



Measuring New Normal Strategy of Brands on Digital Branding during Covid-19

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Paper ID: 13A5U

Volume 13 Issue 5

Received 28 December 2021

Received in revised form 19

April 2022

Accepted 26 April 2022

Available online 03 May

2022

Keywords:

Digital Branding; Social Media; Strategy; Covid-19; and SMEs

Abstract

The research addresses the role of digital marketing solutions in creating a synergy of SMEs and the influence of customer perception in building strong branding during COVID-19. The researcher has taken the communication through social media (SCM) as an independent variable, whereas the market shares (MS), brand loyalty (BL), and general feedback from customers (GF) as dependent variables. The information is collected from 100 managers and owners of SMEs from different locations in Saudi Arabia.

The correlation analysis of communication through digital media with the market share, brand loyalty, and general feedback of customers is 0.79, 0.75, and 0.84, where there is a strengthening relationship between dependent and independent variables. The significance F value is below 0.05, and the p-value of all three variables is below 0.05, which means that the null hypothesis is rejected as there is a strong relationship between dependent and independent variables. The results show a strong relationship between variables, and organizations need to emphasize adopting digital media.

Disciplinary: Management (Marketing & Digital Branding, Marketing Research).

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Cite This Article:

Amer, O.M.I., Zaheer, A. (2022). Measuring New Normal Strategy of Brands on Digital Branding during Covid-19. *International Transaction Journal of Engineering, Management, & Applied Sciences & Technologies*, 13(5), 13A5U, 1-13. <http://TUENGR.COM/V13/13A5U.pdf> DOI: 10.14456/ITJEMAST.2022.105

1 Introduction

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 globally shifted paradigms for traditional business and marketing communication practices from the core (Aleksandra et al., 2021). The increased time spent on digital media has allowed brands to interact with their audience in a new way – on multiple channels and touch-points simultaneously, reaching out to a broader consumer base while

serving as their one-stop information hub (Brand et al., 2020). It is now a reality that customer experience is equally important offline and online, so focusing on digital development is essential (Baker & Judge, 2021). Businesses operating on conventional mediums, namely bricks and mortar strategies, are most likely to experience a downfall in market share and return on investments (ROI) (Visconti, 2021). Today, most businesses have shifted to digital platforms and e-commerce channels to reach the target audiences (Shi et al., 2020). The researcher is interested in emphasizing the role of digital branding during COVID-19 and how their business profitability is improved.

Digital Branding is a multidisciplinary management consulting practice that incorporates many fields, disciplines, and disciplines within its practice (Young et al., 2020). The trend of digital branding has gained massive popularity during COVID-19 in areas as strategic management, innovation, innovation management, new product development, design thinking, qualitative and quantitative assessment, and much more (Guo et al., 2020). Understanding how consumer purchase decisions are affected by digital technology is fundamental to successfully positioning any brand in this environment (Sobreira et al., 2020).

Researchers said that digital presence directly impact sales and overall return on investment results. The digital presence influences every potential consumer's interaction with the brand (Sharma, 2020). All it takes is a single comment to bring a brand down or trigger outrage that leads to business failure. Therefore, businesses must use every platform to create a strong digital brand to overcome the after-effects of the Pandemic (Priambodo et al., 2021; Wang & Cheng, 2020). Successful brands are creating rapid transitions in marketing strategies by integrating digital solutions in the communication process controls (Reardon et al., 2021). This research investigates the emerging role of digital branding during the COVID-19 business environment.

This research would address if the digital marketing solutions were the new normal for the progressing brands operating worldwide with a diversified product and service portfolio, customer segments, and cultural exposures, considering a change in the communication practices. The research objectives are:

- Understanding how digital branding creates synergy for SMEs while acquiring maximum market share during COVID-19.
- Analyzing the role of digital branding as an effective tool to SMEs to influence customer perception to build solid digital branding during COVID-19
- Evaluating how small-scale brands invest in digital marketing to create a contemporary brand image among customers during COVID-19.
- Analyzing how digital branding creates customer loyalty, having a limited attention span during COVID-19.

2 Literature Review

Digital branding is one of the most critical aspects of today's businesses, particularly after the COVID-19 Pandemic. As social media presence, email marketing, and online newsletters have become increasingly popular, brands need to create a strong image through consistent content that engages consumers. Digital branding has allowed businesses to establish their company as experts in their field during the Pandemic. It helps consumers find brands when they search for products or services offered online (Aleksandra et al., 2021). It can be said that digital branding is the future of marketing as businesses have to be aware of this changing landscape or risk losing out on their target audience. The digital era has brought about new opportunities for businesses that can harness their power effectively.

2.1 Digital Branding

The internet is nothing if not a testament to the power of where people are looking. As the leading source of information, these websites and apps help make digital branding easier than ever (Almeida et al., 2020). Understanding how digital branding works is vital for businesses to be successful online. Digital branding is the process of using the internet to create a presence that's unique to businesses (Baker & Judge, 2020). Branding techniques exist outside the digital world, but they are still essential parts of any successful marketing strategy. A company can create its unique moniker or use traditional logos and slogans (Cinelli et al., 2021). The key aspects are making sure that the business name is memorable and easily identifiable by potential customers.

The internet has completely altered how businesses think about branding. It is no longer enough to make sure the name is easy to remember; they also need to be visible on every search engine possible online. It is achieved through digital branding to consider the mobile space (Das, 2021). The rise of smart phones has altered how people search for products and services. A company's mobile strategy needs to take shape for them to be successful online (Alshaketheep et al., 2020). The number of searches is constantly increasing, which leads to an even larger pool of potential customers for companies to reach.

Digital branding is the best way for companies with a presence on the internet to differentiate themselves from their competitors in a competitive marketplace (He & Harris, 2020). Even without proper implementation, digital branding can help businesses thrive in the 21st-century economy because so many people are using it whenever they are searching for anything on their computer or phone (Davies, 2020).

The benefits of digital branding can easily outweigh the costs, but it is essential to be aware of the cost. Time is one of the most significant factors in implementing a robust digital brand strategy (Ketter & Avraham, 2021) as businesses begin to put together the brand by keeping time in mind. It takes time to plan and execute strategies so businesses can simultaneously take on multiple projects (Redjeki & Affandi, 2020). A thorough branding plan can help many businesses avoid taking on too much debt or making poor business decisions that could potentially harm their brand image.

2.2 The Impact of COVID-19 on Digital Branding

COVID-19 is an emerging virus that is capable of spreading quickly. This phenomenon has led to the necessity of digital transformation strategies for the marketing industry. Marketing strategies are no longer limited to traditional methods; instead, they have become more innovative and strategic in light of current circumstances (Antúnez et al., 2021). Almost half (47%) of marketers say that their organization's website is the first place to recommend COVID-19 patients go for information (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum (2020). Organizations recommend their websites first because it offers more comprehensive resources on the topic, which increases trustworthiness among visitors since there are no outside links or content to distract them from what they set out to share (Brand et al., 2020).

With the recent development of artificial intelligence, many companies have used it to optimize their content for various types of visitors. A study by Hasanat et al. (2020) stated that over 50% of e-businesses would abandon a website if it took more than 3 seconds to load. It is also attributed to ad blockers installed on 40% of phones globally. Before investing in new domains and platforms, marketers should consider changing existing web pages (Villa & Monzon, 2021). Due to the decrease in customers, businesses are attempting to increase engagement. It can be primarily attributed to the rise of social media marketing which offers brands an additional platform to engage with customers (Guo et al., 2020).

Sobreira et al. (2020) said that with organizations almost to develop a website of usability smart phone half, so users relying customers can find mobile what phones they to identify looking COVID-19 for, symptoms, while marketers also have begun accessible to on change all how devices.

According to Naumovska & Zajac (2021), providing millennials more (aged localized 18-34) information spend. It is twice seen long by on the mobile increase websites in than number none of millennials smart phone. Shi et al. (2020) said their behaviors were over rising in identifying COVID-19 symptoms. Thus, marketers are moving away from traditional methods of marketing where they are only concerned about making sales; instead, they are now shifting strategies towards providing value and education through new media.

Due to the recent outbreaks, grocery retailers see an increase of 15% in the sales of hand sanitizers (Quyen, 2020). Some grocery stores install hand sanitizer dispensers, which will only dispense sanitizer if the customer uses a loyalty card or mobile app. It shows that customers are not only concerned about how to stop the virus, but they are also concerned about their health and how to protect themselves (Obeidat & Alomari, 2020; Priambodo et al., 2021). Thus, marketers should provide customers with information relevant to their search.

Further research has investigated a transformation to boost the market share by utilizing communication tools like digital media. Priambodo et al. (2021) stated that brands from Indonesia have an efficient communication strategy to reach the target audience and utilize word-of-mouth marketing to strengthen the brand image. Sharma (2020) and Reardon et al. (2021) claimed that brands rely on vital social media tools to reach customers quickly and influence their purchasing

behaviors. Even the concept of digital marketing improved during COVID-19, where most businesses had to be online to sell their products and services. According to Antunez et al. (2020), the digital channels and search engine optimization improve the digital channels during the COVID-19 outbreak. Prihadini (2020) said that digital marketing and branding strategies must influence customer perception and immediately create product needs. Communication channels like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube improve the exchange of information and feedback worldwide.

Redjeki & Affandi (2020), with their focus on MSME players in Indonesia, have found that brands are adapting their marketing approach to a newly developed set of habits among customers. Aleksandra et al. (2021) agree with these findings and add that the digital branding amid COVID signifies an ongoing endeavor to learn how to live with the changed scenario rather than trying to circumvent it. Rahman (2016) said it is worth mentioning that the CSR strategy of brands, which is supposed to contribute to their brand image, is leaning towards precautionary advice, such as staying at home and keeping a social distance. Ketter & Avraham (2021) said that the brands strive to align to the paradigm shift and treat the pandemic era as 'new normal.'

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The study has one independent variable (IV) and three dependent variables (DV) taken: increased market share, brand loyalty among customers, and the satisfaction level of businesses chosen.

The independent variable is digital branding during COVID-19. Digital branding is a term that describes the process of using digital and online methods to promote and market a company, product, or service. Digital branding can be used as an overall marketing strategy or stand-alone practice. Digital branding is a strategy that combines brand management tactics and communication elements to create customer loyalty on internet channels in the long run. Branding has been a part of the advertising industry for decades. A brand is a set of promises a company makes to its customers and is demonstrated in everything they do. It is easier than ever to create a successful brand strategy in today's digital marketplace. The digital age has revolutionized the way brands communicate with consumers, but it has not changed the basic principles of branding: build (Visconti, 2020).

Market share will be analyzed to see whether the business profitability and sales have improved during COVID-19 after implementing the digital media platforms. It is a framework of how an organization communicates with its various publics through multiple channels. Digital branding can increase sales, gain market share, or inform target audiences about existing products and services offered by the company. It is a strategy to engage with customers and align products with the marketing trends. The essential marketing communication like public relations and digital marketing improves brand exposure and stays ahead of competitors (Das, 2021).

Social Media is a digital platform that provides brands with an opportunity to share and exchange information with a specific target audience by creating virtual communities. As social

media marketing continues to grow and evolve, so does the need for creative social media marketers.

Brand loyalty among customers refers to the people's perceptions of the brand. It is the second dependent variable of the research. Digital presence reflects a brand where businesses search for a specific brand on the internet or digital channels. There is no doubt that nowadays, creating and managing a digital presence is a must for every company. Every business needs to be online to reach its target audience. However, the internet landscape has changed drastically since the days of MySpace and face book, meaning that businesses need to adapt to stay relevant and attract customers to gain brand loyalty. There is a shift in the way we interact with brands and companies. This shift brings about a fundamental change to marketing and how businesses look at their customers. In this new era, consumers are taking control and driving the conversation, thereby creating an expectation for brands to be proactive in engaging them to gain loyalty (Moncey & Baskaran, 2020).

Satisfaction levels of businesses are the third dependent variable. COVID-19 Pandemic has entirely changed how businesses used to conduct their businesses. It is believed that the Pandemic has given rise to businesses innovatively and attracting customers through diverse platforms (Baker & Judge, 2020). This variable would be discussed to understand the impact of digital branding on businesses' satisfaction levels.

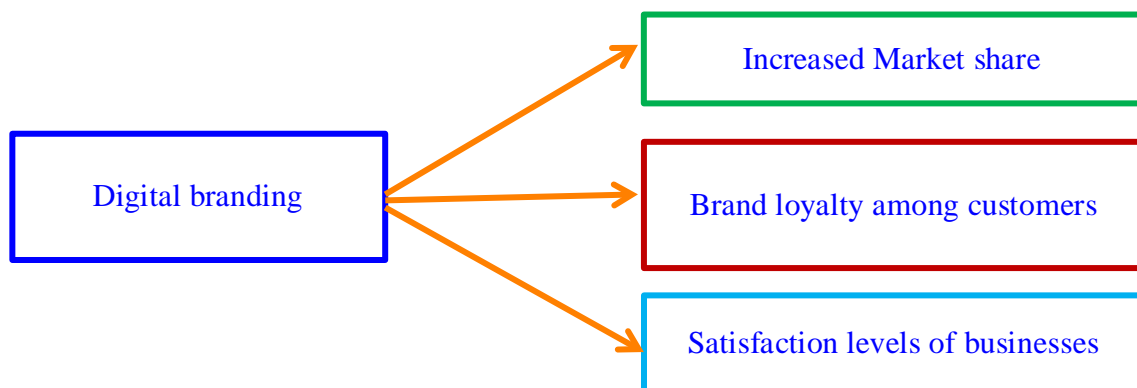


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework and Key Variables of the Study.

3 Research Methodology

The researcher has relied on primary research to collect first-hand information from the respondents in Saudi Arabia. The researcher has used quantitative research where the researcher has chosen an explicit independent variable and three dependent variables to analyze how digital branding has contributed to SMEs' performance during COVID-19. The questionnaire approach is used to achieve the objectives of quantitative research, where the researcher has prepared and distributed questionnaires to owners and managers from small and medium enterprises. The researcher has asked the respondents whether their company has adopted the digital branding approaches during COVID-19 and whether the market share, brand loyalty, and satisfaction level of business is improved or not. Digital branding is used as an independent variable, and market share, brand loyalty, and satisfaction level of business are used as dependent variables. Furthermore, the

researcher approaches only SMEs because they can tell better how their business has transformed after adopting digital media strategy and was it helpful for them to improve their financial performance during COVID-19. The researcher has approached over 120 respondents to improve the research generalize ability, and 100 surveys were selected for analysis. The research sample is not small because the researcher wants to achieve the research objectives. It is not too large because the researcher lacks time to access a large group of respondents.

3.1 Research Analysis

The research analysis uses Microsoft Excel to find the relationship between dependent and independent variables. The researcher has used demographic analysis to find the proportion of different sampled respondents. The demographic analysis is presented in tabular and graphical form to improve the research readability (Rahman, 2016). The demographic analysis allows the company to reach the ideal respondent base.

The second analysis is conducted through correlation analysis. The correlation analysis is a statistical approach to measure the strength of the linear relationship between independent and dependent variables. High correlation analysis shows a strong relationship between the variables, whereas a low correlation shows a weak relation (Davies, 2020).

The third analysis is conducted by using regression analysis. Regression analysis is a statistical process to estimate the relationship between variables by analyzing p-value and ANOVA. It will be analyzed whether the results are significant and the value of p is below 0.05 (Davies, 2020).

4 Data Analysis

The report analyzes the data collected from the respondents in terms of demographic and variable analysis. The data is analyzed using percentage, correlation, regression, and graphical approaches to make the results understandable. The analysis is beneficial in finding how digital branding creates synergy for SMEs while acquiring maximum market share during COVID-19.

4.1 Demographic Questions

4.1.1 Type of Business

The analysis shows 37% of the respondents from the food business and restaurants; 9% from the IT business, 10% from the retail businesses, 16% from the service advisory businesses, and 28% from others.

Table 1: Type of Organizations

	Type of Organization
Food business/ restaurants	37
IT business	9
Others	28
Retail business	10
Service advisory business	16
Others	28
Total	100

4.1.2 Duration of the Organization

The duration of the organization in figure 1 shows that 5% of the organizations are working less than one year. 13% of the organizations are 1 to 3 years old, 25% from 3 to 6 years old, and 57% are more than six years old.

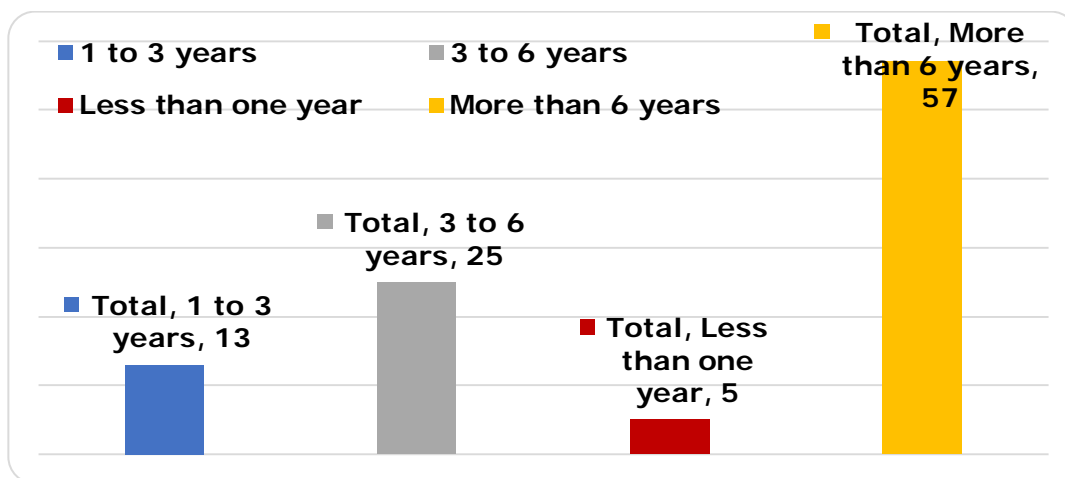


Figure 2: Duration of the Organization

4.1.3 Current Location

The current location of the respondent is analyzed in Figure 2. Respondents 60% are from Jeddah, 6% from Makkah, 19% from Riyad, 1% from Dammam, and 14% from other regions.

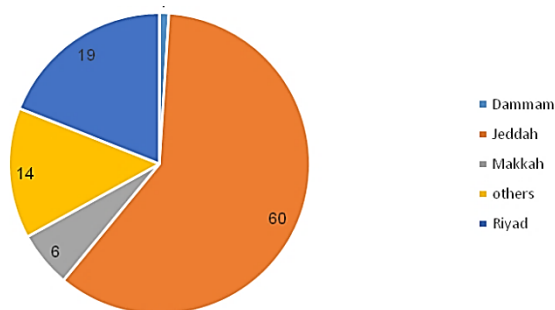


Figure 3: Current Location

4.2 Variable Questionnaire

4.2.1 Increase in Digital Media During COVID-19 Pandemic

The analysis shows that 94% of the respondents stated that their businesses had improved their dependence on digital marketing tools to attract customers.

Table 2: Digital Marketing Tools during COVID-19

Digital Marketing Tools during COVID-19	
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	1
Neutral	4
Agree	18
Strongly Agree	76
Total	100

4.2.2 Averages of Dependent and Independent Variables

CSM is the communication through social Media taken as an independent variable. Market share (MS), brand loyalty (BL), and general feedback (GF) are dependent variables. The average CSM is 4.68, which means that the businesses are moving toward a powerful communication tool through social media. The average market share is 4.66, which is closer to the strongly agree. Similarly, the brand loyalty and general feedback are averaged at 4.63 and 4.74, which is closer to the strongly agree.

Table 3: Average of Dependent and Independent Variables

	Average CSM	Average MS	Average BL	Average GF
Mean	4.68	4.66	4.63	4.74
SD	0.56	0.59	0.63	0.54

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis strengthens the relationship between dependent and independent variables. The value ranges from -1 to +1 to analyze the strength between two variables. If the correlation value is below 0.3, it is weak, and above 0.7, it is strong. Communication through social media is the independent variable that has a strong relationship with the market share, brand loyalty, and general feedback of customers. The relationship with these dependent variables is 0.79, 0.75, and 0.84, where the values are closer to 1. In this way, it can be stated that there is a positive relationship between independent variables and dependent variables.

Table 4: Correlation

	CSM	MS	BL	GF
CSM	1			
MS	0.79	1		
BL	0.75	0.83	1	
GF	0.84	0.82	0.77	1

4.4 Regression Analysis

The regression analysis understands the relationship between a set of dependent and independent variables. The results are presented in Table 5.

The analysis in Table 5 states that the correlation among variables is 0.86, which is a strong relationship among variables. The significance F value is below 0.05, which means that the results generated are statistically significant. The relationship among variables is linked to the p-value to determine whether a significant relationship occurs among variables. The p-value of all three variables is below 0.05, which means that the null hypothesis is rejected as there is a strong relationship between dependent and independent variables. The t-stat is also higher than the p-value, strengthening our claim that communication through digital channels substantially impacts the market share, strengthens the customers' loyalty, and gets positive feedback from respondents.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Regression Statistics					
Multiple R	0.862				
R Square	0.742				
Adjusted R Square	0.734				
Standard Error	0.288				
Observations	100				
ANOVA					
	Df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	3	23.000	7.667	92.214	3.7E-28
Residual	96	7.982	0.083		
Total	99	30.982			
	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	
Intercept	0.442	0.257	1.720	0.088	
MS	0.218	0.103	2.103	0.03	
BL	0.134	0.085	1.575	0.018	
GF	0.550	0.098	5.636	1.7E-07	

5 Discussion

The results show that digital marketing has a vital role in strengthening customer relationships and improving the market share. The respondents in our sample size understand the importance of digital marketing and their role in improving brand loyalty in Saudi Arabia during COVID-19. These results are similar to Baker & Judge (2020), who states that digital marketing has been positive during the COVID-19 Pandemic as it assisted businesses improve their brand presence and reach a broad customer base, which was not possible before the pandemic situation.

According to Guo et al. (2020), the small businesses during the Pandemic benefitted more as they understood the importance of digital media to spread the brand message region-wide. Businesses that showed reluctance to be modernized suffered more during the Pandemic. Digital media has given rise to several new businesses that grab the opportunity of surviving and initiating new ideas. Similarly, Reardon et al.'s (2021) result also supports our research results and concludes that the COVID-19 has given rise to the excessive use of e-commerce, particularly in developing countries. These regions were slow in adopting the new business trends and ways to conduct the business; however, the Pandemic has provided them with an opportunity to think out of the box to expand their business roots. It ultimately strengthens businesses' abilities to grab more customers and make a meaningful influence on the brand and the community. These results align with our research that digital marketing ultimately boosts brand loyalty, consumers' perspective toward the brand, and ultimately the market share.

6 Conclusion

The unprecedented spread of COVID-19, its mortality rate, and its contagion potential have presented several new problems for global markets. Digital technologies are powerful tools for alleviating anxiety and depressive symptoms, which will keep customers engaged in a meaningful life during this period of high uncertainty. It has been demonstrated that digital media can enhance

and benefit companies through advertising revenue. They have also shown that there are areas where this effect does not exist. A study was conducted in Saudi Arabia to examine whether this positive relationship would still be seen if we examined only for those areas where a website was displayed and what it would take to gain that exposure.

The research considers the changing role of digital marketing and online advertising as organizations use new media technologies to facilitate interactions with customers and respond to market demands. Specifically, we develop a framework for understanding how businesses adopt new media technologies, analyze their decision-making processes, and demonstrate how these are linked to firms' objectives and behavior (Brand et al., 2020). New media technologies can improve market performance by providing additional sources of customer feedback, enabling quick access to consumer needs, improving a firm's flexibility, and potentially facilitating innovation. They can also enhance brand equity by offering ways to connect with existing and potential customers. However, they may lead to over-control and distraction from daily tasks. These conclusions guide future research on new media technologies in business contexts.

The information was collected through secondary resources to trigger the innovation decisions by utilizing digital media. Businesses need to emphasize daily production, where the reliance is on maximizing the profit of an organization. The extensive use of social media platforms enhances performance without implementing modern marketing methods (Cinelli et al., 2021). Digital media could lead to better customer loyalty, market share, and good customer feedback. The results are collected from 100 Saudi Arabian enterprises to determine the role of digital media in improving performance. The results demonstrate that digital media has positively impacted all sectors and utilizes external and internal knowledge to strengthen innovation.

Digital Media is used as a digital platform to maintain the connection and affect the business's performance. The social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram lead to professional networking like blogging. Social media needs to develop brand communities by improving customer interaction and understanding their viewpoints. The business created a platform and strengthened the innovative capacity for customers (He & Harris, 2020). The businesses that have adopted modern methods during the Pandemic are more inclined to sustain a competitive advantage. Emphasizing digital media needs to strengthen the relationship between digital media and organizational performance. Digital media platforms put valuable insights into the consumers' decisions and transform innovative ideas into new technology. Social media and digital tools encourage innovation's openness to reach the end customers and play an existential role in attracting a strengthening target market. In Saudi Arabia, enterprises had an opportunity to interact with stakeholders and consumers to improve organizations' performance and market share.

7 Availability of Data and Material

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding author.

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