

## Social Media Approach and Management perceptions

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of current mediamarketing applications and practicesutilized by C-level managers in SMEs to improve the business models and hence the profitability. Although most studies have investigated traditional and social media marketing applications in developed countries, limited studies have focused on SMEs marketing practices and the applications of social media marketing in developing countries, particularly Kuwait. The present research provides insights into the social media marketing and traditional marketing practices prior to covid-19 employed by SMEs executives in Kuwait. This study is supported by the application of grounded theory. The data analysis produces two significant codes and categories referred to as “Axial Code-2” and “Axial Code 3”. The findings confirmed with the previous studies in terms oflimitations and challenges faced by SMEs executives with social media marketing practices and applications.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Media Marketing, Grounded Theory, Traditional Marketing, SMEs,Kuwait

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### I. INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, nascent generation of web and mobile applications empowered the users to interact and generate content online and immerse themselves in alternate universe (Damer 2008). Consequently, organization’s exposure and performance in business, especially small medium enterprises (SMEs) have been improved. Furthermore, marketing communication has changed significantly in recent years. During the start of twentieth century, mass media communication mainly transmittedinformation to vast segments of the population using traditional channels such as print-newspapers, billboards, magazines T.V. broadcastings, radios, and other media. Marketing communication through mass media perceived as one-way feed rather than interactive feed with little regard to the diverse needs and values of consumers. Often, this refers to as “one size fits all” approach considered to be costly and uninformative due to lack of tools for measuring results in terms of sales and customers satisfactions. With more touchpoints and channels between the organizations and their consumers, the recent shift onto one unified strategy and clear messaging that commonly known as “integrated marketing communication” or IMC.Recently, organizations refined their marketing messages for the target audiences by actively listening to consumers’ needs and redesign the business process to promote two-way communication between the firms and theconsumers(Kotler and Armstrong 2010).

The IMCs promotional tools includes everything from search engine optimization (SEO), webinars, blogs,andsocial media networks. The past decade has witnessed a proliferation of web and mobile applicationsfor socializing among consumers using social media networking such as Facebook, Twitter, andInstagram (Taylor 2010).Because of the evolutions in information technology communication (ICT), marketers must decide on the appropriate combination of traditional and digital marketing applications and tools to build a strong brand awareness and consumer relationships management, better business model and improve the profitability. Hence, it is important that organizations ensure the messagesremain consistent across multiple communication channels regardless of whether the utilized channels are traditional, digital, or altogether. ICT can enhance an organization’s exposure and performance in business, particularly helps small medium enterprises (SMEs) to become more competitive (Cloete, Courtney andFintz 2002, O’Dwyer, Gilmore, and Carson, 2009). Therefore, the use of marketing communication in terms of social media-mediated communication is cost-effective opportunities among SMEs (Cloete, Courtney andFintz 2002).

For last decade, traditional media has played a vital role. However, after the rise of e-marketing and social media marketing, traditional media marketing started to decline gradually. Therefore, companies become more reluctant to invest in traditional media marketing than before due to many reasons. Firstly, traditional media is costly in terms of adverts in T.V. and print media (Amhed and Hussain, 2014). In this respect, it would imply that social media marketing becomes affordable for small businesses and help them in managing costs and hence become more efficient even thoughSMEs still in its infancy stage as opposed to large companies (Salehi et al 2012). Secondly, traditional media marketing consumes extended time to set-up and process and more efforts to post a single advert whereas social media platforms are powerful to post many adverts promptly and instantly.

Thirdly, traditional media has lower exposure rate as opposed to social media adverts. Fourthly, there is limited allowable aired time for television and radio shows that may affect the adverts exposure and effectiveness. Fifthly, traditional media has limited customer reach as opposed to social media. Sixthly, traditional media adverts limited view since the adverts aired for a short period of time whereas social media enables multiple views of saved adverts. Furthermore, the young generation cannot be reached and targeted through traditional media platform such as print media because they are heavily users of social media channels. Moreover, traditional media does not reach the targeted audiences easily whereas social media has an effective impact and reach. Lastly, print media is not environmentally friendly byproduct because it wastes valuable resources that are used for manufacturing the print media. Traditional print media adversely affecting the environment and forests due to the heavy production of papers that cause the deteriorations of nature, escalating greenhouse gas emissions, wasting resources, and its after consumption wastes. Even though social media marketing attracted large companies in terms of marketing activities become more exciting with powerful tools and distinctive features such as interactivity, social media still impose a challenge for SMEs. Therefore, many SMEs have missed great deal of opportunities such as customer immediate interactions and feedback, customer relationship management (CRM), business process improvement and customer information processing (Amhed and Hussain 2014, Salehi et al 2012, Cheng and Shiu 2019). In addition, the rise of social media stimulates the development of entrepreneurship and economic growth (Boufaden 2013).

## **II. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM**

Kuwait has a rich and relatively open economy with crude oil reserves of about 104 billion barrels and about 6 percent of world reserves. Petroleum accounts for over half of GDP, 92 percent export revenues and 90 percent of government income (Giris and Ramadan, 2018). Kuwait experienced its first budget deficit in year 2015 when the deficit grew to 16.5 percent of GDP which was reduced to 7.2 percent in the subsequent year. The New Kuwait 2035 strategic plan aims to transform Kuwait to financial, commercial, and cultural hub by 2035 in the region. The plan calls for diversifying the economy. Despite its dependence on oil revenues, the government proposed policy of diversification to move away from oil dependency and save its economy from declining in oil prices and deficits shocks. The diversification of economy includes private sector participation on the economy growth, developing infrastructure, and developing generation funds. Another method proposed is to encourage the growth of small entrepreneur businesses and SMEs and promoting entrepreneurship among youth in Kuwait.

The SME sector is relatively new in Kuwait. The Kuwait's Emir has provided six billion grants for the development of Kuwait national fund for SME development in 2013. In Kuwait, SMEs are defined based on number of citizens employed, asset size in terms of capital investment and revenue size. Entities that employ less than 50 citizens and have an asset value less than 500,000 KD with revenues of less than 1,500,000 KD are considered as medium enterprises. Entities that employ less than four Kuwaiti workers with capital investment less than 250,000 KD are considered as small enterprises. It worth noting here that there is no standardized definition for SMEs in Kuwait and there is no existence for micro-business entities that consists of lower threshold than small entities in Kuwait. SMEs in Kuwait contribute around 3 percent of the GDP and 23 percent of formal employment according to World Bank (2016). The SMEs contribution to GDP and employment in Kuwait is lower than both developed and developing economies which ranges between 35 percent to 50 percent with employment contribution is nearly 50 percent. On the other hand, nearly 40 percent of SMEs in Kuwait concentrated in the wholesale/retailing business, hotels, and restaurants whereas 33 percent are in construction and industry sectors. Prior to covid-19 era, there were approximately 30K SMEs which represent around 81 percent of total businesses in Kuwait. However, their contribution is little to economic growth (Giris and Ramadan, 2018).

Approximately 90 percent of private companies are considered SMEs in Kuwait, the public sector is still the main source of employment in Kuwait. Often, there is lack of entrepreneurial skills, incentives, and resources among Kuwaiti workers to start their own projects. It is commonly known that SMEs demonstrated essential contributions to economic diversification, economic growth, job creation and technological innovations in developing and developed countries around the globe. However, this is not the case in Kuwait as SMEs sector has not received adequate government attention and financial support here. In addition, the sector lacks actual data on SMEs, coordination, effectiveness, definition, and objectivity (Koch, 2011, Giris and Ramadan, 2018). For these reasons, the purpose of the current research is to investigate the effectiveness of marketing communication using social media mediated communications among SMEs in Kuwait.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing can be viewed as a process to identify stakeholders needs and wants, anticipate value propositions, and satisfy diverse needs of consumers at a profit (Kotler and Armstrong 2010). Many people mistakenly associated marketing concept mainly with selling and advertising activities. Indeed, marketing plays an essential role in each types of organization regardless of whether it is profit, non-profit, i.e., charities or public organizations (Costa et al, 2011). The two common methods of marketing in modern societies are traditional marketing and e-marketing including social media marketing (Salehi et al 2012). E-marketing can be regarded as the application of information technology (IT) to traditional media to communicate better with customers and deliver value. Ultimately, it is a way to benefit businesses and their investors (Hasan 2011). In general, many studies compared between traditional marketing and e-marketing and empathized that e-marketing is more cost-effective and feedback immediacy for small business than traditional marketing methods (Amhed and Hussain 2014, Salehi et al 2012, Cheng and Shiu 2019). Many researchers concentrated on the personal characteristics of starting small enterprises (Kerr and Kerr, 2017), the traits of executives which is a similar concept (Collinson and Shaw, 2001; Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 1995; Covin and Slevin, 1989; Cummins, Gilmore, Carson and O'Donnell, 2000; Covin and Slevin, 1991), small business growth and the characteristics of growth orientated small enterprises (Dutta and Thornhill, 2014, Dwyer and Kotey, 2015), the executives characteristics and the financial performance of small businesses (Churchill and Lewis, 1983).

According to Bjerke and Hultman (2002), each country has its own definition of SMEs. For instance, SMEs are small business types with low market share, sales are less than US\$20 million annually and there are less than 500 employees among USA market. SMEs have less than 200 employees in UK whereas employees are not more than 250 and turnover is not more than 40 million in EU. The number of employees in SMEs is not more than 300 employees in Japan. Carson and Grant (1998) defined SMEs from management and decision-making perspective in terms of small size and effect on the environment that make SMEs vulnerable for intensive competition. There is lack of business experts as these are managed by owner/manager (Stokes, 1995, Stokes, 1998). There is lack of financial resources which would affect the organizational growth (Bygrave, 1989; Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 1995). Management style in entrepreneurship is continuously changing because innovating and adapting must suits customer needs (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 1995). Decision making is likely to be simple as it lacks sophistication and structure (Storey, 1995). The literature also covered the managerial implications of such an orientation within SMEs especially training and staff development (Higgins and Aspinall, 2011).

Previous strand of literature found differences in SME marketing requirements between countries due to cultural factors influencing markets and business practices within these markets (Zontanos and Anderson, 2004) The importance of innovation within the field of SMEs marketing has been identified by Hills and LaForge (1992) and Hills and Hultman, (2011). However, many studies pointed that there is lack of innovation in the marketing theory that is focused on needs of the SME (Andrews and Smith, 1996; Stokes, 2000;). Morris and Lewis (1995) and Morris, Schindehutte, and Laforge, (2002) linked the marketing behaviour of SMEs to the practical 'real-world' approach of marketing problems, especially in fast changing markets resulting in necessary adaptations and hence innovative marketing behaviour based on necessity. A similar perspective is expressed that changing market conditions, financial constraints, and the need to 'think out of the box' for innovative entrepreneurially based marketing solutions (Lado and Maydeu-Olivares, 2001). According to Thongsri and Chang (2019), innovation is a necessary condition of market orientation which focuses on the competitive differentiation achieved through innovation.

Although most previous studies focused on the developed countries, the existing studies concerned with the contribution of SMEs to economic growth is very limited, particularly in developing markets and GCC markets. Some studies explored the importance role of the existing marketing media for SMEs in the service sector. A recent study in India concluded that online media gained importance in marketing and contributed to the success of SMEs in terms of cost-effective, broaden the customer database and nurturing leads (Ahmed, Dixit and Sharma, 2020). Another current study conducted among 500 people in China revealed that social media strengthen the effects of interpersonal communication compared with traditional media which has no effect (Han and Xu, 2020). A significant study is also conducted in developing countries (GCC), particularly is UAE market, shed lights on the benefits that SME gained by using digital innovations platform including business performance. The study revealed some disadvantages of digital innovations including increased competitions and open purchasing options for customers based on price and quality among variety of SMEs social media sites (Nusier, 2018). Another study found in Kuwait investigated the attitudes of young generation on small business ventures as SMEs are the main engine for economic growth factor (Al-Wugayan and Shimiri, 2010). Similarly,

Alraja et al(2020) highlighted the crucial relationship between SMEs performance efficiency and Facebook adverts in terms of ease of use, targeting, interaction, and brand awareness among 342 participants in Oman. However, to our knowledge, limited studies have addressed this significant issue regarding the traditional marketing and social media mediated communication practices employed by SMEs in developing economies. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the extend of the recent applications of social media and traditional media among SMEs in Kuwait.

**IV. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The aim of present research is to explore the extent to which small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kuwait utilize traditional and social media marketing applications and tools. Qualitative data collected was completed by means of self-administrated depth interviews by using unstructured questionnaires obtained from a sample of SMEs owners who registered their businesses officially. The purpose of depth interviews is to discover the deep hidden thoughts, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors concerning social media marketing among SMEs in Kuwait from the interviewees. Depth interviews are direct and unstructured personal interviews where interviewer competence, openness, experiences, and professionalism are the keys for their success (Malhotra, 2003). In-Depth interviews were carried out among SMEsnineteen(19) executives in Kuwait to explore the marketing communication using social media for executives of SMEsin private sector (profit and non-profit enterprises) in Kuwait. The conducted interviews were prolonged and challenged task. The data collection process started in May 2012 and ended in January 2013 which is roughly nine months duration. The researchers have conducted as many interviews as possible from top managers in variety of sectors in Kuwait. The cut-off point was determined after the researchers collected a remarkable and credible amount of data which enrich the area of study and covers the research topic here (Charmaz, 2006). The interviews were recorded, were translated from Arabic language to English language, checked, corrected, analyzed, and categorized into codes based on grounded theory. Jointly, there were nineteen (19) interviews conducted and recorded. A total of 19 individuals (14 men, 5 women; aged 26 – 55) participated in the interview sessions. Table 1 summarizes the participant demographic. The authors conducted all the interviews, which were completed face to face. All the interviews were audio recorded, with an average of 50 minutes per interview.

Table 1: Participants Demographic Data

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education</b>
Profit	Male	55	PhD
Profit	Female	33	Bachelor
Profit	Male	35	Bachelor
Profit	Male	26	Bachelor
Non-profit	Female	36	Diploma
Non-profit	Female	44	Diploma
Profit	Male	37	Master
Non-profit	Male	38	Bachelor
Profit	Female	39	Bachelor
Profit	Female	33	Bachelor
Profit	Male	38	Bachelor
Non-profit	Male	34	Master
Profit	Male	35	Master
Non-profit	Male	32	Bachelor
Profit	Male	36	Bachelor
Non-profit	Male	38	Master
Profit	Male	45	Master
Profit	Male	48	Bachelor
Profit	Male	42	Bachelor

The data were analyzed based on the two rules of grounded theory. The first rule explained that the data analysis must be relevant to the aim and research questions while the other rule is focused on underlying concepts that can be articulated as descriptive and explanatory idea and its embedded meaning to provide a conception (Birks and Mills, 2008). The importance of coding as clarified by grounded theory evolves from making short codes that are specific which generated from conducted interviews to build a comprehensive structured theory. The coding as clarified in grounded theory builds the foundation and base of the analysis process. When these codes are gathered, the theoretical integration formed the structure (Charmaz, 2006).

When the codes are turned from general to specific, allows researchers to become knowledgeable and observant and less judgmental. In grounded theory, coding consists of two central phases: the initial phase, where each word and segment of data is labelled, and the second phase is known as the focused phase which combines and organizes significant amounts of data (Charmaz, 2006). The researchers are inspired by coding to examine hidden assumptions in their own language as well as that of participants (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, it is essential for researchers attentive to new ideas and away from their own biases and prejudice to allow new knowledge to emerge. In other words, the researchers must be fully presented and free themselves from past experiences, stereotyping and future expectations. The researchers must focus on every word, sentence, and phrase like they hear it for the first time. This act provides researchers an opportunity for freedom to generate fresh data. Initial codes are provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data. The researchers remained accessible to other analytical possibilities and created codes that best fit the collected data. Then, the researchers progressively reviewed codes to validate its corresponding with the undertaken topic. Then, they gathered data to explore predetermined codes' (Charmaz, 2006). The researchers were vigilant and tentative to new ideas because this improves the development of the flow of new and fresh data and helps to improve the research environment and builds the ability to be non-judgmental. Charmaz (2006) also suggested that it is important for researchers to be observant and attentive to what might emerge from codes. It is also essential to keep the codes dynamic, reasoned, short and logical.

Strauss and Corbin (2008) defined open coding-which is first stage in data analysis-as the process of partitioning, assessing, evaluating, conceptualizing, and categorizing data. Open codes begins when statements are put into codes which are related to the undertaken study and are derived from the study research questions. The sentences in the collected interviews were tagged using 'comment function' which is located on the right-side margin of each interview transcripts. Next, the open codes in each interview were colored-coded corresponding to their individual axial code. Only one out of the nineteen transcripts with the SME stop managers were administered in Dubai branch of a Kuwaiti company whereas the remaining eighteen administered inside the country of Kuwait. The recordings of the interviews conducted via a mobile application known as 'Voice Memos'. Moreover, each axial code has been sketched as an individual pie chart, and then codes drawn as one pie chart collectively. Similarly, the codes were represented in a single-column chart. Furthermore, the graphical representation clearly revealed the frequency of each open code and the frequency of the individual axial codes.

The second phase of coding is known as focus coding which comes after the initial coding. The focus coding identified by the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through enormous data. The focus coding requires researchers to decide which initial codes make the most analytic sense to be categorized data intelligently and wholly (Charmaz, 2006). Focus coding is not a linear process where the researchers never return to the start of the collected data. Occasionally, the researcher might return to the beginning of the data to examine it further to make the appropriate connection with the new data and information. The axial coding phase seeks to connect categories with subcategories and determine how the categories and subcategories are related (Charmaz, 2006). The axial coding is about being selective and organized when examining and exploring enormous data to find the relationship and connection in the data that has been already studied and examined in the open coding stage (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). The axial coding provides answers to questions such as when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences (Charmaz, 2006).

## **V. DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS**

In this research, axial codes were developed to answer the undertaken research question. A total of nineteen (19) interviews were collected from profit and non-profit enterprises in Kuwait. Then, the collected data were open coded in accordance with guidelines explained by Strauss and Corbin (2008). Then, in accordance with the guidelines given by Strauss and Corbin (2008), these open codes were placed in axial categories, which represented overall themes or categories. Totally, the in-depth interviews generated 2,713 individual statements which were given open codes. There are 641 out of 2713 individual statements reflecting the views on social media and traditional media in SMEs. Overall, 2 different axial categories were constructed. The axial code 2

represent traditional media marketing category whereas axial code 3 represent social media application. The axial code 2 consists of 199 open codes whereas axial code 3 consists of 442 open codes. The axial code 2 represents the “**Factors related to SMEs traditional marketing,**” accounts for 7percent of the total number of open codes. Totally, there are 199 statements reflecting open codes in axial code 2. The open codes explain the importance of traditional marketing to SMEs.In axial code 2, the most important open code is code 2, “**Traditional and newspaper marketing became less trendy and popular,**” which represents 28percent of the total open codes. The second important open code is code 1, “**Traditional marketing wasted time and efforts**” which represents 22percent of the total open codes, and the third-most important open code is 10 is “**Newspaper adverts were not attractive,**” which was 16percent of the total open codes. The fourth most important code is code 11 signify that “**TV integrated with social media marketing and make it more effective than before,**” which represents 14 percent of the total open codes. Moreover, open codes 5, “**Many newspapers advertising outlets started to close down,**” and open code 6, “**Newspapers adverts became the last communication option,**” are together important codes. Altogether open code 5 and open code 6 present only 14percent of the total open codes. However, this reflects the reality-checkin Kuwait that many newspapers outlets have closed, and newspaper advertisements became less attractive to SMEs. As a result, newspapers became the last communication option to be implemented. This means that SMEs lessen the preference of traditional marketing advertisements and favored marketing through social media applications and practices. Therefore, axial code 2, “**Factors related to SMEs traditional marketing,**” is 7percent of the overall open codes. The open code 2, “**Traditional and newspaper marketing became less trendy and popular**” is the most important open code in axial code 2. The remaining open codes 1, 2, 10 and 11 have higher percentages compared to the others as demonstrated in Table 1 below:

**Table 2: Axial Code 2 with Examples of Constituent Open Codes and Frequencies**

Code NO.	Axial Code 2	Axial Code Group	Total Statements	Percentage
	***Factors related to SMEs’ traditional marketing	2	199	7%
1	<b>Traditional marketing wasted time and efforts</b>	2	43	22%
2	<b>Traditional and newspaper marketing became less trendy and popular</b>	2	56	28%
3	Traditional Media had a strong impact before the introduction of social Media	2	3	2%
4	Many tweets have greater impact	2	8	4%
5	<b>Many newspapers advertising outlets started to close down</b>	2	25	13%
6	Newspapers adverts became the last communication option	2	1	1%
7	Newspaper ads are moving online	2	1	1%
8	The young generation cannot be reached and targeted	2	1	1%
9	Social media applications created more opportunities and ways of marketing	2	2	1%
10	<b>Newspaper adverts were not attractive</b>	2	32	16%
11	<b>TV integrated with social media marketing and make it more effective than before</b>	2	27	14%

Axial code 3 represents the “**Factors related to SMEs social media marketing,**” has the highest frequencies because it consists of 16percent of the total of open codes. There are 442 open codes in axial code 3. These codes explain the views and the importance of social media marketing to SMEs.In axial code 3, the most important open code is 17, “**Social Media has improved communication process,**” which represents 18percent of the total open codes. In axial code 3, the second-most important open code is 4, “**Social Media users can access Social Media networks anytime and anywhere (24/7),**” which is 13percent of the total open codes.The third important open code is 11, “**Social media helped SMEs to grow,**” which is 12percent of the total open codes. Moreover, open code 1, “**Social Media Marketing is cost efficient,**”is selected to be an important because SMEs usually have limited resources and budgets.Therefore, marketing in social media saves

businesses monies and efforts. SMEs were attracted to social media marketing. SMEs started to understand the influential role of social media applications and its importance. Consequently, the SMEs started to utilize as a tool to market their products and/or services as demonstrated in Table 2.

**Table 3: Axial Code 3 with Constituent Open Codes and Frequencies**

Code No.	Axial Code 3	Axial Code Group	Total Statements	Percentage
	***Factors related to SMEs' social media marketing	<b>3</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Marketing through Social Media is cost efficient</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>2</b>	Social Media marketing save money, time, energy and bring more customers	3	23	5%
<b>3</b>	SMEs marketing via Social media has become popular	3	23	5%
<b>4</b>	<b>Social media users can access social media from anywhere at anytime (24/7)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>5</b>	Social media has helped SMEs to bring traditional customers in one place	3	22	5%
<b>6</b>	Social media marketing allowed customers to respond quickly	3	3	1%
<b>7</b>	Social Media marketing helped SMEs to become profitable, efficient and effective	3	12	3%
<b>8</b>	Social media affected marketing in a positive way	3	1	0%
<b>9</b>	Social media improved quality control and customer service among SMEs	3	8	2%
<b>10</b>	Social media marketing has improved business process and made monitoring easier	3	4	1%
<b>11</b>	<b>Social Media helped SMEs to grow</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>12</b>	Social media affected traditional businesses to get out of the market	3	1	0%
<b>13</b>	Social media has driven new type of business to enter the market	3	1	0%
<b>14</b>	Social media helped SMES to become globally known	3	10	2%
<b>15</b>	Social media became an attractive option to many SMEs	3	3	1%
<b>16</b>	Many top managers depend on social media	3	17	4%
<b>17</b>	<b>Social Media has improved marketing communication processes</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>18</b>	Social media boost-up the marketing activities	3	1	0%
<b>19</b>	Because of social media networkings capabilities, SMEs stopped advertisement elsewhere	3	3	1%
<b>20</b>	Social media adverts have unlimited views and interactions	3	7	2%
<b>21</b>	Social media channels enables marketers to gather informations about customers	3	5	1%

22	Social media helped top managers in learning process	3	6	1%
23	Social media helped SMEs access new markets	3	1	0%
24	Many SMEs started to depend on social media	3	6	1%
25	The news about SMEs activities spread quickly	3	12	3%
26	Social media applications are available for smart phones users	3	35	8%
27	Social media has benefited individuals and SMEs	3	2	0%
28	SMEs has reduced newspapers adverts	3	11	2%

To sum up, the current study pinpointed the influential role that traditional marketing used to have before the introduction of social media. The present study also indicated that the applications of social media became extremely popular and urgent among SMEs in Kuwait after the collapsed of traditional media. This in accordance with past study conducted by Sin Tan, Chong, and Lin, (2013). The trend of social media applications was growing gradually among SMEs executives. The social media applications were still nascent, effective, efficient, and accessible technology to support business operations among SMEs in Kuwait. It is worth noted that most C-level managers and owners spotted that the need for the traditional media marketing has reduced among the SMEs since individuals started utilizing social media since year 2006 in Kuwait. Therefore, top managers had to make critical decisions to apply social media marketing in their enterprises which was urgent and risky at that time. The executives have witnessed that some SMEs with some social media presence have a better chance in the marketplace in terms of economies of scale, growth in market share, and customer satisfactions. This finding harmonized with past studies including Zeiller and Schauer (2011), Cloete, Courtney, and Fintz (2002) and Derham, Cragg, and Morrish (2011). As a result, this practice pressured SMEs to be creative and innovative generating new ideas, products, and services than their competitors in the same sector and large companies' counterpart. The SMEs top managers have faced critical challenges on how-to-use techniques. This meant that they faced challenges on how to utilize social media platform to reach their customers and target market. The main challenges including difficulties deciding on how to market the products and services in social media platform, network and interact with various stakeholders, and analyse information about stakeholders (Barba-Sanchez, Martinez-Ruiz, and Jimenez-Zarco, 2007). An Outsourcing can be beneficial to executives of SMEs accessing pool of expertise that might increase SMEs' level of performance, productivity, and creativity (Agburu, Anza, and Iyortsuun, 2017).

More importantly, social media sites generated tremendous amount of information about the customers and other stakeholders. Many executives faced the challenge with information gathered and scattered from different multiple social media sites about stakeholders and the information that have been collected from offline media. Integration of data became an issue facing executives in SMEs in Kuwait. The issue becomes ubiquitous among SMEs in Kuwait. The executives are also faced with technological issues such as employing effective databases which can integrate data collected from multiple sites and channels and analysing information about stakeholders, products, transactions, and financial which generated by online and offline modes. There was an urgency to implement a system that integrates data and analyse data which is not efficient SMEs as they still at their infancy stage and reducing the financials is crucial practice. The analysed and integrated data can be utilized to market products and service offered which aligned with companies' strategies and objectives. The executives would be capable to catch a glimpse of new opportunities in the current target market and better serve the customers. The executives need to access current data and the right types of information that support their social media marketing strategies because social media platform is highly interactive environment. Moreover, social media communication enables the SMEs to update their products and/or services and/or create new ones and create needed marketing knowledge. In addition, social media could maintain transactions records which saves time and effort for SMEs and enabled them to create the database and share it. This helps SMEs to construct the most appropriate type of information management system that make this more successful than their counterparts. The finding is in accordance with past study conducted by Locke (2004). It is very critical to note that despite all the advantages that might social media application offered to SMEs; many SMEs has suffered severely. This is due to limited knowledge and expertise on social media applications and data integrations. Furthermore, SMEs have access to limited resources compared with large companies that operate in the same sector. Although many executives are educated and have the relevant business education that enable them to understand the business environment, many struggled with social media marketing plans and strategies as well as data integrations.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The current study explored the extent of social media applications and traditional media practices amongst SMEs which operate in the private sector in Kuwait prior to the Covid-19 era. This study applied grounded theory approach. The main purpose of grounded theory is not limited to data collection and analysis but allows concepts and themes to emerge. The current study concluded that SMEs operate in a growing, dynamic and sustaining private sector (profit and non-profit) in Kuwait. The urgency to apply social media became significant among SMEs in the private sector in Kuwait. SMEs must remain competitive, efficient, and productive locally and globally. This requires a great deal of knowledge, applications, skills and techniques of social media that align to the marketing strategies that add value to enterprises. Indeed, there is a growing need to be cost-effective among SMEs. The social media application became a cost-effective tool that helps SMEs to better market themselves to target audience, identify marketing opportunities, improve communication, interaction, and engagement with target market, assist in information analytics that helps executives to make a better decision. It is recommended that SMEs might need to reach out for outsourcing to cut down cost, save energy and improve management efficiency. An outsourcing can be an essential approach for executives in SMEs due to small and medium sized enterprises and have limited access for resources. The implications for academics and business practitioners must acknowledge the fact that despite the growth of social media in shaping societies and businesses, data integration in online and off-line media remains under-researched area becomes essential within businesses. And this was the biggest challenge among executives of SMEs in Kuwait. The analysed and integrated data assist businesses to market products and services offered which should align with enterprises' strategies and objectives. The appropriate knowledge and expertise are needed to add values to enterprises in an ever-changing environment. This might assist SMEs with social media marketing planning and strategies that contribute to the success of the enterprises before the introduction phase such as the product life cycle (PLC) in Kuwait. The implications for academics to introduce courses for students that focus on data integrations, social media, and big data analytics within the general business administration programs in academic universities and institutions in Kuwait.

This study is an exploratory and still at its early stages. Therefore, further quantitative studies should be conducted to include demographics data of executives such as age, years of experience, gender etc. to examine and model brand building, culture and behaviour impact, and marketing mix among SMEs in Kuwait. The future research should also investigate innovation and entrepreneurship role and examine the impact on performance factors in the region. Future research is also required to further investigate the concept in other countries in the regions and around the globe before and after COVID-19 periods. Individual cases and empirical studies must be undertaken to examine the SMEs from different sectors. A comparison between profit and non-profit sectors can also be examined in the region.

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