quantitative analysis of all the posts of the “Ezwa” campaign on Instagram. The researcher analyzed 84 posts to answer the research questions. The researcher will discuss the key results in this section.

The message design on Instagram’s posts:

The researcher found that the team used written messages with graphic backgrounds in 34.5% of the posts, written messages with graphic photos in 9.5% of the posts, graphic design in 44% of the posts, and videos in 12% of the posts to convey the message (Table 2).

Message Design	Frequency	Percentage
Written messages with graphic backgrounds	29	34.5%
Written messages with graphic photos	8	9.5%
Graphic design	37	44%
Video	10	12%
Total	84	100%

Table 2: The message design on Instagram’s posts

Based on Kress & Leeuwen’s (1996) framework, a communication planner could either use “demand” or “offer” visuals, where the participant in the posts would look at the viewer and demand that the viewer should enter a kind of imaginary relationship with him or her (Kress & Leeuwen,1996, 122). The “offer visuals” offered the represented participants (characters in the posts) to the viewer as items of information or objects of contemplation (Kress & Leeuwen,1996, 124). The researcher finds that 70.2% of the posts used offer messages while 29.8% of the posts used demand messages (Table 3). The team used both “offer” and “demand” messages in the visuals to convey the message in multiple ways using several strategies that will be explained in the following section.

Message Type	Frequency	Percentage
Offer message	59	70.2%
Demand message	25	29.8%
Total	84	100%

Table 3: The types of used messages

The used strategies on Instagram posts:

The researcher found that the team used five significant strategies on Instagram posts. 58.3% of the Instagram posts used a stimulation strategy, 23.8% of the Instagram posts used a noetic (attribution) strategy, 8.3% of the Instagram posts used an identification strategy, 4.8% of the Instagram posts used an empathy strategy, and 4.8% of the Instagram posts used a teleological strategy (Table 4).

The Used Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Stimulation strategy	49	58.3%
Noetic (Attribution) strategy	20	23.8%
Identification strategy	7	8.3%
Empathy strategy	4	4.8%
Teleological strategy	4	4.8%
Total	84	100%

Table 4: The used strategies on Instagram posts

RQ3: How did the target audience interact with the campaign's strategies on social media?

The researcher found that all the posts (100%) got "likes"; 78.6% of the posts had comments, while 9.5% of the posts got "mentions" (Table 5). The posts had several "mentions" starting from 212 "mentions" to 2,288 "mentions". The posts with high "mentions" used "demand" visuals and "simulation" strategies where the team used rewards and prizes to motivate the interacted target audience. The findings showed a high interaction with the campaign's innovation strategies.

The type of interaction with the posts	Frequency	Percentage
Posts that have comments	66	78.6%
Posts that got "likes"	84	100%
Posts that got "mentions"	8	9.5%

Table 5: The type of interaction of the target audience with the posts

The campaign's outcomes

To evaluate the outcomes of the social media campaign, the team conducted a questionnaire with a random sample of 104 of the target audience who participated in the campaign's virtual activities. The final evaluation of the campaign demonstrated the following results:

- As for the gender and age of the participants, 73.1% of the sample were female, and 26.9% were male. Most of the sample 77.9% were between the age (18-25) years old, 8.7% of the participants were between the age (33-26) years old, 5.8% of the sample were between the age (34-44) years old, and only 1% were above 50 years old. 76.9% of the sample had a

university degree, 22.1% had a high school degree, and 1% had a diploma degree.

- When the team asked the participants about the impact of the campaign on their recognition of new local small businesses in Bahrain, 85.6% of the sample stated that the campaign helped them to recognize new local small businesses in Bahrain, 7.7% of the participants said that the campaign helped them to some extent to recognize new local small businesses in Bahrain, while 6.7% of the sample stated that the campaign did not help them to know new local small businesses in Bahrain.
- When the team asked the participants about the impact of the campaign's videos on their attitudes, 78.8% of the participants stated that the videos used in the campaign's account created a positive attitude towards supporting local small businesses in Bahrain, 14.4% of the sample said that the videos created a positive attitude to some extent towards supporting local small businesses in Bahrain, and 6.7% of the sample stated that the videos did not affect their attitudes towards local businesses in Bahrain.
- When the team asked the participants about the impact of the campaign's serials on their involvement in the needs of the local market, 65.4% of the sample stated that (One Minute with a Story of a Local Business) helped them to feel involved in the needs of the local market, 26% of the sample stated that (One Minute with a Story of a Local Business) helped them to feel involved to some extent in the needs of the local market, and 8.7% said that (One Minute with a Story of a Local Business) did not help them to feel involved in the needs of the local market.
- As for the satisfaction of the sample with the campaign's activities, 66.3% of the sample indicated that they were highly satisfied with the campaign's activities, 21.2% of the sample were satisfied with the campaign's activities, 5.8% of the sample were satisfied to some extent with the campaign's activities, 4.8% were not satisfied with the campaign's activities, and 1.9% were highly not satisfied with the campaign's activities.
- Based on the final evaluation of the campaign, 62.5% of the sample stated that the campaign encouraged them to buy from local stores, 26.9% of the sample stated that the campaign encouraged them to some extent to buy from local stores, and 10.6% of the sample said that the campaign did not affect their behavior towards local businesses.
- When the team asked the participants to rate their level of satisfaction out of (5), 66.3% of the sample gave a rate of (5) to the campaign's activities, 21.2% of the sample gave a rate of (4), 5.8% of the sample gave a rate of (3), 4.8% of the participants gave a rate of (2), and 1.9% of the sample gave a rate of (1).



Discussion and Conclusion:

The findings of this research demonstrated that the “Ezwa” campaign used a strategic plan to attract the target audience. Despite the low budget of the campaign, the campaign’s team used a strategic plan. They conducted a situation analysis and researched the needs of the target audience. The campaign’s team used multiple strategies to motivate the target audience to support local small businesses in Bahrain. The researcher found that the team used five strategies on Instagram posts. 58.3% of the Instagram posts used a stimulation strategy, 23.8% of the Instagram posts used a noetic (attribution) strategy, 8.3% of the Instagram posts used an identification strategy, 4.8% of the Instagram posts used an empathy strategy, and 4.8% of the Instagram posts used a teleological strategy. These strategies were related to the cultural Islamic and Arabic norms and values of society that are based on community participation. Based on the findings, the stimulation strategy was beneficial in motivating the target audience to interact with the campaign’s activities.

The findings of the research highlighted the role of social media in solving economic problems during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for the campaigns implemented with limited resources. Moreover, social media has succeeded in achieving interaction with the target audience when social distance was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the limitations of the campaign was its short period because it depended on the voluntary efforts of its team. Thus, it is essential to enhance cooperation with governmental and private entities to improve the impact of the campaign.

The contribution of this study is that it is the first research that focused on the innovation strategies used by a non-government campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Arab Gulf using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The paper recommends that further research should be developed to study the impact of social media campaigns in solving social and economic problems in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era using multiple research methods.

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