Social Media, Internet, and Memes Through the Lens of Political Geography

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Abstract

Almost four billion people in the world use the internet which includes forms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, etc. Along with the gifts of such developed communication technologies, many hardships and future problems have emerged. Misinformation leaks, internet trolls, and the newer trend of cyber-nationalism all come with these advanced forms of technology. The purpose of this paper is to define what these negative consequences mean for us, and what our government is doing with this new power. To be able to grasp a scope of what is happening, the history of the internet and cyber-nationalism need to be distinguished as well as showing different forms of use and how they affect us in our daily lives. Looking through the eyes of a political geographer it is important to see if cyber-nationalism deserves its own category yet as a topic of study, and how this is similar or different to the use of propaganda in the past such as World War II. This paper concludes with final thoughts on the internet and cyber-nationalism, and future research possibilities that help to interpret the use of cyber-nationalism and further its study.

Keywords: Cyber-Nationalism, Communication, Propaganda, Geopolitics, Social Media.

1. Introduction

Cyber-nationalism is an old and yet new phenomena in the era of modern technology. People around the world fall victims to the spread of misinformation by radicalized political parties on the internet or even trusted friends who have fallen victims themselves. This misinformation can be categorized as a form of propaganda since its intent is to mislead the reader and pose a certain political point of view behind this twisted truth of information. On the internet there are many forms of communication such as text posts, comments, like buttons, pictures, memes, and the list goes on. All these forms of communication are at the disposal of any person who has access to a computer.

People question as to why these cyber-nationalists have not been restricted from internet usage and the spread of false rumours. However, the virtual world is more complicated than a person's limitations. Millions of people have their accounts hacked each year while using the internet which provides the hacker all the information and access to the person's computer and/or social media accounts. Many people on Facebook users could claim that their friends sent them links to buy new sunglasses, concert tickets, or other items, only to later claim that their account had been hacked and that they should disregard the false information. At that time, the hacker had most likely obtained at least one other account from this transaction which would play a later role in producing the same misinformation cycle all over again.

Before investing too much into a single topic type under the umbrella of cyber-nationalism it is important to understand how the internet emerged and why it led to the use of cyber-nationalism today.

Today, when discussing any geopolitical conflict or problem, the role of the cyber sphere cannot be ignored due to the sharp increase in the number of users of social networks. For instance, there are over 160 million Internet users in the

Middle East. Social media is becoming a central space for political discourse as it can connect people and support political recruiting. Over the past decades, social media has opened new spaces for identity politics, conflict speech and hatred. It can play a role in political processing. Social media have also played an important role in promoting populist interpretations of national interests and sovereignty. State and non-state regimes, such as dictatorships, have developed strategies, developed cyber capabilities, and allocated resources to advance their geopolitical goals.

2. Literature Review

There are few studies on social media and lens geopolitics. Most of them were written in China due to China's nationalists, who used internet as a tool as weapons against its enemies. Liu (2016) gives a sound description of a new trend in Chinese cyber-nationalism by an examination of Diba Expedition. He examines the impact of new cyber nationalism, and the political consequences of it (Liu, 2016). The book examined the relationship between Chinese cyber nationalism and its influence on potential tourists. Nationalism is two blades for governing. In 1990, Chinese nationalism demonstrated the use of the internet against enemies in the economic sector, which occurred in Hong Kong's tourism sector. Innumerable amount of people visits Hong Kong for tourism. Due to the cultural and political differences, Chinese cyber nationalism has been used against Hong Kong. It is important to discover the link between growing Chinese cyber nationalism to Hong Kong and its stimulus on internal tourists travelling to Hong Kong (Liu, 2016). Hong Kong took an incredible downturn in tourism after its cyber-attacks. It is worth mentioning that tourism is one of the largest support industries in Hong Kong, and Interior China is the biggest tourist market. Chinese cyber nationalism has diverse levels of negative impact on possible tourists (Liu, 2016).

Even in 2000, Taiwanese nationalism has taken on a more nativist form, which one might call zealot, and which paradoxically has highlighted the confusion and limitations of this phenomenon.

Chinese cyberspace has violated sovereignty. In Asia many food and beverages brands have been accused by Chinese internet users silently supporting Hong Kong and Taiwan independence. The Communist Youth League (CYL) is one major organization that actively pushes the nationalism agenda. A few years ago, the CYL was faced with deep challenges both in terms of its declining organizational function within the Party, and in light of criticism from senior leaders (Kecheng, 2019). In order to rebuild its legitimacy and status within the party, the CYL seized the opportunity to promote nationalism on digital media platforms, with products principally targeting Official media including the People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, and CCTV are also active in promoting nationalism on social media.

Moreover, cyber nationalism in China keeps striking European businesses It's time to learn more about the dynamics underlying this phenomenon for even a small coffee shop based in the German city of Düsseldorf was exposed to a wave of online pressures after its manager posted a message on Instagram — a service censored from within China — suggesting that Taiwan and China are "separate nations" (Kecheng, 2019).

Russian cyber weapons surge instability because their weapon type and strategies increase the motivation for cyber revenge. The Russian attacks used in Georgia and Ukraine did not finish their victims' capacity to answer in kind, leading to punitive attacks

Nationalist tensions in Estonia (Leary, 2017). In 2007 began with ethnic Russian minorities in Tallinn after building on a World War II memorial honouring Soviet troops that represented heroism of the Great Patriotic War. Where vice versa to Estonia representing a vestige of Soviet occupation (Lobjakas, 2007).

3. Brief History of the Internet

The original networking and computer types are not nearly the same as in modern technology. For the United States the beginnings of computer technology began in the early 1960s in the department of defense. They wanted to create a form of networking that was not using physical paper and logistics which would aid in the speed of response for the protection of the United States. Here it began the creation of multiple types of test networks such as ARPANET, CYCLADES, and Gopher. All these were later replaced by what is known today as the World Wide Web (www. Preceding each website input) or the internet for short.

Soon after in the mid-late 1990s the search engines emerged which is the most familiar today, Google.com (1998). Most likely now this or another search engine in someone's first page when opening any internet browser because of the easy access to information about any topic. However, the history of the internet is different from other nations' perspectives especially that of China's competitor superpower to the United States today.

The beginning of networks and the internet did not even occur until 1989 in China. However, this was already during the time of nationalism with the bloody results of protesting at Tiananmen Square in Beijing (Wu, 2007). Since then, until the early 2000s China had very little public use of the internet and occurred at intermittent rates of users and non-users. Following current trends, China has one of the biggest populations of internet users equalling over 40% of the total internet users in the world.

Even though Chinese will not be discussed much due to lack of texts about its usage of cyber-nationalism, Russia as another rival superpower should be discussed with at least in use of the internet. Russia had also had access to the internet around the same time as China, and similarly did not permit access for the public until the 2000s in Russia's case in 2009 (Denisova, 2016). In the 2010s, it has become one of the leading users in types of cyber-nationalism mainly using misinformation and creating dissent in other nations' people.

4. History of Cyber-Nationalism

The history of cyber-nationalism is short in comparison to that of the internet, or most other historical subjects. According to Xu Wu the first accounts of cyber-nationalism had occurred in China within the communist party for the People's Republic of China (Wu, 2007). During 1994-1995 China's population allowed to use the internet had increased (even though not all were allowed to use it) and had created a bulletin in which the government would send articles and news to be published to the users (some of which were nationalist). This did not mean cyber-nationalism was as prevalent in the 1990s as it is today. Through the creation of multiple news feeds, Chinese students who travelled abroad to study, were able to keep in touch with people from their homeland due to their sense of nationalism.

Soon after the Chinese communist party was able to use this as a way to create a false sense of "homesickness" for students who originally left because of political complications and livelihood restrictions through these types of news feeds (Wu, 2007). They created a sense of what Wu determined as "third-identity" which became a way of giving these students a feeling of exile as well as homesickness because they had moved to another country meaning they were not "pure" Chinese anymore.

This did not go unnoticed by other superpower nations, the United States and Russia foreign intelligence agencies had found what the Chinese Communist party was doing and decided to restrict their internet usage while paving the way to use the new idea of cyber-nationalism to their own advantage (Denisova, 2016). Scholarly articles show slight information about these two countries coming into the world of cyber-nationalism but touch that in the late 1990s and early 2000s when they followed the footsteps of creating a virtual nationalism for internet users.

Along with the technology advancement in the 2000s, the Chinese Communist Party had become the biggest utilizer of cyber-nationalism as a tool to spread misinformation and promote patriotism. This was able to take place on social media forums, chat rooms, and news articles (Wu, 2007). The Chinese Communist Party was not only able to reach people and descendants of its own nation but also citizens of other nations. According to Wu most of the largest cyber-nationalism pushes by the Chinese Communist Party happened after large political events, which they used to misconstrue information to the Chinese people as well as the world before others were able to present their perspective on what happened (Ex. Indonesia had Anti-Chinese riot).

Wu also mentions that after discussing the Chinese's use of cyber-nationalism, the United States used this tactic for their own purposes during September 11th in 2001 after the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon had been hit by hijacked planes. The United States was able to push strong nationalist feelings for not just the American people but many other countries, and strong feelings for anti-terrorism (Wu, 2007). However, this cyber-nationalism was also used by Warhawks to promote propaganda to warrant the invasion of countries deemed homes to terrorism, which led to the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Today, cyber-nationalism is a widespread phenomenon for internet users, most posts, news feeds and articles have more of political biased misinforming readers to agree or disagree with certain ideas or actions. Even finding information on cyber-nationalism has become surrounded by misconstrued information pointing fingers at different political parties for failures or outrages on current events (Palmer, 2012). We see the creation of new radicalized political parties gaining power through the virtual world as internet trolls (which will be defined later) propagate the spread of hatred and dissent because of the availability to do so.

5. Forms of Cyber-Nationalism

Cyber-nationalism can manifest itself in many different ways. There are four types to be used as the biggest tools for the promotion of political parties. YouTube has been around since February 2005 and has allowed anyone to upload content that he/she wishes except some restrictions like pornography. According to (Burgess & Green, 2018), YouTube creates social relationships between viewers and the uploader of videos. However, YouTube has also been used to promote cyber-nationalist agendas as well. Uploads for the recently created alt-right party have made significant leaps in popularity because of social media such as YouTube and Google searches during the Trump campaign prior to election.

The second form is using Twitter. Most of the Americans and the world have noticed the recent increase in Twitter usage by political parties and radical political groups. Using cyber-nationalism on this platform, the terrorist group known by ISIS has performed covert operations and communications all around the world to commit acts of terrorism.

Hostage to this anti-Islamic Twitter groups have been able to fuel hatred by sending mass amounts of Twitter "literature" to followers showing that Middle Eastern countries are home to terrorist organizations (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Via using Twitter, users are able to communicate their passions within 140 words (soon to be 280). Most scholars would agree that to accurately and credibly make an assumption in political situations would call for more than 140 words, but to the mainstream population this is easy access to quick information (or misinformation).

The third type of manifestation of cyber-nationalism can be found in is memes. What actually are memes some people may ask? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary a meme is "*an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture*". In Zittrain's article he discusses that memes are actually used to perpetuate and create many different kinds of beliefs and ideals (Zittrain, 2014). Some of the existing well-known memes are the troll face, the doge, and My Little Pony (which created the cultural group "bronies"). Other memes are used as tools that can be used to spread opinions (or nationalist views) such as The Unpopular Opinion Puffin, The Confession Bear, and the Philosoraptor. On meme browsing sites such as Imgur, Reddit, 4Chan, and Tumblr users are able to upload mass amounts of misinformation and political agendas that can cloud judgements of people especially children whose minds are more vulnerable and malleable to this form of cyber-nationalism.

The final form of cyber-nationalism to be discussed is video games. They have actually been around before the three previously discussed manifestations. Gaming had gained extensive popularity in the 1980s and has now become a worldwide culture where millions of people play games with others all around the world. Psychologists have found that youth are exceptionally susceptible to online chat via video games more than the three previous platforms because video game is physically engaging them as well as mentally (Sherry, 2014). One year ago, an event happened which involved with the online video game sensation league of Legends. A streamer Tyler1 (noted for his unsportsmanlike behaviour, intentional losing and verbal abuse) had been permanently banned through his IP address by Riot (The company that made League of Legends). However, his viewers who became infatuated with the streamer went directly to League forums to petition and advocate for the discontinuation of the ban. He is now currently unbanned but has to follow certain restrictions or faces permanent ban once again. This example shows a type of cyber-nationalism that was used to repeal an executive decision made by the governing source for someone who made the game frustrating for the entire population.

6. Cyber-Nationalism vs. Historical Propaganda

How does cyber-nationalism compare to the propaganda we have seen in the past? To start, propaganda used before the emergence of the internet was not able to be transported as fast and as far in comparison to how quickly cyber-nationalism can travel on Facebook or YouTube. However, does this mean that cyber-nationalism is a more effective tool of propaganda? In the past, physical propaganda has shown to have stronger political effect than that of cyber-nationalism. For example, before World War II and during the rise of the Nazi power, propaganda was placed all over Germany whereas prior to mass propaganda the party had only one area of power (Herf, 2006). After the use of physical propaganda, the party was able to gain significant power and become the majority faction in Germany in the election. Comparing this to the alt-right movement that has recently happened, cyber-nationalism was a tool used by the party to influence people on a mass scale. This only gained the attention of few white supremacists, but mostly the faction of "internet trolls" which do not support as much physical presence as would the Nazi party. The election of 2016 led to the disbanding of a large part of the Alt-Right party because the "internet trolls" were scared most of them by the threatening threat from Anonymous of the White Supremacist Supporters, who "hid behind their screen" supporting the right-wing party, to disclose personal information.

To summarize, cyber-nationalism and propaganda techniques used in history are fairly similar, but physical propaganda had a much larger effect most likely because someone wasn't able to switch screens or websites to ignore the propaganda in front of them like how most people would online.

7. Cyber-Nationalism as its own Subject

Cyber-nationalism has become substantially prevalent in the online community as a form of nationalism, but does that warrant an entire subject of study for this subject? Currently, until more research has been conducted and verified by peer-reviewed sources, cyber-nationalism should just remain as a subtopic under the umbrella of nationalism. But it does need to be studied because of how many people are affected by this phenomenon. Quantitative and qualitative data must be gathered from groups of low and high vulnerability, but do not need to be studied under one subject alone. To study the phenomena effectively, it requires psychologists to study the behaviour and changes in the mind when exposed to cyber-nationalism, geographers to understand the use of space and time, sociologists to understand how this

affects social norms and interactions as well as statisticians to study the quantitative data behind as the backbone to research.

There are already types of research methods in place (that were used in this paper) which are effective tools to credibly locate and access information on this subject. Mining datasets from social media sites are useful for gathering mass amounts of quantitative as well as qualitative data straight from volunteers (terms and agreements), and online content analysis which creates more of the empirical data for research. Virtual ethnography is a vital method when conducting research online because it studies people and culture within the virtual world, which has been proven to be a distinguished type of society from the real world. This type of method mixed with social network analysis on popular browsing websites would be useful to gather public data en masse.

8. Conclusions and Future Research

Overall, cyber-nationalism has been an extreme consequence in the creation of the internet domain and affects almost half of the population of the world, however, continued research and data gathering is a necessity for this topic because current literature is specified in China for the majority of historical research. There is also lack of scholarly articles for cyber-nationalism in general, which contains a multitude of bias from non-peer-reviewed sources. The subject of cyber-nationalism is difficult to understand though it is easy in concept. It must be continually researched to counter the negative effect it is having on our online communities before more drastic or radicalized actions are taken to harm human life.

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Ayad Akhtar's American Dervish: Analysis and Revaluation

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Abstract

Apparently the best and yet the most famous work by Ayad Akhtar is American Dervish which was published in 2012. It has gained quick attention, but not by many, as a debut novel about the identity issue. Yet, no studies have been devoted to studying the novel from an analytical point of view of Pakistani-American migrants' issues in America, in general. However, the novel has received some attention, there remain some aspects, in our view, and an essential aspect amongst them is the analytical study of the novel, which is not explored yet. In general migrants to new countries will usually face difficulty and especially if they are followers of a different religion. Also, the difference in their culture with culture of the country they migrate to will be an obstacle in integrating themselves into the new culture as seen in the character of Hayat Shah's father; whereas to some extent different for Hayat himself. Hayat befriends a Jewish girl and neglects Islam and similarly his father becomes friend with a Jewish teacher, Nathan. It is not easy for the migrant people to integrate into the American culture and tolerate the other religious beliefs such as Judaism as it is quite a novel experience for them. The migrants obligingly ignore their surrender to their own Islamic religion and assimilate into the Judaism and American culture, which is very difficult. These are the two key aspects that the paper focuses on by analyzing and highlighting the challenges that Hayat Shah and his family members face in America. Akhtar demonstrates the difficulty for the migrant characters between either choosing Islam or Judaism or secularism to be able to live like Americans.

Keywords: Diaspora, Assimilation, Culture, Quran, Judaism, Love.

1. Introduction

The novel, *American Dervish* has been written to tackle the cultural and the religious aspects of the Muslim people in diaspora. More precisely it is about the religious aspect of life as Akhtar says that he intended to present the status of belief through a global tale. It will be about the entire Americans and Muslims or non-Muslims as well as their way of living and that titled American Dervish (Akhtar, 2012).

The opening lines of the novel, introduces Hayat, a boy, together with Rachel who is a Jew. Firstly, the writer shows Hayat with a bosom student Rachel, who possesses such a beauty that attracts his attention. Rachel and Hayat together are ready to take part in one of the lectures of Edelstein, which is a 15-minute lecture on the recorded events of the Islam. One of the friends of the German professor in his study talks about Quran and this draws his friend's attention, and he has concluded that in brief, Edelstein asserted that 'his German' partner was going to all the 'bedrock Muslim' faith 'in the Quran' which is supposed to be like immediate, unaltered, unceasing expression of God was a not real (Akhtar, 2012). The negative statement did not cause any concerns and worries for Hayat. This demonstrates that even the intention of the author is towards the same direction as the way it is depicted it shows that it is normal to consider Quran as a tale. Not only that Hayat found that normal but also, he said that is 'a true and tried Mutazalite. He frankly told this to Rachel. This work consists of an epilogue and some book, each of which contains four chapters, but the

second book has one more chapter. From the beginning to the last section of the novel the writer gives negative roles to the Muslim characters. The promise of God that after difficulty there comes ease and tranquility gives Muslims a kind of relief. Hayat referred to Surah of 'Expansion' of Quran (Akhtar, 2012):

Have We not opened your heart
And removed your burden?
Have We not remembered you?
Truly, with hardship comes ease,
With hardship comes ease!
And so, when you are finished, do not rest,
But return to your Lord with love

2. Literature Review

For the last several years, several papers have been written on Ayad Akhtar's American Dervish. All the scholarly articles have praised this novel because of its themes. Its themes are mainly about identity and religion. None of these papers has so far tackled this novel in terms of its complete analysis. Here are some of the papers written about American Dervish and praise it: Lorraine Ali's '*American Dervish*' review: A Muslim boy grows up in the Midwest' is talking about the life of antagonist in the novel. Then, another paper by Ali in 2015 about loss of Identity is talking about loss of identity of the Muslim characters in diaspora. Also, more recently Faris Fajar (2017) has written a paper about feminist perspective in the American Dervish, which tackles the agony and sadness as well as all the challenges the women faced in Pakistan before arriving in America. Moreover, there is 'The Process of Assimilation in Ayad Akhtar's American Dervish' by Ismail which again like many other papers studies the loss and assimilation of identity of the Pakistani–American Muslims in America. Malik (2017) tackles the novelist's plays in an article. Also, Hasan and Sharif (2020) in their article on Golding's novel, have been considering Akhtar as a contemporary American novelist whose influence is continuing. Moreover, Fedtke (2019) discusses American nation in Akhtar's novel in his article. Daley (2012) talks about the plot of his novel in the *USA Today Review*. Then, Chaal (2018) discusses the identity of Muslims in USA through Akhtar's novel.

My approach is to some degree not the same as other authors approaches because it is an analytical approach and did not praise the work like the majority of the authors did. The novelist has merely considered the failure of a lady in marriage and the unhappy marriage of another family. He must have considered more than to Muslim families to be able to objectively present the lives of the Muslim families in the US. The way some of the Muslim characters speak about the Quran demonstrates the outcome the unsuccessful marriage of those characters but they ascribe it to Islam and the Quran. The shortcomings of these people lie in considering a relationship with a female or male character who is a Jew, or an atheist as a happy and successful relationship but considering the most principled type of relationship which is marriage a failure.

3. Migrants Adaptation with the New Culture of America

The novels talk about the religious, social, cultural, and even political sides of life and the challenges the Muslims confront in America owing to integrating themselves into the new country. The novelist negatively discusses the role of religion but positively presents the role of love, which is to some extent, exaggerated. Dale just simply refers to the narration of the novel which is the role of religion is negative and the one of love is positive (Daley, 2012).

In an interview with Akhtar, Aditi asks him about his work. The novelist intends to make his work a multi-layered work to cover almost the full life of a Muslim migrant family who live in America. However, it must have been referred to as one of the worst examples of this because there are thousands of Muslim families live in diaspora, yet they do not live in such a worse manner although they also live a challenging life. Akhtar's insightful perceptions of the conflicts between two worlds: the old and the new, between the unbeliever and the believer and among outsiders may appear to be natural to pursuers of both contemporary and classic writings (Langer, 2012). The majority of Ayad Akhtar's novels and plays deal with the life of Muslim families live in diaspora. He might have lived such a miserable life and therefore out of his personal experience he appeared to write about such issues. Akhtar thinks that he is like a narrative writer. Ayad Akhtar does not consider himself a novel writer or screenwriter or dramatist. Those he calls them modalities, are clearly dissimilar, and he says that he does not know that he favors 'one over others' (Sriram, 2014).

This novelist opens the lines of novel by introducing two female characters; his mother; Muneer and his mother's friend; Mina. His mother narrates to Hayat the sad and miserable story of Mina's marriage to Hamed Suhail in their home country before migrating to America. Hamed sent his lawyer to say to Mina that Hamed divorces her. The lawyer says repeats it three times, which implies he has completely divorced her (Akhtar, 2012), this repetition in Islam means that he has permanently divorced his wife. Also, the lawyer says that he recently gave life to Suhail's child. The boy was

named Imran by him. The two will be together for seven years, so, he will have the full privilege, unquestionably as a guardian (Akhtar, 2012).

The miserable life that Mina had in Pakistan obliges her to leave to American after receiving an invitation letter from Shah's household to stay with him in Milwaukee. The relationship between the child and his father was quite strong as Hayat asserts, yet he was fascinated by Mina. Hayat says that he liked her voice and wanted to attach to her. 'His time now turned around the expectation of that night-time hour listening—my eyes closed—to her breathy voice while the baby's mother told stories to him (Akhtar, 2012).

The moment the divorced woman goes to America, Hayat, who has been fascinated by Mina as his mentor, commences learning some Islamic teachings: the way one devotes himself like dervishes and knows the Quran by heart. Mina merely starts to explain to Hayat about Islam, but his guardians do not like this as 'Hayat's father was a mainstream humanist who' would not accept being limited to the he restrictions of any religious books (Fresh Air, 2012). Furthermore, his mother was frankly showing her hatred to Islamic teachings.

Thus, Hayat knows the majority of the Quran by heart. Hayat thinks that the best dream for one in life is to be a 'hafiz' one day, while Mina narrates stories of the dervishes to Hayat wishing to see him become one of those people. Perhaps she wants him to continue and be like dervishes as identified in the story told by Mina. She looks at two human beings in a glimpse, holding oranges, why scorn him. The two, chase a dervish by throwing orange peels; this makes the dervish thank them instead of becoming furious (Akhtar, 2012). Regarding this, Mina states that he found that quite normal and considers it to be similar to the 'ground' and 'those peels as those men' as well as the entire things made by God (Akhtar, 2012).

4. Role of Education in Hayat's Breeding

Since this young boy has been prepared to embrace the life of a hafiz (a memorizer of the holy Quran) relying on Mina, he, at the final part of the 'Second Book', 'asks God not to allow his father to be scourged in the flares of Hell fire for his transgressions. The boy sees his 'father waving at' him 'through the' unlimited blazes and he asked 'God to' pardon 'him, to' dismiss the father for all the wrongdoings. He 'heard father's cries of' agony similar to flames burnt the father (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat could only help his father be rescued from the hell by memorizing the Quran as a hafiz. 'It's Mina's word. While Mina during her teaching told Hayat that Hafizs could be protected from the hell, and he could be a protector for his parents. This encourages him to be a hafiz (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat and Mina have a spiritual and physical relationship. He values her truly, especially 'in the wake of having seen her' exposed 'body in the' restroom. Hayat asserts that her bare body is the best he has ever seen, 'its expanding at the chest and hips'. This stirred his sensual feeling. A strange feeling 'inside' him was at that point arousing (Akhtar, 2012). Because he had a 'physical adoration for Mina' and studying about Islam, Hayat cannot approve her marriage to Nathan, as he was a Jew. Therefore, Hayat tells Mina's family in Pakistan about their daughter who has a plan to get married to a Jew, in a letter. Mina's parents leave to the US and disapprove her marriage. Thus, she is obliged to marry a Muslim boy, Sunil. Mina's new life is not better than her previous marriage with Hamed. Unfortunately, her recent marriage is catastrophic for her because she dies by a cancer disease. Her disease does not make her sad, but she rather finds it as a solution for her on going familial issues with the person who is like a dervish.

Hayat starts to rely on Mina since his parents dislike religion and simultaneously he likes to know about Islam. Hayat finds is it quite essential to know about Islam because it is something which is missing while being brought up by his parents. He rarely hears anything about Islam from his father and mother all he learnt from her mother about Islam is her mother's story of her husband's white mistresses (Akhtar, 2012). As a result of the agony Mina has from her partner, Muneer starts telling the 'child the' assumption 'that he ought to' reject 'the Muslim conduct' towards girls and accept a girl who is a Jew. Muneer usually tells her child that her father wants his child to be similar to the Jewish people, which is what he likes much about Judaism and he says that the sole reason behind raising him up in a special way is to make him know that woman must be respected. The true thing is that. She also says that Kurban she is raising him up as a Jewish person (Akhtar, 2012). It is shown that the mother never works in the Jewish families, but she is in rest which is opposite to the Muslims in feeling with women; Jewish people respect women, whereas 'the Muslims' disrespect women. Therefore, Muneer asserts that Jews know how to regard ladies, in a better way. They know how to leave a lady alone as a lady, to let her look after them. They know how to give a lady consideration (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat's love for Jewish people has a precedent and it has been transferred to him from her mother and this love comes to her 'from her father'. Muneer's parent told members of his family a principle 'that Jews were the' extraordinary individuals, and God loves them more than believers, especially Muslims (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat's has stemmed from their ideas regarding the Jews. Hayat pinpoints 'that his grandfather's' regard 'for the' Jewish people 'originated from his experience living with them as a university student in Britain after the Second World War' (Akhtar, 2012).

The opinion of Hayat's grandfather about the Jewish people is that he believes that they know the benefit of learning more than Muslims do that is why he considers the education that Jewish people receive true not the repetition remembrance and careless spewing forth of custom he saw as regular to Muslims (Akhtar, 2012). His understanding of Muslims and Jews has been used as a relying source of knowledge in American Dervish and it leaves impact on Hayat.

To communicate his undesirable childhood because 'of Mina who' wanted to consider him to 'be a hafiz or a dervish, Hayat' highlights that his spirit was growing out of the kid measured attire 'with which' his childhood had equipped him as a Muslim child (Akhtar, 2012). In the epilog, Hayat states that 'it was in Rachel's arms—and it was with her affection— that he at long last found himself as a man, yet as an American' (Akhtar, 2012). It was Hayat who finds himself in nowhere but in company 'of the Jewish' female youth, 'Islam was' not, at this point important to him. His heart longed to ask. He puts 'my hands out before' him in the 'Muslim style' and attempted to invoke the sincere 'fire he' knew quite 'well from back when Mina lived' with them. However, 'his words rang empty'. 'Like sounds' addressed 'the deaf', or more terrible, to nobody (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat discloses his refusing 'of Islam and its' principles, while speaking with Mina He intended to inform Mina that he had been abandoning Islam step by step in the previous time, and now nothing 'left' (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat is such a naïve character who has been deceived by his friends who are not Muslim; they teach him some taboo words before leaving Islam. Farhaz and Hamza are his two friends.

By the end of *American Dervish*, Hayat unhappily announces 'that he has' barely 'read the Quran for some' years and he no longer loves Quran and does not consider it important in the library, the garbage bin was loaded up with books. He did not really think about the occasion. He did not kiss the cover as he normally did. He simply 'put the Quran down' on the 'top of' different 'books' and looked at 'it slide' aside, until it was no longer seen. It was the last time he would contact 'the Quran' for nearly a decade (Akhtar, 2012).

At the last part of the novel, it has been crystal clear that 'Hayat is' not a proper person to American Dervish for some reasons. For instance, he refuses all the Islamic rules and principles and points out the point 'that his' character 'in America' rotates only 'on his' closeness 'with the Jewish people' and gatherings, especially with Rachel. Consequently, Hayat needs to repudiate his related 'people, the Muslims' when what is supposed to be done, they will do it particularly 'the Pakistanis'. As observed 'toward the end of the novel, when Hayat needs to know more information about Mina's two children after her death', it is 'Professor Nathan Wolfsohn, the Jewish' instructor, who 'illuminates him about their lives'. Hayat's information about people from Pakistan is 'from Professor Wolfsohn'. Also, the reader is totally aware 'of the way that Hayat cannot be the American Dervish since' he, in his dream, was not honoured to remain and supplicate with the prophet. 'Mina' stated it was an extraordinary gift 'to see the Prophet in a dream', however there did not appear as a gift in hers. Despite continuing and supplicating with him, she had left (Akhtar, 2012). This lady did not tolerate sincere preliminary in his life. He was unable to deal with the idea 'that Professor Wolfsohn may marry Mina' regardless of the way that he is altogether set up as associated 'with Islam for her own specific' reason. Nearly 'towards the end of the novel when both Hayat and Professor Wolfsohn' meet, the later states that he did not give up her aunt. 'She was, and consistently will be', the adoration for my life (Akhtar, 2012). Also, Hayat could not accomplish or show enough ingenuity 'with his father's grave changes' that unfortunately upset 'his relations with his family'. Despite proposing appeal to his father 'not to drink' or look 'for the white American' lovers, he cooperates with his mother to reveal his father's motivations of weaknesses. While Hayat is tuning into his father and the clinical guardian's playful 'demonstrations, he' ends up being totally aware of his father's contaminated deeds (Barzinji & Hasan, 2016). Hayat enlightens readers regarding the method he comprehends 'his father that he was listening as she talked about', all aspects 'of him' inclined 'in toward her'. He was drinking and gesturing. He looked cheerful. The two of them kissed each other (Akhtar, 2012). The author tries to show the weak relationship of the father and the child. The child is looking 'out for the father while the father's position' may go 'to pieces' once 'he sees his child is watching him'. As though identifying something, 'father halted'. He looked at 'the window'. He solidified. At that point, the lady turned to look. He said that he knows 'her now'. She was the medical caretaker 'from the' clinic room, Julie (Akhtar, 2012). 'Mina is the best character in the novel' since she has kept her burdens secret from everybody. She never protests of any bad behaviors done by any character against her and attempts to tell Hayat the best way 'to be a dervish', which exposes probably the best quality. 'Her being' another 'dervish is very' clear 'in her taking after the' message passed on to Hayat to demonstrate 'him being a dervish'. It reflects her psychological state when life and death, bliss and feel sorry for, 'and châteaux' and confinement offices are no different 'in her eyes', that mirror her honest accommodation to the spirit 'of Sufism and shows how she is' just worried about finding 'the genuine way to Him'. Mina asserts that confidence 'has never been' about a life following death for her, Hayat. It is tied in with discovering God now. Nothing changed with you. Regardless of whether I am living in a jail or in a palace, wiped out or solid, it is not different. That is the thing that the dervish teaches. What 'comes our' direction, 'whatever it is, that is the vehicle'. Every individual's life, regardless of how small or big, how merry or 'how sad, it' very well may be a way to Him' (Akhtar, 2012).

This declaration implies 'that being a dervish implies, similar to a real Sufi, to be dissolved in the Almighty's Being in spiritual and physical ways'; that is to say., one's character, 'self and identity' are to be broken down in a more prominent one of Being, consequently quitting any pretense of everything to God (Allah). 'Such an image of a' decent dervish is the contrary side of retention into any gathering. She clearly reports 'that she could be' some 'dust, or sand, or nothing at all' with the objective 'that she will not' do any harm 'or be hurt by anybody on earth'. In doing as such, 'she best practices' the noteworthiness of ingestion 'to the extent that she' was unable to think less about the outside sorts 'of her religion'. Thus, she did not wear a headscarf;' and 'nor did she fast in Ramadan' (Akhtar, 2012). 'To present the significance of a real 'dervish or Sufi, Mina' sees being a Sufi, way to surrender 'the world and everything in it'. Being a Sufi is way to rely upon nothing, to need 'nothing, to be nothing. A Sufi is a day that needs no sun, a night that needs no moon, no stars. 'A Sufi' resembles 'the dust on the ground, not the stones that hurt' individuals' feet, yet the dust is there although nobody realizes (Akhtar, 2012).

The above statement of a dervish or a Sufi shows that Mina is a dervish. Her marriage is with Hamid Suhail who separates with 'her to take his child back to' himself. 'Mina and Milwaukee, joined by her child Imran, live as two visitors with Hayat's parents'. Mina teaches Hayat Quran in futile, pauses 'when his father' demands her to stop. She prepares food 'for them like a cleaning' professional, exhibits her willing to get married with the Jew, yet marries the horrendous man Suhail 'Chatha who's American' spouse quits him, and finally 'dies because of' Suhail after an extended length of awfulness. To acknowledge 'what society forces upon her, Mina' changes her 'physical structure' to adjust 'herself into' the general public in such a way that her stylish hair made her fashionable, an American lady, an amazing possibility to people 'like us' who could not imagine we could look like that (Akhtar, 2012). Also, part of her inundation 'into society' is appeared in her condition 'to marry Professor Wolfsohn', a Jew.

One can argue that it is Mina who becomes a dervish in the novel not Hayat since she is worth calling her dervish owing to her features which resembles the ones of a dervish. Hayat is the individual who dismisses the American convention as he continued looking for his identity, a request which shut in abnegating his Islamic precepts to find his personality. It is not easy for Hayat 'to be a hafiz for certain reasons. He has been trained 'by Mina who has taught him the Quran in English, not in Arabic'. Clarifying her conclusion, Mina expresses that all deeds are estimated by objectives, not appearances, which helps Hayat the best 'way to memorize the Quran in English'. Souhef, who was the 'Imam' discredits this point of view, advising Hayat that she needs to become familiar with the blessed book in its heavenly language. Yet, she does not need be debilitated. (Akhtar, 2012). Second, Hayat's spiritual and physical connections with Mina is emphatically solidified straightforwardly 'after Hayat sees her' uncovered body 'while she is having a shower'. The image of Mina's bare body gives off an impression of being unshakable and overwhelming in his life. Hayat says the picture he thought he'd trained himself to overlook would return, 'unbidden—her breasts'; and long periods of disarray and would follow. Hayat made new endeavours to stifle the psychological picture. It was useless. The more he opposed, the more tenacious it demonstrated (Akhtar, 2012). Afterward, he inclines 'down to give Mina' a kiss. The love 'relation between the two' has been shared and both let it be known after kissing her, Hayat says: 'That is so sweet, behta.' 'I love you, Auntie.' And she says, 'I love you, too, Hayat' (Akhtar, 2012).

Hayat is quite attracted by 'Mina's' naked body and her photo, 'that his mother posted on our refrigerator door' (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat elucidates the indescribable influence the picture has on him both physically and emotionally. 'One night I lost myself. Mina's picture before me, my hands between my legs, I disappeared into pleasure. Before I knew it, my loins shuddered and convulsed, releasing something thick and wet inside my underwear' (Akhtar, 2012).

Mina's naked photo and her physical region raise Hayat's feeling and shiver his body as he sees Mina inclined 'in to turn the page. Her arm brushed against mine, her touch murmuring along my skin and repeating up my arm to the rear of my neck' (Akhtar, 2012).

Somewhere else, Mina embraces, exhorting him that he would transform into a hafiz soon. (Smith, 2012) It is brief which observes the mixture of both physical and academic manners of thinking. Mina intends to assist him with recollecting transforming into a hafiz while he focused on her amazing greatness and squirmed with convincing emotions. She embraced him, and at the same time he felt it once more that dazzling shiver 'running along' his limbs, 'up my back' (Akhtar, 2012).

When the novel begins the novelist shows 'that Hayat is' not very close to 'his father like his mother. In this manner, the peruse envisions 'that Hayat will take after his mother's' movements in venerating her viewpoints as for the Jews. This is the explanation for Akhtar's start of 'his novel with Hayat and Rachel's connection in the' prelude and conclusion of this literary work with a similar association in the epilog. The beginning and the end of the novel with the nearby association between 'Hayat and Rachel' causes the focal point of the novel to give off an impression of being 'a midsummer night's dream'. In that capacity, what isolates the prelude, and the epilog is only a record prompted 'by Hayat who' tends to 'Rachel about his' nearby relative Mina'. Truth be told, Rachel requests Hayat to relate the tale of Mina'. At the point when he educates her regarding 'Mina's passing', she does not react as solidly as he envisions 'that

she will, yet' she finally does. Hayat attempts 'to hear a word' from Rachel to demand him portray Mina's story. The truth was, he might not want to leave. He was expected to stop. He expected to prompt her. They sat calmly 'for a long moment', and thereafter Rachel touched his hand. 'Let me know,' she said (Akhtar, 2012). If Rachel did not 'mention Hayat to relate Mina's story, there would have been no American Dervish using any and all means. Along these lines, one can say that the whole story is depicted at Rachel's own specific requesting. Hence, Hayat who is directed by 'Mina can be neither a dervish nor a hafiz' (Barzinji & Hasan, 2016). It is a piece of the writer's skill to demonstrate Hayat's unproductive undertaking 'to be either a dervish or a hafiz when Akhtar portrays Hayat's life as being constrained' by his obsession with his tutor, Mina."

5. Losing of the Previous Identity and Gaining a New Identity

The other person who speaks of lack of respect for 'Islamic personality among the older generation in American Dervish is Hayat's father, Naveed Shah'. In the entire novel, the writer makes it obvious 'that Naveed is an abominable man for a modest bunch of reasons. Moreover, he says: 'to begin with, his wife Muneer tells nothing about him except' how he behaves with the beautiful female companions. Hayat observes, 'I heard more tales from Mother about Father's mistresses than anything else' (Akhtar, 2012). He 'also recalls his father's difficulties with his family' and asserts: 'throughout my childhood, Mother spared me little detail about her troubles with Father. And at ten, I already knew myself well enough to know that if I listened too closely to what she said, my blood would start to boil' (Akhtar, 2012).

  Naveed, on the other hand, is 'from a third- world village, Muslim, rough-hewn, and sardonic. Their colleagues at the hospital called them the Odd Couple' (Akhtar, 2012). 'To make the contrast more apparent, Naveed's son says' 'the butt of most of Father's jokes was Nathan's love for all things cultural: the theater, symphonies, art museums, and above all books' (Akhtar, 2012). It is clear that Naveed's bad characteristics became a proof when Naveed is dissimilar to Nathan Wolfsohn in terms of social relations. He had a shattered family because his relations with his wife and child have been weakened. In this regards Hayat points out: my parents now fought as they never had. They cursed and slammed doors and threatened to leave each other. More than once, Father walked out, car keys in hand, and did not come back until the next day, or even later' (Akhtar, 2012). He disrespects his wife, Muneer states, 'all I wanted was to know how he was feeling! That is all! And if he did not want to say anything, he should just tell me. But no! Instead, he finds a way to hurt me. He's a cruel man' (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat confirms the bad marriage of his parents: 'my parents' marriage was difficult almost from the start. In short, by the time I was ten, she had been miserable for years' (Akhtar, 2012). Naveed discloses his hatred for his wife and his love for western girls. Muneer asserts: 'he doesn't like my mouth, he told me. Not the way he likes the mouths of his white prostitutes. Free hearts, free minds, free mouths, he said. Not like Eastern women, who are heavy and dark and mentally imprisoned' (Akhtar, 2012). Naveed's wife did not behave well with her husband. She highlights, 'after all, a man who drank and cheated on his wife could not claim to have any credibility, she liked to say' (Akhtar, 2012). These bad behaviors are seen as Naveed's loss of Islamic Identity.'

  Hayat's father, 'Naveed, despite what might be expected, 'is from a third-world' town, Muslim, unpleasant cut, and cynical. Their partners at the medical clinic considered 'them the odd couple' (Akhtar, 2012). To make the difference obvious, Naveed's child says the aim of the majority of Father's jokes was Nathan's affection for everything social: the theatre, orchestras, craftsmanship historical centers, or more 'all books' (Akhtar, 2012). Essentially, Naveed's bad behavior ends up being totally apparent when he is socially appeared differently in relation to Nathan Wolfsohn. He had a very weak family and his relations with the two broke. Hayat insinuates his folks' separated associations when he says that his folks currently battled as they never had. They reviled and hammered entryways and took steps to leave one another. More than once, father exited (Akhtar, 2012). He abuses his partner, Muneer who says that all he needed 'was to know how he was feeling!' That it is in a nutshell! What is more, on the off chance that he would not like to state anything, he should simply let him know. However, no! Rather he figures out how to hurt him. He is a pitiless man (Moody,2014). Also, Hayat declares 'that his mother's' union with 'his father has been a pitiful' one from its beginning. He says that his folks' marriage was troublesome nearly from the start. So, when he was ten, she had been hopeless for quite a long time (Akhtar, 2012). Naveed illuminates his life partner Muneer that he abhors her a lot that he adores the white ladies. Muneer says that he does not care for his mouth, he let him know. Not in the manner which he prefers the lips of the beautiful whores. 'Free hearts', free personalities, 'free mouths, he' stated, dissimilar to Eastern ladies, who are hefty and dull and intellectually detained (Akhtar, 2012). Naveed, like an accomplice was not regarded by his partner. She features, all things considered, a man who drank and undermined his better half could not profess to have any validity, and she jumped at the chance to state (Akhtar, 2012).'

6. Quitting Religion and Identity

Giving two of the most crucial things in one's life is not easy. These two are religion and identity which were gained throughout one's life. 'Having started to show his dislike of Muslim prayers five times a day and considered it duplicity

Hayat postulates that 'Praying all day long. Nothing to show for it, they are hypocrites' (Akhtar, 2012). Similarly, Naveed's spouse has been affected by Naveed and she starts asking about his belief in religion, also this concern that influences the entire of those close to him badly, and more particularly the members of his family, and this has been talked about by' Hayat:

'Deep down, Mother was a believer, but the years she'd spent with Father—who thought religion was for fools—had trained her, I think, to check her religious impulses' (Akhtar, 2012). The writer once more negatively makes a reference to the role of religion, which either Naveed believes religion is not necessary to anyone, or the author intentionally talks about the negative role of the practitioners of religion, which is certainly influenced by his previous culture. He talks about religion to his friends and states, 'Religion, my friends is a topic for fools. And this conversation is the living proof' (Akhtar, 2012). After being influenced by the new culture and perhaps the new religion of Judaism, he starts calling Muslims who say prayers in the mosque: 'There are idiots enough here for someone to lead. Chatha and all those stooges with their masjid on the South Side. Be grateful you do not know any of them yet' (Akhtar, 2012). It was possible for Naveed to disregard the entire religious beliefs as pressed by Randy Boyagoda (2012) at the time the lady states: 'Hayat's father is a philandering alcoholic neurologist who wears his atheism proudly, scorns the local immigrant Muslim community, and regards all religions and Islam in particular as backward and embarrassingly crude.' (Akhtar, 2012) The novelist is always being influenced by a new culture and religion therefore he hates Islam in particular.'

This hatred of Islam has been transferred to the character of Naveed disallows Mina teaching his son anything about Islam particularly Quran: 'Your father asked me not to participate in your religious study anymore. He made me promise and I have to honor his promise. I am his guest, after all' (Akhtar, 2012). The integration 'of Mina into' community is based on her surrendering to her 'visitor's principles' and in remaining thankful to her commitments to stop teaching lessons of Islam to Hayat. Naveed likes to go out; notably contrasting, it was discovered by him during his happy remain with the beautiful girls, and it is described in the speeches: 'what has your Father sacrificed for my sake? Hmm? Tell me! Not even one night's pleasure with one of his white prostitute.' (Akhtar, 2012).

Naveed thoroughly rejects Quran believing that it has no significance to him. The reason he hates Quran, is a kind of misunderstanding; because in his culture people mistakenly behaves badly and now, he ascribes it to Quran and Islam. Also, his tearing of pages of the Quran is another hint about his hatred of the Islam because of his own strict and severe culture in his own country. Moreover, worse than this is the act of his father who puts the torn pages of the holy Quran under his feet. While he is quite furious and is acting foolishly is one of the obvious problems that immigrants face in a new culture and country.'

It is said that 'in Akhtar's skillful hands, American Dervish helps non-Muslims understand the difficulties of following deeply held religious beliefs in a secular society, although we see Hayat [sic] lose his Muslim faith.' (Ashworth, 2012) Adapting one in a new country does not mean to quit all the personal values that are related to religion and identity because without giving one's culture and identity or religion one could integrate himself and even make friends.

7. Conclusions

Akhtar was influenced by some western thinkers, who left their impact on his works. In an interview with Aditi Sriram in 2014, Akhtar confirms that some theologians who have influenced him are 'Jonathan Edwards, Emerson, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and some others such as, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Woody Allen, Seinfeld' (Ali, 2015). Akhtar has presented Islamic people negatively. To him Muslim men disrespect women and there is no love and respect between married couples. The writer was not objectively presenting the reality of the Muslim families in diaspora. The novelist demonstrates the hardship and the challenges the Pakistani migrants face in America because of two factors; culture and religion. Their culture and religion differ from the one of most of Americans. His portrayal of the life of Muslim families in diaspora is negative. This lies in presenting the struggle between the parents of Hayat. Hayat's mother was treated badly by her husband under the name of religion. This makes her hate religion and tells others about her hatred of it. Naveed and Muneer's thinking of religion leaves Hayat relying on Mina for gaining some knowledge of his culture.

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Quality, Price and Competition Strategy Effects on Performance of Soft Drink Enterprises in Rwanda

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Abstract
Amidst market performance challenges of declining customer numbers and sales for some soft drinks enterprises in Rwanda, that has caused a big concern for academics and professionals, the study set to empirically investigate the effect of quality, price and competition strategies on sales and customer retention performance for these enterprises. The study was quantitative and cross-sectional where researchers obtained data at a single point in time on more than one case. A sample size of 118 marketing managers was taken from these enterprises in the central districts of Kigali that produce carbonated drinks, mineral water and juice. Due to corona virus pandemic, virtual means of data collection were used through telephone-based questionnaire survey. Despite the positive and significant relationship between quality and price strategies with market performance, (β =0.500, t=1.09, p<0.01) for quality, (β =0.23, t=3.05, p<0.01) for price, results for competition strategies (β =0.23, t=3.05, p=0.281), show nonsignificant relationship with market performance in the studied context. This finding manifests a big gap in managing competition and therefore advise these enterprises to revisit their competition management decisions and make investment in those positioning alternatives that impact on consumer perceptions.

Keywords: Strategy, Positioning, Market Performance, Soft Drink Industry, Rwanda.

1. Introduction

Quality, price and competition strategies are part of the positioning dimensions according to Aaker and Shansby (1982), which firm managers can manipulate to create a favourable brand image in the market through altering customer beliefs and perceptions to their favour. The positioning concept is built entirely on one core foundational cause of understanding a specific target market segment and consequently directing all the marketing mix activities in order to create a unique value before the customer compared to the competitor. It is one of the marketing mechanisms in which numbers (sales) are realized by firms in their operating market space. Despite the disagreement on how firms can uniformly use quality, price and competition strategies (Kalafatis *et al.,* 2000), they are controllable decision variables that an individual firm can leverage on to win competition. On the other hand, market performance is the magnitude to which a firm achieves its set market objectives than the competitor (Morgan, 2011). How quality, price and competition strategies can influence market performance has ostensibly gained currency before researchers and practitioners given the continued problem of failure by soft drink enterprises to meet their market performance

objectives in the region and world over (Financial Times, 2021; Lamwaka, 2018; Kell, 2017; Taylor & Jacobson, 2016). Like other countries in the region, soft drink enterprises in Rwanda have had challenges where some have closed down before celebrating their first anniversary with yet others experiencing consistent sales slump, besides others facing declining customer numbers (Sophia & Söderbom, 2013; Pamela & Lwakabamba, 2010; Bralirwa Annual Reports 2013, 2016, 2017). Such market phenomena happen in the aftermath of the country's good industrial growth trajectory following a decade of sustained growth in the manufacturing sector, with a compound annual aggregate growth rate of 6.5% in real terms between the years of 2001 and 2011 (Gathani & Stoelinga, 2013). The government has supported the industrial sector in general and the soft drink industry in particular, because of this industry's enormous contribution to the national economy in terms of GDP (6%) and the 14.3 per cent contribution to private sector employment according to Integrated Business Enterprises Survey (IBES) 2015 report (Department of Economic Statistics, 2015) and National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2018.

Nevertheless, strategic marketing scholars have tended to agree that well positioned brands or companies achieve their market performance objectives (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Ries & Trout, 2001). It has been argued that for good performance results and firm's continued existence in the today's marketplace that exhibit high degree of fluidity, right positioning strategies must be developed and enacted (Mustapha, 2017), reinforced by the right set of resources and abilities as postulated by the dynamic capability theory (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). That said, positioning strategy (related to quality, price and competition) takes a centre stage in explaining market performance in this paper. We use a marketing perspective to measure market performance as customer retention which is a customer performance metric that evaluates the strength of customer relationship and also sales as a business performance metric which relates to financial objectives (Zahay et al., 2004).

The quality strategy debate in the industrial organisation literature departs from Adam Smith and his contemporaries, who strongly believed that the ideal superiority principle for a firm to obtain and sustain profits than other individual competitors in the same industry, lies in the invisible market hand rule of providing the 'best' product. This is a non-compromised truth that cannot and should not be bent! The competitive advantage theory as advocated by Adam Smith (1776), a Scottish social philosopher and a pioneer of political economy, in his book "an inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations", one of the most influential books ever written, initially suggests that states and businesses should pursue policies that create high-quality goods that guarantee selling at high prices in the market under "unfair" market share environment. (Rose et al., 2010) contend that with this happening the firm gains monopoly by capturing high market position. The 'best' product principle as a driver of competitive advantage for business entities has been and or is still ruling in business circles despite the fact that comparison of product actual performance and product performance expectations and perceptions of customers still remain controversial (Thijs & Staes, 2008).

Positioning is one aspect of the STP model (segmentation, targeting and positioning); one of the familiar strategic approaches in marketing that help marketers to prioritize propositions as they develop and deliver personalized and relevant messages for their different audiences (Bleier & Eisenbeiss, 2015). Specifically, positioning does with identification of right propositions for each segment. It embodies a set of decisions and activities including product attributes or features, quality, price, use or application, and competition (Aaker & Shansby, 1982). To have a product occupy a certain place in a consumer's mind, owes greatly from an adopted positioning strategy (Kerin et al., 2007). Various studies have shown how firms have positioned themselves differently and attained their goals: for example, basing on product quality (Saqib, 2019), Service quality (Blankson & Crawford, 2012), benefit-based positioning (Chen & Zhu, 2009), service personalisation (Peppers & Rogers, 2000). Other scholars have considered other positioning constructs for example value creation by Haksever et al. (2004), time efficiency by Zhang et al. (2007), problem solutions or need, usage situation of users and competitors by Sakyi-Gyinae and Holmlund (2018); while Liu et al. (2016) emphasizes product aadvertising; whereasHuda, Karim and Khan, (2012), emphasise competitive distribution. The overall intention is to change the image quality of offerings that are competing for the same buyers on the market. In this regard the ideal positioning option would put into consideration needs, wants and aspirations of the target markets reflecting the idea by Aaker and Shansby (1982) that positioning mean different things to different people. According to them it is still debatable as to whether positioning means segmentation decision or image question or product features! Whereas no defined dimension in terms of numbers that marketers can use have been prescribed, positioning on the basis of limited number of dimensions has been emphasized to yield better results in terms of market share, sales and profitability (Pereez et al., 2020), yet others have put emphasis on many dimensions to yield positive results (Eryigit et al., 2014). It is seen here therefore from these findings that it's still unclear whether a positioning on the basis of limited dimensions is rewarding than competing on many dimensions. We are reminded however not to fall victims of trying to be everything to everyone (Akroush, 2012), presupposing that the only guide is basing the positioning priority choice on the existing market segments or consumer choice dimensions.

Despite the Resource-based and market-based theoretical contradictions on what firms should base on in their choice of strategy propositions, this study supports those internal organizational resources and capability, and external market considerations guide this process (Hooley *et al.*, 1998). The ardent changes visible in the marketing world today call for a match between market requirements and company abilities as they struggle to deliver value. The researchers observe that there is a product proliferation challenge in the soft drink industry in Rwanda where many soft drink combinations exist in different flavours, shapes, colours and sizes. This has made features of market offerings become less distinctive raising significance to intangible factors to do with management of reputation and manipulation of consumer perceptions (Makhitha, 2019). Moreover, soft drinks are bought not because of quality but their brand image (UKEssays). Positioning ostensibly fills this marketing gap ensuring that the product occupies an explicit, distinct and proper place in the minds of potential and existing consumers, relative to other rival products on the market (Ries & Trout, 2001). The marketer does this without forgetting that we are in an information society, in which a lot of commercial messages flow in different formats to the consumers necessitating that for a brand to stand out from its competitors and to be perceived as superior on a consumer's line of choice, positioning becomes prominent.

Presumably, here a product will not only be purchased, but also warranting a larger margin through the perceived added value before the target customer. There is a general belief that any potential change or improvement made on brand perceptions is a function of positioning. It goes into the whole modification of tangible characteristics and intangible perceptions of a market offering in relation to the competition (Solomon, 2011), where the practical aspect of positioning is enshrined in the consumer perception manipulation (attitudes and preferences) linked to certain good or service. This discussion sees positioning as both a consumer concept and management concept that is wide in scope. It is important therefore that every organization defines clearly its positioning propositions.

Moreover, the customer environment today, by and large, demand products and services that are "newer, imaginative, exciting, innovative and, products with increased variety and availability, shorter lead times, and increased differentiation at the same or lesser price" (FR. Oswald & Mascarenhas, 2018)! The kind of existing heterogeneity in consumer tastes and preferences makes it rarely possible to provide goods and services that optimally meet all need of clients on the market. This very kind of variations in consumer tastes and preferences makes it hard to satisfactorily live to expectations of every client and this has always remained a virgin area that constitutes opportunity for those companies that have always strived to do their best in delivering best products and services in the last 2 or 3 decades. Evidently, firms which have been able to emphasise product-related features: i.e product quality, product variety and best brands, in their value offering to the market have been able to survive and grow fast (Badenhorst-Weiss *et al.*, 2014).

Among others, price ostensibly remain a sensitive marketing issue, for, every customer today expects a high-quality product at a low price (Razak *et al.*, 2016). Positioning on the basis of price, though, still one of the most flexible elements of the marketing mix, which interferes directly and in a short term over the profitability and cost effectiveness of a company (Borenstein *et al.*,1997) is practiced with caution for fear of price wars which in themselves reduce profitability (Krämer *et al.*, 2016). What is apparent is that for a low-price positioning strategy to be sustainable, it requires that costs are at least low compared to competitors. Competition-based positioning has also proven to yield results especially when linked to manipulation of market intelligence for the sake of firm interests (Kunle *et al.*, 2017).

Besides positioning strategy offering explanation on market performance, different industrial organization and strategic management researches have shown mixed findings on possible causes for business success or failure. For example, Arasti (2011), attribute firm performance success or failure to expended efforts of business managers in achieving their goals, whereas, Appiah (2011), attributes performance failure to organisation's inability to predict its environment. Richard *et al.* (2009), also in their empirical study focusing on measuring Organizational Performance, attribute performance success to existing political environment while specifically referring to changes in government policies and programmes which influence the ability of economic entities in achieving their goals. Pratten (2004), agrees to this position arguing that regulatory changes have the potential to promote or inhibit market competition. In yet another related study, Arasti *et al.* (2014) associate failures in firm performance with institutional policies, whereas Blankson, and Crawford (2012) posit that a firm's poor market position stems, in part, from its ineffective positioning activities. In a rather different way Mustapha (2017) attribute product market performance failure to marketing challenges. A review of results of the aforementioned studies reveals inconclusiveness and do not provide a framework for understanding market performance variations across soft drink manufacturing enterprises in a developing country context. Besides this study continuing this debate due to disagreements in reviewed studies, it was partly also a response to many calls by strategic and relationship marketing scholars for a continued empirical examination of the relationship between positioning strategy and market performance (Butt *et al.,* 2017). Lack of information on how quality, price and competition strategy influence market performance, is regrettable because it is a source of evidence for soft drink producers to build long term quality, price and competition management decisions. From this study findings soft drink enterprises will, first of all, attain desired insights in how quality, price and competition strategies link with positive

market outcomes, secondly, in consideration of survival in the highly competitive soft drink industry in Rwanda, managers, will allocate due consideration to these strategy areas to reap from positioning effects and improve their market position. The rest of the paper presents literature review, methodology, results, discussion, implications, conclusions, recommendations and limitations.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Despite the significant relationship which has been found to exist between quality, price and competition strategies and market performance, suggested by dynamic capability theory and market orientation perspectives, there are still empirical evidence in literature showing results that are disagreeing (Saqib, 2019; Butta *et al.*, 2017; Hooley *et al.*, 1998). For example, Anderson *et al.* (1994) have specifically shown that an effective quality strategy guarantees customer satisfaction and continued sales. Relatedly, Lagat et al. (2015) also reports a positive association between positioning dimensions of quality, price, and market performance. Their findings concur with Blankson and Crawford (2012) who found positive effects of positioning strategies on service retail firms in U.S. Further still, Wu (2013) observes that a company that fails to provide services or whose service quality does not fall within the consumer's choice scope may negatively affect the quality perceptions of its physical products as well. Quality is the natural reason for the customer to buy. The relationship between price and customer retention has also been emphasised (Dawes, 2009). Although strategy literature is sparse on how competition should uniformly be handled, a theoretical study by Medlin and Ellegaard (2015) show that competing is a firm-based process which is customer and data oriented. McMullen *et al.* (2009), posits that competition strategy enables a firm to minimise threats caused by external environment. It is reflected in the firm's internal behavioural adaptation as it strives to acquire new customer and competitor information and insights. This however according to Arnold *et al.* (2010) requires heavy investment in acquiring new capabilities that go into process improvements that benefit the customer in a sustainable manner. Going through the whole cumbersome process of uncovering, modifying and finally satisfying the customer needs by the firm in question explain the whole practical gist of this customer centric strategy (Chong & Chen, 2009). Here the customer develops feelings of being loved and consequently become loyal to the providing firm which have future sales implications besides making referrals.

Besides the fact that quality, price and competition strategy as predictors of market performance have been widely researched in the micro-enterprise setting in Brazil (Porto *et al.*, 2017) and others in used car market contexts (Tellis & Wernerfelt, 1987), and others on micro-level firm comparison (Matsubayashi, 2007) we are not sure whether theories that tested these relationships can produce similar results for soft drink context. This study examined effects of quality, price and competition strategies on Market performance of soft drink enterprises in Rwanda.

Although positioning by quality and price has generally been found to relate strongly with market performance (Blankson *et al.*, 2008), only a handful of studies have been done in Rwanda (Mukeshimana *et al.*, 2019); besides a few studies have specifically examined whether positioning strategy has sales and customer retention benefits claimed (Chang *et al.*, 2015; Kalafatis, 2000; Blankson & Crawford, 2012).

The significance of positioning strategy cannot be overemphasised though since; empirical evidence shows that no one positioning strategy achieves results in all situations (Saqib, 2020). This finding agrees with a study by Hooley *et al.* (1998), who conclude that in reality, there is a never-ending number of ways in which firms might position themselves in their markets. Moreover, besides the effects of positioning being negative in contexts of co-branding (Wason & Charlton, 2015) the success of quality, price and competition strategies is dependent on customer orientation (Butta *et al.*, 2017).

The researchers base on above differing views to infer that the discussion on effects of quality, price and competition strategies on market performance is still inconclusive, particularly when viewed in the soft drink industry context in Rwanda. We consequently hypothesised as follows:

H1: Quality, price and competition strategies do influence market performance of soft drink enterprises

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed telephone-based questionnaire survey to collect data (Vallance *et al.*, 2014; Tomlinson *et al.*, 2009) because of the need to honour Corona virus pandemic prevention guidelines related to social distancing. This minimised the risk of contracting corona virus and collected data with ease. Data was collected at a point in time (Bell *et al.*, 2018) in June 2020 aided by the soft drink enterprises' contact list from the Rwanda Revenue Authority report (2018). Directors of Human Resources served as contact persons and helped to identify respondents who were majorly marketing managers in these enterprises.

From the population of 167 soft drink enterprises in the three city districts of Kigali (Rwanda Revenue Authority report, 2018), the study investigated 118 enterprises determined using a formula by Yamane (1967) i.e

$$n = N/1 + N(e)^2$$

Where, n= corrected sample size, N = population size, and e = Margin of error (MoE), e = 0.05 based on the research condition.

Practically, as per the sample determination formula, sample size (n) = 167 / (1 + 167 (0.05^2) = 167 / 1.4175 = 117.60 ~ 118

City region districts were emphasised by researchers because it is in the same region where 70% of soft drink enterprises are located and therefore a good representative sample. Soft drink enterprises were categorized using stratified sampling with enterprises categorized by district and type of drink (Carbonates, mineral water and Juice). Only formally registered enterprises were considered and selected from each district using simple random sampling technique (Standage *et al.*, 2006).

Guided by previous works on positioning strategy and market performance (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Trout & Ries 1972; Delen *et al.*, 2013) and a pre-test with 16 academic and industry experts, we were able to develop scales for five variables in our model: (1) Quality strategy (2) price strategy (3) competitor strategy (4) sales and (5) customer retention. A 5-point likert scale was used to measure perception of respondents where 5 stood for strongly agree, and 1 stood for strongly disagree.

An effort was made to ensure that each construct was measured as the sum of its items' responses. Details of validity and reliability of the scales are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Variable Validity and Reliability Statistics.

Variable	CVI	Cronbach's Alpha
Quality	0.840	0.848
Price	0.936	0.769
Competition	0.709	0.732
Market performance	0.830	0.857

As can be observed in Table 1, all of the measures had acceptable levels of validity and reliability (Field, 2009).

As part of data analysis, hypothesis testing and estimating the relationship between positioning strategy (quality, price and competitor) and market performance, we used Pearson Correlation and Linear Regression (Tabachnick *et al.*, 2007). We defined our linear regression model as follows:

$$MP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 QS + \beta_2 PS + \beta_3 CS + \mu \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots (1)$$

Where, MP= Market Performance, β_0 constant, $\beta_1 QS$ coefficient of quality strategy, $\beta_2 PS$ coefficient of price strategy, $\beta_3 CS$ coefficient of competitor strategy and μ =Error term

We analysed the data using SPSS version 20.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Table 2 contains the profile of respondents and surveyed enterprises. The majority of respondents were males and the predominant respondent age was between 26 and 35. On average the enterprises surveyed had employees ranging between 21 and 100 (76.7%), which means the survey largely covered small firms. It was found out also that majority of enterprises had stayed in business for at least seven years which suggests that the sample had a good industry experience. In terms of products produced, the majority (66.7%) produced juice and all of them find market in Rwanda besides some having other international markets.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents and Enterprises Surveyed.

Respondent age	%
Less 25	7.4
26-35	36.3
36-45	33.5
46 and above	22.8
Respondents' Gender	%
Male	65.0
Female	35.0
Firm size	%
21-100	76.7

101-250	6.7
251 and more	16.6
Firm Age	%
less than 2 years	3.3
3-7 years	76.7
8-15 years	3.3
More than 15 years	16.7
Products produced	%
Carbonated drinks	13.3
Mineral Water	20.0
Juice	66.7
Markets in which they sale their products	%
Rwanda	100.0
East Africa	16.7
Africa	6.7
International markets outside Africa	10.0

Source: SPSS; Primary Data

Table 3. Regression Model Summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	0.643	0.413	0.410	0.213	0.409	35.182	3

   a.   Predictors: (Constant), competition_based_strategy, pricing_strategy, quality_strategy
   b.   Dependent Variable: market_performance

The study results in Table 3 generally portray a significant positive relationship between quality, price and competition strategies and market performance of SDMEs (r = 0.643, p < 0.01). However, hierarchical regression results show positive but insignificant relationship between competition strategies and market performance (Table 4). The implication of this is that better quality and price management strategies are related to increased possibility of attaining desired market outcomes, supporting our study hypothesis. As indicated in *table 3*, the whole model accounted for 41% (r^2=0.41) of the variations in performance of SDMEs, and other factors not specified in the model explain 59%.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.401	0.412		.973	0.000
	quality_strategy	0.293	0.267	0.500	1.098	0.000
	pricing_strategy	0.502	0.165	0.230	3.051	0.000
	competition_based_strategy	0.086	0.128	0.071	0.673	0.281

a. Dependent Variable: Market_performance

   The beta coefficient ((β =0.500, t=1.09, P< 0.01)), shows that any positive change in quality management strategy would result into a positive change in market performance (Table 4). Though a similar trend was found for price strategies, (β =0.23, t=3.05, p < 0.01), the beta coefficient for competition strategy i.e (β =0.07, t=0.67, p>0.5), shows that the relationship is positive but not significant. This finding emphasises that competition strategy did not contribute to the variations in performance. This is a realization of a big gap in managing competition by these SDMEs.

4.2. Discussion

The study generally established a significant and positive relationship between quality, price and competition strategies with market performance. The results show that at 95% significance level, 41% of variations in market performance are explained by these strategies soft drink enterprises use. This finding implies that if these positioning dimensions are emphasised by an enterprise, a resultant change in its market performance in terms of customer retention and market sales is guaranteed. Though regression test results (beta coefficients), show a relatively bigger contribution of quality strategy to the performance variation than either price or competition strategy, this does not refute the robustness of the study findings but rather to show the multidimensional nature of positioning as a concept where one dimension may yield for a firm than or different from others.

The findings agree with some scholars in strategic marketing management literature who observe that positioning is a multidimensional construct related to quiet an array of performance indicators proposing that firm should pursue multiple strategies as a way of yielding positive market performance outcomes (Eryigit et al., 2014; Blankson & Crawford, 2012). This view however contradicts Chang et al. (2015)'s and Pereez et al. (2020)'s position emphasising on positioning on the basis of few or limited dimensions. They seem to be biased on pursuing many positioning claims (alternatives) since they tend to confuse a consumer (Mitchell & Papavassiliou, 1999), create disbelief (Kotler, 2003), all this earlier alone described by Evans et al. (1996) as enemies of positioning, allegedly, that consumers do not usually have a clear mind picture of the needed brand since human brain naturally has challenges in remembering multiple brand associations (Trout & Rivkin, 1996). What is apparent is that there is no defined competitor-based positioning rule, but Czepiel (1992) advises that every business entity should play cards well but don't fall a prey to having a target to satisfy demand for all. This line of thinking matches with the argument by Prahalad and Hamel (1993), who tend to emphasise forging a strategic position in the operating environment commensurate with the business entity's core competencies. It utterly reflects on positioning as a need-and-resource-based function. Resource-based and market-based theories support these kinds of argument where choice of a strategy propositions, should base on not only firm's resources and capability but also a consideration of external market conditions (Hooley et al., 1998). It is observable that many soft drink products in different flavours, shapes, colours, and sizes exist on the market in Rwanda and competition is high but the ability of these soft drink enterprises to promise and deliver high value will distinguish them in terms of realised market outcomes. It is important for marketers in the multinational marketplace to realise that there is no single positioning strategy that works for all business entities (Gulati & Garino, 2000). It's important to note however that the adopted strategic positioning option should be a true representation of consumers' perceptions on products or their purchase intentions as reference point for positioning before competition (Camelleri, 2018). Camelleri argues that positioning is an image question (it's a mind thing), calling for attention on which product features guarantees customer patronage.

5. Managerial Implication

First, the study highlighted the critical role quality, price and competition strategies play in the market performance of soft drink enterprises in Rwanda. The study findings remind marketers on the key positioning dimensions that these enterprises should place emphasis on in order to be able to alter consumers' perceptions on their products. From the study findings, such strategic positioning options are crucial in determining not only improved customer retention performance but also improved sales performance.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that generally, quality, price and competition strategies positively influence market performance, though competition strategy, specifically, was found to have no significant relationship with market performance in the studied context. The results provide confirmation of the significant role of the quality and price positioning alternatives in creating a favourable market position in terms of increased customer loyalty and market sales. This study presents empirical evidence to academic community that supports the relationship between quality and price with market performance in soft drinks industry in Rwanda. The study adds to the existing stream of market performance knowledge and a debate in the quest for performance improvements in a firm. SDMEs are hereby challenged to constantly revisit their competition-based positioning management strategies in order to attain better market performance outcomes. It's of strategic imperative for SDMEs in Rwanda to set right strategies related to quality, price and competition that permits them to not only satisfy the target market needs but to also overcome or minimise threats caused by entry of international players on the local market.

The study recommends that soft drink enterprises infuse better competition management processes. They should position their brands based on dimensions that are appealing to their market segments. They can revisit their competition management decisions and make investment in those positioning alternatives that impact on consumer perceptions.

Although there is a lot of literature on positioning strategy and market performance, there is still ambiguity of the precise meaning of these concepts. This may have affected the conceptualisation of the study and therefore results.

Moreover, the study focused on quality, price and competition strategies as predictors of market performance. Secondly, due to unusual situation of corona virus pandemic, virtual means were used to capture self-report questionnaire-based data. We resorted to virtual interview because of wanting not to violate social distance guidelines of the government. Besides falling a prey to certain social desirability, the researchers missed out on the facial impression that would enrich the findings. Thirdly, the present study was limited to soft drink enterprises operating in the central districts of Kigali. This makes it possible that the results are only applicable to soft drinks sector in Rwanda. Lastly, the study is cross-sectional; it is possible that opinions held by people may change over time. In spite of the limitations, company owners, managers, academicians and policy makers interested in the field of positioning strategy and market performance might find this study useful. Future research may wish to carry out a long-tudinal study to test how quality, price and competition strategies predict market performance in non-soft drink manufacturing settings in another country.

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The Gender-Biased Wording of Recruitment Advertisements in Iraq

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Abstract

This research studies the nature and the scope of gender discrimination in job advertisements across Iraq's various business sectors, segments, and hierarchical levels. It also attempts to understand the correlation between the language of the vacancy announcements and the level of the gender discriminatory content in them. This study is conducted with the hope of contributing to gender equality at the workplace in Iraq and the wider region. The current study adopts a content coding and analysis method that depends on the analysis of job advertisements (n=1015) by organizations operating in Iraq published in the leading recruitment websites and social media pages for a period of about four consecutive months from June to October 2017. The analysis is conducted using descriptive statistics and tested using simple cross tabulation method. Although the topic has been studied in various countries and contexts, it lacks academic attention in the Middle East, which can be seen as a unique area for research. Also, this research is the first attempt, as far as we are aware of, to comprehend the correlation between the choice of language (English, Arabic or Kurdish) and gender-biased wording of vacancy announcements. Understanding the relationship between language and gender discrimination in job advertisements might as well unveil a new area of study and aid in the quest for gender equality in the Iraqi workplace. This paper provides scientific evidence that more than 41% of all job advertisements in Iraq commit gender discrimination. The majority of them indirectly favor male candidates. Additionally, the nature of the vacancies for which women are preferred is different from the ones that target men. The adverts generally try to segregate women into non-managerial and administrative jobs. The study also infers a statistically significant correlation between the language of the advertisement and gender discrimination rate.

Keywords: Recruitment, Job Advertisements, Direct Gender Discrimination, Indirect Gender Discrimination, Kurdistan Region, Iraq, The Language of Job Advertisements.

1. Introduction

In Iraq, the practice of gender discrimination is illegal. The Iraqi constitution states that all Iraqis are equal regardless of their gender and any act of discrimination is prohibited (Iraqi Const. art. 14, 2005; Iraqi Const. art. 16, 2005). However,

gender discrimination is prevalent in many aspects of work life in Iraq. One of the reasons is the ineffective implementation of the relevant regulations, because of weak public institutions (Fatafta, 2018). Another reason is the lack of legal education and awareness of relevant individual rights (Women in Iraq Factsheet, 2013). These and various sociocultural barriers are among the reasons that allow organizations operating in Iraq to commit gender discrimination in their job vacancy promotions.

Gender discrimination in job advertisements is when a vacancy announcement shows favouritism to a particular gender. It can be either direct or indirect. Direct gender discrimination is when employers publicly call for one gender and/or discourage the other. However, nowadays gender discrimination in recruitment advertisements is subtler (Regmi & Naidoo, 2008; Gaucher *et al.*, 2011; Pager & Western, 2012). Indirect gender discrimination is when employers use subtle signs, such as qualities attributable to one specific gender, without stipulating the preferred gender of the applicants. This research focuses on both direct and indirect sex favouritism in the design of such advertisements in Iraq.

Although research on the matter is fairly advanced in other parts of the world; in the Middle East, it is underexplored at best. Not enough scientifically valid content has been published about the nature of gender-biased advertisements in the area. Similarly, the relationship between the use of the language of the advertisement and gender discrimination tendency lacks adequate scientific research. We deliberate that studying the phenomenon could contribute to gender equality at Iraqi workplace and contribute to the deeper understanding of the gendered wording of job advertisements.

To fill this knowledge gap, this research has collected, content-coded and analysed more than one thousand job advertisements from all over Iraq. It is aimed to settle important questions regarding the nature of discrimination in the job advertisements in Iraq. Some of these questions included the rate of gender discrimination, the targeted gender and whether the discrimination rate corresponds with the level and the segment of the job being promoted. It also tried to understand the correlation between the choice of language (English, as a main language of business in the country, Kurdish and Arabic, the two main official languages of Iraq) in the call for job applicants and the likelihood of committing gender discrimination.

The issue of gender discrimination during recruitment is very important in the Iraqi context, as women are very underrepresented in the country's job market. The Iraqi labour force consists of 72% males and only 13% females who are currently working or actively seeking jobs (Iraq Knowledge Network Survey, 2011) without much prospect for positive change (Iraq Human Development Report 2014, 2014). This phenomenon can harm the individuals and their families (Iraq Knowledge Network Survey, 2011). Against this backdrop, this research examined one important area of employment practice, which is recruitment advertising. In view of the fact that the way employers design their recruitment messages can have a significant impact on the number of applicants, their gender mix and capabilities. It can also influence the country's labour force.

This paper starts by first reviewing the relevant literature around the topic followed by an in-depth explanation of the methods used for data collection, organization, analysis and interpretation. The detailed discussions of the findings of this research are followed by the conclusions and the recommendations alongside the authors' notes for better practice and further research at the end of the paper.

2. Literature Review

Recent research on the topic has been carried out in many different countries in Asia, Europe and America, excluding any Middle Eastern country, up to the researchers' knowledge. The studies propose that the practice of gender discrimination in job advertisements is both present and has important negative outcomes.

Various studies claim that organizations option for attracting a specific gender right from the recruitment stage almost all over the world, and the majority of organizations tend to try to attract male applicants. For instance, Gao (2008) and Woodhams *et al.* (2009) study the Chinese labour market for the symptoms of sex discrimination in job advertisements to find out that nearly 40% of job advertisements specify the gender sought for, the majority of which seek male applicants. Lawler (1996), Grün (2004) Hossain and Kusakabe (2005) and Anand (2013) examine employment statements in Thailand, Singapore, Africa and India to come up with similar inferences. Similarly, the gender-differentiated wording of job advertisements is considered both present and significant in some European countries such as England (Stidder, 2005; Regmi, 2009), Denmark (Askehave & Zethsen, 2014) and Germany (Horvath & Sczesny, 2015). In a similar fashion, in the United States of America and Canada gendered wording is used in job recruitment materials (Gaucher *et al.*, 2011).

The only exception seems to be Spain. García-Izquierdo *et al.* (2015) state that their research could not verify such practices in Spanish electronic recruitment documents. However, their study mainly focuses on the recruitment messages on the websites of companies listed on the Spanish Stock Exchange. Listed companies are usually subject to more scrutiny. Therefore, they are probably more prudent when discriminating against one gender. Moreover, they test

for discriminatory language against women only. Hence, their findings cannot infer lack of gender discrimination against males and by organizations that are not listed on the stock exchange. Accordingly, the nonexistence of gendered wording of job advertisements in Spain cannot be verified.

Regardless of the gender preferred, gender discrimination in job advertisements can lead to many negative outcomes. One such repercussion is reducing the size of the generated pool of applicants. For, women are less likely to apply for jobs that use more masculine terms (Born & Taris, 2010; Gaucher *et al.*, 2011). This does not apply to women only. Men also avoid applying for positions that favour female applicants (Bem & Bem, 1973). Additionally, just portraying a sex in a job advertisement, regardless of whether it is a male or female, can drive both men and women away even if it is their gender that is being called for (Bosak & Sczesny, 2008). Along with the reduction in the size of the pool, the talent level of the applicants is likely to drop as well.

The second drawback of the gendered wording of job advertisements is maintaining and increasing gender inequality and stereotypical ideas about masculinity and femininity at the workplace. Researchers argue that being gender-biased at the first stage of recruitment, the vacancy announcement, is both an important symptom of and a cause for gender inequality (Woodhams *et al.*, 2009; Gómez-Mejía *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, it can be an indicator of an organization's detachment from fair-hiring practices (Leong *et al.*, 2004).

Discrimination against women in Iraq is related to the traditional culture and deeply rooted in the society; that establishes the hierarchical relationship between male and female. Discrimination has been a cultural tradition that is accepted by women and applied by men as social value. Iraq is a religious and male dominated society where women are considered as secondary to men. Preference of son birth is more common almost in every community. Gender based discrimination in different forms starts right after the birth and it continues throughout the life cycle. There is popular saying in Iraqi "Chhora pae khasi, chhori pae farsi" which literally meaning a delivered women will get goat and pumpkin to eat if she gives birth of boy and daughter, respectively. There are different sets of behaviours for boys and girls to perform. Such discrimination has helped to establish the hierarchical relationship between men and women in the society and also helped to create many rigid gender norms that restrict women's opportunities and stifle their development in the private and public sphere.

Furthermore, the gendered wording used in job recruitment materials has served as a reason to keep women away from traditionally male-dominated occupations (Gaucher *et al.*, 2011). This, in turn, leads to gender segregation of jobs. Authors distinguish between two types of gender segregation, vertical and horizontal; both of which are attributable to gender discrimination in recruitment. Horizontal gender segregation refers to sorting men and women into different jobs. While vertical segregation is sorting men and women between different managerial hierarchies (Fernandez & Sosa, 2005; Hossain & Kusakabe, 2005; Gao, 2008; Woodhams *et al.*, 2009; Gaucher *et al.*, 2011). The consequences of gender segregation range from hesitant applicants, under satisfied workers to economic inefficiencies (Hegewisch *et al.*, 2010).

The current research focuses on a particular geography whose labour market is of a unique structure that is underexplored in the area of gender discrimination at recruitment stages. It also focuses on the relationship between the use of a particular language and the tendency to discriminate between the genders. Understanding these is likely to aid in gender-fair recruitment in Iraqi job market and improving both the labour force and the recruiters.

The definitions of the important variables used in this paper are provided as follows:

Gender-biased language has been found to have detrimental effects for women, for example, in decision making during the hiring process: Early work by Bem and Bem (1973) showed that explicit gender references in job advertisements discouraged female U.S. university students from applying for typically male positions. Recent studies obtained similar results with more subtle gender references: An agentic compared with communal wording of job advertisements led to a lower level of anticipated belongingness and to a lower level of job appeal in female Canadian psychology students (Gaucher *et al.*, 2011). Job advertisements in the masculine (he instead of he and she) decreased female U.S. students' identification with the job and their motivation to pursue the respective career (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011).

Gender discrimination in the world can be seen in different religions, countries and communities. As indicated by Waltke, ancient Jewish prayed every morning saying "Thank you lord that I was not born a woman; Christian boys are taken to the special room of the church, but the girls are not during the name giving ceremony; women are not supposed to be priest or father in temples and church. The situation of the gender discrimination has been worsened with the development of science and technology as it predicts the sex of a foetus before it turns to a baby. In 1978 and 1983, seventy-eight thousand foetuses were aborted in Mumbai, as they were known as female foetus.

The first point to identify about recruitment is that it is a process with several key stages, all of which work in co-operation to improve one's chances of finding the best candidates available for any advertised position. The candidates are required to go through various stages, and they are given certain tasks or go through various rounds of interviews,

which they have to accomplish in order to get selected. In some cases, final round of interviews, include only two people, one is selected and the other one gets rejected.

Job advertisement is an announcement that informs people that a certain job position is available. It is written in an engaging tone, and it contains information not only about the job position, but also about your company and the benefits you offer.

3. Methodology

The researchers wanted to find answers for important questions related to the rate of direct and indirect gender discrimination in vacancy announcements in Iraq and whether the nature of this discrimination changes in accordance to variables such as job level, job segment and the sector in which the recruiting organization operates. This study is conducted with the hope of contributing to gender equality at the workplace in Iraq and the wider region. The current study adopts a content coding and analysis method that depends on the analysis of job advertisements (n=1015) by organizations operating in Iraq published in the leading recruitment websites and social media pages for a period of about four consecutive months from June to October 2017. The analysis is conducted using descriptive statistics and tested using simple cross tabulation method. Although the topic has been studied in various countries and contexts, it lacks academic attention in the Middle East, which can be seen as a unique area for research. Also, this research is the first attempt, as far as we are aware of, to comprehend the correlation between the choice of language (English, Arabic or Kurdish) and gender-biased wording of vacancy announcements. Understanding the relationship between language and gender discrimination in job advertisements might as well unveil a new area of study and aid in the quest for gender equality in the Iraqi workplace. Thus, the research was conducted using content-coding and analysis method, a method used by the majority of the researchers who have conducted similar research in other countries (Bem & Bem, 1973; Grün, 2004; Leong *et al.*, 2004; Gao, 2008; Gaucher *et al.*, 2011; Anand, 2013; Askehave & Zethsen, 2014). We content-coded every job advertisement we could find on the leading recruitment websites and the leading social media pages throughout Iraq from the period of June to October 2017. The choice of the period was out of convenience. We used random sampling for data collection as described hereinafter.

First, a focus group of 7 persons was entrusted with finding the leading recruitment websites and relevant social media pages. The group included people from different backgrounds all of whom were seeking jobs when the focus group was conducted. They suggested the sources shown in Appendix one alongside the reasons for their choices. Their suggested sources were used to collect the samples from.

After that, around 10100 job advertisements were downloaded and screened by one of the researchers. However, only the advertisements containing the required information were content-coded (n=1015). The required information included job descriptions and requirements, person specifications, seniority level and the profile of the hiring organization. The content-coding was done by one person (the researcher mentioned above) for consistency purposes. To help with the process, a special Google Form was created, a similar copy of which is attached in Appendix two.

During the coding process, any advertisement that included reference to one gender such as male/female or men/women in any language was labelled as a direct discriminator. When direct discrimination was found, there were no further attempts to detect indirect discrimination, assuming it unnecessary.

For indirect discrimination, we used the same list of vocabularies presented by Gaucher *et al.* (2011) in their similar research. The list was translated to Arabic and Kurdish to check the non-English content. According to the aforementioned list, any advertisement that contained more feminine terms that refer to communication, care, commitment and passion than masculine terms such as leadership, command, control and analytical skills were considered indirect gender biasedness in favour of female applicants and vice-versa. Alongside this list, any advertisement that asked for owning a car or having a driving license was considered sexist in favour of men. For, Iraqi women drive to a much lesser degree compared to their male counterparts. For example, in Kurdistan Region, probably the most economically active region in the country (Aziz *et al.,* 2017; Ahmad & Cheng, 2018). The ratio of women having driving licence is probably much more at least at the past few years. In the other parts of Iraq, the odds are much less in favor of women (Tahir, 2013). Finally, any job advertisement that required the ability to travel within and outside the country or required the applicant to be able to stay onsite overnight was considered indirect gender discrimination against women. Since Iraqi women have too many social and religious constraints against that.

The research question related to understanding the relationship between the language of the advertisement (Arabic, Kurdish, or English) and gender discrimination rate is considered complex, for gender is expressed in different ways in each language. For instance, there are male and female suffixed and stand-alone pronouns in the Arabic language. Yet, when Arabic speakers do not want to discriminate, they usually use male pronouns (Sībawayh, 1988). Therefore, we did not interpret the use of male pronouns as a sign of direct discrimination in the Arabic advertisements. However, the use of the female pronouns is interpreted as direct discrimination in favour of women. Nevertheless, the case is different in

the English language. Therefore, any use of male/female pronouns is interpreted as a sign of direct discrimination. In contrary to both Arabic and English languages, there are no dedicated male/female pronouns in the Kurdish language[1]. Accordingly, only words like male/female, man/woman and lady/gentleman were considered direct discrimination.

4. Findings and Discussion

Job postings in Iraq are written in any of the three aforementioned languages or a combination of any two. The English language is considered the most popular language for advertising vacancies. As, around 40% of them were written in English. The second most popular language of the job advertising is Arabic followed by Kurdish at 35% and 21% respectively. The rest of the advertisements are either bilingual or multilingual, combining two or more of the three languages. Interestingly, even organizations located in Iraqi Kurdistan use English and Arabic languages more often than the local language in their job advertisements. This could be due to the weakness of business Kurdish and/or Iraq's subsequent regimes' efforts to Arabize the Kurdish region.

According to our data, the retail sector seems to be the biggest recruiter, as more than 15% of the job advertisements come from that sector alone. Correspondingly, the current status of Iraq has attracted many local and international charity and non-profit organizations. Therefore, this sector has had the second largest rate of job advertisements during the period of this research.

The segments and the hierarchical levels of the jobs being advertised vary as well. The majority of the recruiters look for professionals at almost 37% followed by management positions at a little less than 29%. Administrative jobs and sales and marketing come last at 18.7% and 16% respectively. Furthermore, the absolute majority of advertised jobs fall into the non-managerial level category. When it comes to management positions, recruitment messages for first-line management jobs are more popular than middle and top management ones. During the period of this research, only 4.2% of the organizations were looking to hire top managers, while 16% and 14% of them were looking to hire functional and middle managers respectively.

In what follows, our findings are presented and discussed. This section is divided into two parts. Part one discusses the nature of the practice in Iraq and part two analyses the relationship between the use of language and discriminatory content.

4.1. The Nature of Gender Discrimination in Recruitment Advertisements

4.1.1. Discrimination Level

A little over 41% of all recruitment advertisements state their favouritism for one specific gender. This rate, despite the fact that it is high, is a little lower than countries such as Thailand, Singapore and a few other countries mentioned in this paper. Results also indicate that establishments operating in Iraq are less likely to commit indirect sex favouritism. As, only 14% of the organizations stress qualities that are attributable to one specific gender without directly specifying the gender they are seeking. The reason might be the relative freedom organizations possess to commit direct gender favouritism without the fear of being persecuted, as discussed earlier.

In India, organizations seek female candidates (Anand, 2013). Nevertheless, in China organizations look for male applicants (Gao, 2008; Woodhams *et al.*, 2009). Similar to China, organizations operating in Iraq show gender favouritism towards men. Of the advertisements that favour one gender only, 52.5% of them favour men and the other 47.5% favour female candidates. A more interesting finding is when organizations want to discriminate for females, they are more likely to do so publicly at 83.4%. This could be the result of the relatively unique use of pronouns in the Arabic language, especially that job advertisements in Arabic tend to be more in favour of females (direct discrimination).

4.1.2. Discrimination and the Job Hierarchy

The data presented in Table 1 shows that organizations operating in Iraq are trying to drive women away from top management positions towards lower-level jobs, as not even a single job advertisement was found to publicly favour female applicants for top management positions. On contrary, almost 65% of them state they favour female applicants for non-managerial jobs.

Table 1. Direct and Indirect Gender Discrimination According to the Job Level.

Type	Gender	Job level			
		Top management	Middle management	First-line management	Non-managerial

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[1] This is true for the Sorani dialect that is spoken by the majority of the Kurds living in Iraq. In the other dialects, there are dedicated male/female pronouns.

Direct discrimination	Male	8 (100%)	12 (57.1%)	13 (52.0%)	79 (35.1%)
	Female	0 (0.0%)	9 (42.9%)	12 (48.0%)	146 (64.9%)
Indirect discrimination	Male	8 (80.0%)	22 (75.9%)	21 (65.6%)	58 (84.1%)
	Female	2 (20.0%)	7 (24.1%)	11 (34.4%)	11 (15.9%)
Total	Male	16 (88.9%)	34 (68.0%)	34 (59.6%)	137 (46.6%)
	Female	2 (11.1%)	16 (32.0%)	23 (40.4%)	157 (53.4%)

A consequence of this is the vertical segregation of women in the lower managerial positions, while men occupy the decision centres. One of the reasons this happens, which is related to the wording of job advertisements, is the fact that masculine wording of advertisements for middle and top management positions can make women think they are less fit for the job posted (Bosak & Sczesny, 2008; Horvath & Sczesny, 2015). This phenomenon is already apparent in some sectors of Iraq. According to Abdullah (2015), in the political sphere and in the judiciary system of Iraq, women do not have decision making power. For instance, about 90% of the judges and the top leaders of the political parties are men. This is because the judges and those of top managerial posts are appointed by decision makers and political consensus. You rarely can find job advertisements for the public sector. However, lower in the hierarchy, female representation could go up to 60 %. The current research suggests this phenomenon could partially. But we rarely can find job advertisements for the government sector. This practice, as (Bosak & Sczesny, 2008; Zieleńska, 2012; Horvath & Sczesny, 2015) explain, is due to the misbelief that men are more fit for leadership positions; despite lack of scientific evidence supporting this claim.

4.1.3. Discrimination and the Job Segment

Table 2. Direct and Indirect Gender Discrimination According to the Job Segment.

Does the advert discriminate?		What segment would the advertised job fall into?			
		Sales and marketing	Management	Administrative	Professional
Direct discrimination	Male	28 (41.8%)	20 (54.1%)	19 (28.8%)	45 (41.3%)
	Female	39 (58.2%)	17 (45.9%)	47 (71.2%)	64 (58.7%)
Indirect discrimination	Male	23 (100.0%)	42 (70.0%)	7 (46.7%)	37 (88.1%)
	Female	0 (0.0%)	18 (30.0%)	8 (53.3%)	5 (11.9%)
Total	Male	51 (56.7%)	62 (63.9%)	26 (32.1%)	82 (54.3%)
	Female	39 (43.3%)	35 (36.1%)	55 (67.9%)	69 (45.7%)

Results in Table 2 show that only administrative job advertisements seek female applicants, while every other segment commits discrimination against them. As mentioned earlier, this sector counts for less than 19% of the job postings. This could partially explain why women are so underrepresented in Iraqi job market. These results are similar to many other such studies done elsewhere (Gao, 2008; Leong *et al.*, 2004; Anand, 2013). This practice is thought to be one of the major reasons behind the formation and persistence of gender segmentation and segregation (Hossain & Kusakabe, 2005), especially horizontal segregation where Iraqi women are more likely to be concentrated in administrative jobs.

4.2. The Correlation Between Language and Discriminatory Content

It could be because of the culture, the language structure or the organizational atmosphere that there is a significant relationship between the level of discriminatory content and the language being used to advertise. The results in Table 3 show that Kurdish advertisements seem to commit the most direct discrimination at 45% followed by Arabic advertisements. Nonetheless, English advertisements are the highest in committing indirect discrimination at 20 %, but lowest in doing direct discrimination. This phenomenon was noticeable during the content-coding process too. For example, the same organization posting the same or very similar job openings directly discriminates when using Arabic and/or Kurdish languages but is much more prudent when using the English language.

If we assume that foreign-owned entities use the English language more often in their advertising, we might be able to divulge that foreign organizations are less likely to discriminate between the genders, since these organizations usually try to set good examples for the local ones in terms of gender-fair recruitment (Gao, 2008). It is likely that these organizations are responsible to abide by the gender discrimination rules in their home countries too. However, the current research cannot verify this practice in Iraq. Another likely reason is that it is popular for the non-governmental organizations (NGO's) to use English as the main language of vacancy announcements and people would expect the

third sector organizations to be more gender-fair. This practice might be the NGOs' attempt to stay up to those expectations. However, making valid assumptions for this case is beyond the scope of the current research.

Table 3. The Choice of Language and the Discriminatory Content.

Type	The language of the advert				Total
	Arabic	Kurdish	English	Bilingual	
Direct discrimination	127 (35.7%)	94 (45.0%)	51 (12.4%)	10 (26.3%)	282 (27.8%)
Indirect discrimination	29 (8.1%)	23 (11.0%)	85 (20.7%)	4 (10.5%)	141 (13.9%)
No discrimination	200 (56.2%)	92 (44.0%)	275 (66.9%)	24 (63.2%)	591 (58.3%)

Even though Kurdish is the formal language of the Kurdistan Region and the advertisements written in this language portray the highest rate of gender biasedness, it cannot be automatically assumed that organizations located in Kurdistan are more discriminative than those located in the other parts of Iraq. In fact, the analyses revealed that organizations all over Iraq are almost equally discriminative regardless of their location. The only difference between the Kurdish region and the rest of Iraq is that organizations located in Kurdistan are more discrete than the later in doing so.

Additional suggestions should be developed and proposed by each conference's Safety Officer in consultation with the conference organizing committee. Moreover, conference organizers can assess the extent of diversity programming at each delegates' home institution to develop a reference point for how knowledgeable delegates are of gender disparity through a short survey during the registration period. For example, surveys could ask if participants have a leaky pipeline program at their institution or what tactics they have encountered at other conferences, including any diversity trainings they have completed.

5. Conclusions

This research content-coded more than a thousand job advertisements from Iraq's different organizations. Then, the data was analysed and tested to settle questions related to the level and the nature of the gender-biased wording of job advertisements published on the leading recruitments websites and social media pages all over Iraq. The first purpose of the paper was to answer important questions about the level of discrimination and whether it changes in accordance with the nature of the job opening. The second purpose was to find the correlation between the use of language and the tendency to discriminate between the genders by the recruiters in their job advertisements.

It was concluded that gender discrimination is present in more than 41% of the job advertisements in Iraq. Of those gender-biased job announcements, more than 52% seek male applicants. This might be one of the reasons why women are so underrepresented in Iraqi labour force. It also concluded that women are not only discriminated against in numbers, but the nature of the discrimination is less in their favour. Since only the advertisements that promote vacancies in administration and lower level or non-managerial positions try to attract female applicants, while organizations try attracting male applicants for management and professional vacancies. This has led to segregating women in non-managerial and administrative jobs in the country.

This research also inferred that the use of a particular language has a significant impact on the discriminatory content in job advertisements in Iraq. Since advertisements written in Kurdish are more discriminative than the ones written in the Arabic language while English job advertisements contain the least amount of discriminatory content. Furthermore, Kurdish and Arabic advertisements are more direct in their discrimination, while organizations are more discrete in their discrimination attempts when they use English in their advertisements.

Finally, this study concluded that organizations all over Iraq are equally discriminative, judging the geographic location an irrelevant factor on the rate of the gender-biased wording of the job advertisements in the country. The only exception was that organizations in Kurdistan are more indirect in their discrimination.

6. Recommendations for Practice and Further Research

Judging from the findings of this research, we believe it is the responsibility of individuals, businesses, NGO's and the government together to be aware of the status-quo that undermines the Iraqi job market and prevents women from getting the jobs they are worthy of. The hope is for all the parties to work together to create equal opportunities for the genders.

We advocate that it is the government's responsibility to pass and implement relevant equal opportunity laws for Iraqi workplace. Also, the government and the NGO's have to make sure that individuals are well aware of their legal rights, especially the ones related to equal opportunities at the recruitment stage. They also have to change the cultural values that encourage gender discrimination in recruitment. These approaches, we presume, will minimize the practice of

gender discrimination in job postings across Iraq.

Furthermore, the recruiters should actively try to avoid the misconception of women being fit for lower positions only. They should follow the best practices in this regard. One way to make sure that their advertisements are discrimination-free is to post their job vacancies in more than one language.

We also recommend further research to be carried out in this regard. First, research should be conducted to understand the differences between local and foreign organizations in terms of gender discrimination in job advertisements. Also, a scientific understanding of whether NGOs are more gender-fair in their recruitment messages is important. These studies will help determine whether the international organizations and the NGOs can be used as role models for the Iraqi organizations.

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The Adoption of Blue Ocean Strategy to Sustain Competitive Advantage in the Syrian Food Industry

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Abstract
This study aims to detect the extent of adoption of the Blue Ocean Strategy in the Syrian food industry companies and its role in improving its competitive advantage. Syrian Companies need to shape their blue ocean strategy in accordance with consumer value, price, cost, and adoption. This permits them to construct a feasible business model and ensure that profits from the blue ocean is created. The study used descriptive-analytical approach. The data were composed of a questionnaire distributed to 293 personnel working in 85 Syrian food companies. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 22) were applied to analyze the data. The result showed there are a substantial interest by Syrian food companies to adopt Blue Ocean strategy indicators in its operations. Also, there was a significant relationship between the adoption of Blue Ocean Strategy and the improvement of sustainable competitive advantage for the investigated companies. The researchers suggested that Syrian companies should emphasize on the importance of the innovation indicator and its role in producing new brands and creating markets free of competition which sequentially contributes to increase in the company's market share. The study achieves a qualitative benefit for both researchers and academics about the concept of BOS because it is the first study that introduces the BOS and its impact on sustainable competitive advantage in Syrian.

Keywords: Blue Ocean, Red Ocean, Sustainable Competitive Advantage, Blue Ocean Strategy Indicators, Syrian Food Industry.

1. Introduction

The Syrian food industry is one of the most essential industries affecting the Syrian national economy especially post the crisis of 2011. According to the head of Syrian Exporters Union Mohammed Al-Sawah, despite the harsh economic conditions that face Syria, Syrian food products are still entering 90 countries and exports of the food sector is five times the textile sector, and there are Syrian companies whose food exports reached tens of millions of dollars. According to Bayram and Gök (2020), the raw material export share was about 68%, while the share of the total Syrian export for finished products and semi-finished products was 24% and 8%, respectively. Therefore, it is vital to study this industry and discover new trends affecting its progress.

The rapid improvement in the Syrian economy after the 2011 crisis and the high demands for food in the government-controlled areas, food industry firms need to change and adopt unconventional ways and means to reach the top of the competitive pyramid among existing companies in Syria today.

The revenues of any economic sector are determined by the different forces of competition within it and surpass any institution within this sector depends on adopting an effective competitive strategy that allows it to gain and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage that distinguishes it and ensures its superiority over other competitors. Therefore,

setting strategies are one of the main ingredients for long-term success and survival. Old tradition businesspeople believe that evaluation of competitors' strategies and knowing their activities are good business, on the other hand, this concept has become relatively old in the eyes of those who advocated the application and adoption of the Blue Ocean strategy.

In modern time, so many companies are looking for new strategies with innovative approaches away from traditional strategies. The concept of Blue Ocean emerged as a solution to the old and traditional business practices in Syria. The blue ocean strategy is the development of the concept of strategic management in the evolving and changing world of business. Kim and Mauborgne (2015) defined blue oceans as those industries and markets that yet to be identified, therefore, they do not exist. Its characteristics are that they are entirely new markets, so they have the potential to generate profitable and attractive returns to organizations. On this basis, the Blue Ocean strategy represents the means to discover market locations that are not competitive. The Blue Ocean strategy is an option for organizations to distance themselves from the bloody competition that characterizes the red ocean (the competing companies) by creating an undisputed market space, so that competition becomes irrelevant (Taleb & Albanna, 2012).

Kim and Mauborgne (2015) summarized the difference between the Red and Blue Ocean strategy, the first involves competition within the current market space while the second involves the creation of unutilized market spaces. The former works to defeat the competitors, while the second considers competition as irrelevant. The first focuses on exploiting the current demand and conducting value and cost analysis, while the second focuses on the creation of new demand and acquisition. Finally, the first makes the firm's actions follow the strategic option of differentiation or cost leadership, while the second focuses on organizational activities as a whole to strive for uniqueness and cost leadership together.

In this research, the researchers will be studying the blue ocean strategy according to its four factors indicators (eliminate, reduce, increase, and create) and its relationship with the dimensions of sustainable competitive advantage (Quality of product/Service, Customer Response, Organization Effectiveness and Efficiency, Flexibility, Cost and Creativity), which will be clarified thoroughly later in the paper.

The authors motivation for this study came from their knowledge that blue ocean strategy pursues to turn strategic management on its head by sustaining competitive advantage with innovation as the main objective, in which businesses produce consumer demand resulting in increased profitability in the industry. To test the dominance of Blue Ocean Strategy through both the long and short terms, a theoretical model is outlined that postulates that as long as there are profits to be had in the food sector. Looking at entire industry in this way over time would tell if Syrian food companies succeeded by creating new markets (blue oceans) to sustain competitive advantage. If companies succeeded by creating new markets that attracted consumers over the long term, industry profits and the number of vendors would both steadily increase

1.1. Problem Statement

Many food industries companies in Syria operate in an unstable environment, which characterized by the limited ability of these companies to invest their technical and marketing capabilities to suit the needs of their customers or even stand up and meet the competition in the surrounding countries. Moreover, the problem is compounded by the status quo and economic sanctions imposed on the Syrian government for more than 9 years. Also, restrictions on import and export due to the United States and its allies' arbitrary measures and economic embargo, which requires these companies to redouble their efforts to adopt new strategies and innovative approaches that contribute to overcoming the difficult circumstances surrounding them.

According to (Understanding Market Drivers in Syria, 2018) the main problem facing many companies in Syria is lack of experienced marketers and knowledge of the competitive methods. In addition, the failure to apply modern management methods and relying on family experience, as well as the non-application of modern technology and innovative products, resulted in a lack of competition. Findings from the Syrian Economic Science Association Research in 2017 showed that market competition has a direct and strong relationship to the companies' sustainability.

We will shed the light on the food industry companies in the Syrian Arab Republic and examine their adaptation of Blue Ocean strategy as a modern competitive strategy, especially in light of the rapid changes and transformations taking place in Syria today. The researchers will examine the achievement of sustainable competitive advantage by exploring the principles and indicators of Blue Ocean strategy and its impact on the food industry companies. Therefore, the research problem is to what extent food companies in Syria adopt the blue ocean strategy; does this strategy promote a sustainable competitive advantage?

1.2. Research Objectives

I.   Identifying the extent to which food companies adopt the BOS as a competitive strategy by discovering the undetected gaps unnoticed by competitors.

II.   Identifying the extent to which competitive superiority is achieved by employing the dimensions of sustainable competitive advantage (product/service quality, customer response, effectiveness and efficiency, Flexibility, cost, and creativity) by adopting the BOS.

III. Testing the relationship between BOS indicators (eliminate, reduce, increase, and create) and sustainable competitive advantage.

IV.   Studying the impact of the BOS indicators (elimination factors, reduction factors, increasing factors, and creation factors) to enhance sustainable competitive advantage in food industry companies in Syria.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study draws its importance from the subject matter, which is the extent of BOS impact on the sustainability of Syrian Food Industry Companies. The study has two important aspects: cognitive and practical. Cognitive side: The study achieves a qualitative benefit for researchers and academics about the concept of BOS because it is the first study that introduces the BOS and its impact on sustainable competitive advantage in Syrian Food Industry. In addition to the potential significance of this study for scholars in the field of strategic management which could emerge clearly in the future. In the practical aspect, the study deals with investigating food industry companies in Syria after the 2011 crisis, and the attainment of sustainable competitive advantage through the adoption of the principles and indicators of the BOS.

2.   Literature Review

2.1. Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) Concept

The BOS emerged as a new strategy because of the rapid development and changes in the business world. Moreover, the modernization of the strategic management concept and theories has motivated Professor Chan Kim and his assistant Renee Mauborgne at Harvard University to create the Blue Ocean phenomenon. BOS is a reliable design with strategic thinking concentrating on generating new markets where the competition is irrelevant. Thus, the BOS is a business strategy that stimulates the creation of a new market space rather than competing in the existing industry (Kim et al., 2008). Debi (2006) points out that companies who want to improve their quality and performance; must adopt this strategic move that contribute to the creation of positive business indicators when these moves strategically implemented, it will create a new space and thus a new blue ocean.

  Many researchers contributed to the definition of the BOS. For example, Kim and Mauborgne (2015) defined Blue Ocean as all the industries that do not exist today with unknown market space and have not been reached by competitors, and competition is irrelevant because competitive rules are not yet in place. It is a business strategy, which dives into untested market space and free from the competition (Massoudi, 2018). It is a strategy that creates new value for the organization, customer and breaking the rule of substitution between differentiation and low cost (Baxter & MacLeod, 2008). According to previous definitions, the researchers concluded that BOS is the discovery of the remote areas of the market that were not discussed by one of the competitors through the creation of value.

2.2. Red and Blue Oceans

The red ocean is a familiar and known market saturated with goods and services where companies introduce their products, and the markets are crowded with competitive conflict. Kim and Mauborgne (2015) believe that the strategies that are determined by the level of demand and the availability of resources are called the red ocean, which represents the existing places. On the other hand, the Blue Ocean strategic plan creates new environments for redefining products or services where the nature of competition is not on the table and differentiation and cost leadership strategies are sought at the same time.

  Blue Ocean strategies are similar to prospecting strategies in terms of searching for new markets and products. The risk that business faces when it enters a new market or seeking to create a new demand forced them to stay in the Red Ocean. Sloan and Pollak (2006) reviewed the most important differences between blue oceans and red oceans as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Differences Between Red and Blue Ocean (Sloan & Pollak, 2006).

Comparison	Red Ocean Strategy	Blue Ocean Strategy
Market Area	Competition within a market	Creating a new market area
Competition Nature	Beat the competition	Competition doesn't exist
Demand Nature	Exploitation of current demand	Creation of new demand
Cost and Value Strategy	Trade-off between value and cost	Breaking value-cost trade-off

Organizational activities	Low cost or differentiation	Low-cost and Differentiation

2.3. Blue Ocean Strategy Indicators

The researchers based the selection of BOS indicators on a previous literature and opinions of researchers who agreed on these indicators, such as Kim and Mabourgne (2015), Siegemund (2009), Saxtoft (2008), Choyt (2007), and Yang (2007). The researchers framed these indicators (create, eliminate, reduce, and increase) as questions to narrow the usual strategic logic in red markets:

What can we eliminate among the elements that the industry considers necessary at present?

What can we reduce to lower costs at the current industry level?

What elements can we increase to exceed the industry's current quality level?

What elements can we create that is unavailable already in the industry?

By answering the first two questions, you have the ability to visualize how to cut costs more than competitors do. The answer to the last two questions gives you the ability to visualize the innovative value you can offer customers to create new demand in the market. These indicators are the cornerstone of building Blue Ocean strategy. Saxtof (2008) explained these indicators:

I.   Increase: represent some things that will have the ability to increase and improve quality in the products required for the consumer, such as increased sales premises, demands, increase the quality level, seeking to meet customers' needs. In this way, the organization seeks to achieve competitive superiority over its competitors in the market.

II. Eliminate: excluding some unnecessary elements, this exclusion will reduce costs and do not affect sales or quality levels. For example, the elimination of the products sale in one market location or the elimination of certain workers who slows the work process and work at high wages, as well as the elimination of some expenses which can reduce the costs of the production process. Thus, the goal of the organization is to eliminate what is considered unnecessary and has no effect on the work process.

III. Reduce: reducing some non-work-related actions, which will contribute to reducing costs. Many companies are overstating their customer service, which raises costs without profit, thus, the company reduces the volume of its investment to a certain extent such as downsizing ideas or applications that are harmful to the environment and the development of ideas that stimulate the application of environmental ideas. This can distinguish the organization from its competitors in front of its customers and stakeholders.

IV. Create: Creating new ideas, finding ways to deliver and offer goods and services to satisfy customers or create new systems or practices that help organizations to improve its product. Innovative organizations have the ability to transform creative ideas into useful outcomes, and managers who talk about making the organization more creative usually want to stimulate innovation. The Blue Ocean organization seeks to create new business and products, as well as create an innovative working environment and innovative production and marketing methods.

Kim and Mauborgne (2017) presented The Value Innovation Model or the strategic model in which the two researchers suggested that value provided without innovation becomes just an addition and innovation without value becomes only a technology. This may exceed the readiness and expectations of customers and offer them something other than what they expect and accept, consequently, the product fails.

2.4. Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The interest in sustainable competitiveness and its importance in business organizations have grown rapidly. Organizations use Different types of competition to meet the pace of change and to cope with rapid development, where the sustainable competitive advantage means different things for business organizations. Companies may relate their strategies to suppliers, customers, competitors, low price, desirable characteristics, or different resources owned by one organization without others. Competitive advantage also depends on the company's ability to outperform competitors in any domains of strategic performance (Taleb & Albanna, 2012).

Porter (1996) asserts that competitive advantage is a strategic goal originated from within the organization to achieve a long-term share that does not disappear quickly, renewable and innovated. Others define it as the investment of the financial, human and technological resources to create value for customers. Taleb and Albanna (2012) define it as a set of integrated operations, services, and activities that offers greater value to consumers and helps to outperform competitors by having sustainable resources hard to replicate by competitors.

2.5. Dimensions of Sustainable Competitive Advantage

There are substantial empirical studies that describe sustainable competitive advantages, such as (Jie *et al.,* 2013; Awwad, 2011; Massoudi & Ahmed, 2021; Thatte, 2007; Petrovic *et al.*, 2008; Voulgaris *et al.*, 2013). Based on previous studies, the researchers developed six dimensions to measure competitive advantage, namely quality, customer response, cost, efficiency and effectiveness, flexibility, and creativity.

I. Quality: Quality is a changing situation related to the state of the product or service provided, as well as the individuals, processes and the environment that satisfy customer's needs. Ren *et al.* (2010) stated that quality means satisfying customers and is the basis for achieving sustainable competitive advantage. This is a modern concept of quality definition since the old concept focused on the characteristics of the product only. In addition, achieving quality in all areas of work is a difficult task to achieve, especially as customers change their perceptions of quality.

II. Customer Response: Achieving and maintaining customer loyalty is a necessary basis for sustaining the competitive advantage for the organization. Taleb and Albanna (2012) state that the customer is the center of the game, he determines his needs first and the role of the organization is to meet those needs. One of the keyways to enhance the competitiveness of the organization is to continue to deliver new services of better quality and faster response than competitors to meet the wishes and needs of its customers.

III. Efficiency and Effectiveness: Efficiency refers to provide the highest value to the customer as much as the customer believes the quantity of that value. Moreover, it means the aptitude of the firm to adjust and stay in the environment. On the other hand, business organizations are effective when they can achieve their objectives through the means available to them. Daft (2001) defined effectiveness as the capability of the firm to establish available resources and use them efficiently to achieve limited objectives. Moreover, Gabbar (2007) sees effectiveness as a reflection of the organization's negotiating ability to invest in opportunities and obtain something it requires from the scarce environmental resources.

IV. Flexibility: Is one of the most important competitive dimensions at the level of business organizations because it highlights the organization's ability to adapt to customers' needs and expectations, as well as the innovation in developing its internal resources and adapting to the external environment. Dilworth (1992) defines it as the capacity of the organization to respond to changes in production quantities and product mix. Moreover, Evan (1997) points out that many organizations use flexibility as a competitive weapon that indicates the capacity and ability to adapt successfully to changing environmental conditions. It is the possibility of making fundamental changes in a market location based on creativity, design, and size.

V. Cost: Reducing the cost of the final product is one of the priorities that most products seek because they reflected on the final price of the product or service, particularly in competitive markets. To achieve competitive advantage, Organizations should determine the cost of raw materials and labor in order to tailor a production system that contributes to reducing the cost of one unit, Porter (1996) states that institution is able to achieve competitive advantage by decreasing the costs of its actions, creating value to the lowermost levels in comparison with competition.

VI. Creativity: Is one of the distinct characteristics of successful organizations, it is the capacity of these organizations to stay and continue in the market. According to Chesbrough *et al.* (2006), for organizations to survive and grow in the market, they must reexamine in depth its internal mission and strategy, and external conditions such as market structure, customer, competition, and society, because these factors are constantly changing.

2.6. Blue Ocean Strategy and Competitive Advantage

Kim & Mauborgne (2017) contend that the blue ocean doesn't pursue competing excellence, due to the trap of competition. This is considered to be as a good measure to be improved. Yet, in the end, the achievement of BOS can be considered a competitive advantage. few studies in the past were related to the implementation of the BOS with the achievement of competing superiority such as Shared (2019) in Saudi Arabia and Bataineh and Alomyan in Jordan. According to Shared (2019) the four-dimensional influence of the BOS referred to as The Four Action Framework on competing excellence. The author found that BOS's dimensions are positively influence the performance of Al-Rajhi Bank of Saudi Arabia. Shared also cited six paths in his research but did not test the impact of tool on competing excellence. Shared (2019) also designates that BOS elements (Eliminate, Reduce, Raise and Create) positively correlate to competing excellence which consist of service quality, innovation, flexibility, cost, and customer response.

Moreover, in Telecommunication sector in Irbid, Jordan also provides evidence of the strong influence of BOS elements on competing excellence. From their funding, it is showed that the three-elements: create, raise, and reduce positively influence competing excellence. While the eliminate element which has no positive effect on competing excellence. Some other studies have been done by Namboodiri *et al.* (2019), Dehkordi *et al.* (2012), Hanifah *et al.* (2015), and Shared (2019). Bibliography study conducted by Namboodiri *et al.* (2019) By reviewing BOS related articles and

analyze them using the grounded theory method. From the study, they collected 68 first-tier themes, and 9 second-level themes, which were categorized to be three main themes consisting of "innovative governance", "integration of functional complexity", and "catalysts" or "drivers for development".

Besides, Dehkordi *et al.* (2012) focuses solely on describing the differences between red ocean and blue ocean market and managers' practical role. Hence, companies were found competing in the red ocean continuously to win the competition amid a diminished and less attractive market share, while the blue ocean is a market where competition is not relevant. The authors added that BOS can be used as a new business model due to its ability to increase profits by creating new market. However, its implementation requires the involvement of right staff with practical ability, emphasis on leadership.

Additionally, Dehkordi *et al.* (2012) didn't specify any clear influence of the BOS' on competing for advantage, even though it contributes to the formation of new market. Likewise, Hanifah *et al.* (2015) labels the case of the BOS implementation in a Japanese company in Indonesia. They named Four Action Framework, but Hanifah *et al.* (2015) failed to deliver evidence on the company employs the dimension of the framework in producing new market (See Figure 1). Based on the above clarification, the researchers concluded that the previous research results on the BOS's impact on the competitive advantage still have not resulted in a bold conclusion. Because of the varied methods and inconsistencies of the tools used by the researchers.

Similarly, a review of the implications of the BOS implementation and sustaining competitive advantage is still not getting satisfactory assessment. Departing from this point of view, this study proposes a framework for study the effect of BOS on sustaining competitive advantage. Thus, the researchers postulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the blue ocean strategy in terms of its indicators individually (create - eliminate - reduce - increase) and sustainable competitive advantage dimensions combined.

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant effect of BOS indicators (eliminate index, reduce index, increase index and create index) in enhancing sustainable competitive advantage in the food industry companies in Syria.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed framework:
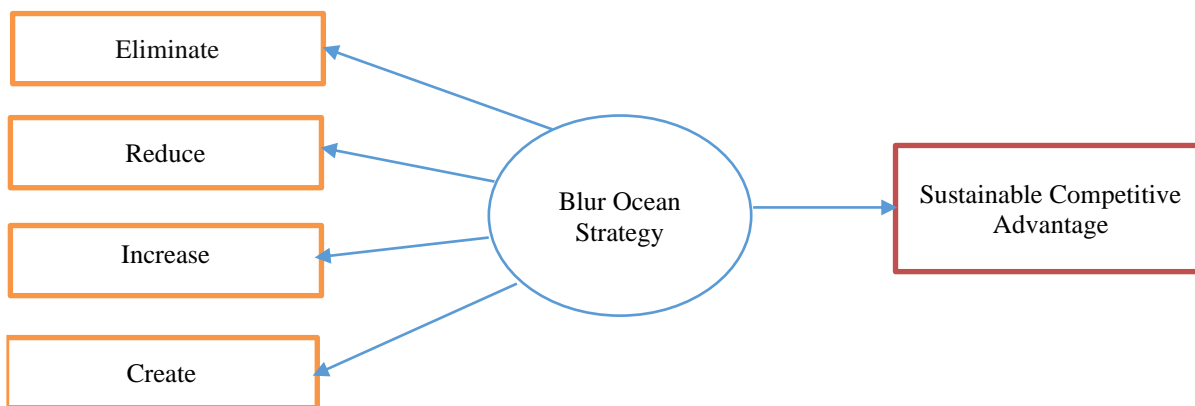
Figure 1. Proposed Framework.

3. Methodology

The researchers used a descriptive-analytical method in order to achieve the study objectives. The researchers will present the phenomenon of Blue Ocean; analyze the collected data and test the connection between its components. Two variables were used; the dependent variable is the sustainable competitive advantage dimensions (product quality/ service, customer response, organization effectiveness, organization efficiency, flexibility, cost, creativity). And independent Variable: BOS indicators: (eliminate, reduce, increase, and create).

The data were collected by questionnaire distributed to the studied companies. The reasons for choosing a questionnaire survey were: It is affordable ways to gather quantitative data, they offer a way to gather vast amounts of data on any subject, it was quick and easy to collect results, it allowed the researchers to allow you to gather information from a large audience.

The population of this study is 85 companies that were taking part in the Food Industries Exhibition at Damascus Fairgrounds City (Over 85 companies take part in "Syria Food" Exhibition, 2018). The sample of the study was 300

personnel representing company managers, marketing managers, production and operations managers. 293 valid responses were collected. The questionnaire consists of three main sections: Demographics (gender, age, education, experience, and occupation), Blue Ocean indicators composed of 20 statements distributed equally on the following 4 domains (create, increase, reduce, eliminate). Finally, the sustainable competitive advantage dimensions with 24 statements distributed equally on the following 6 dimensions (quality, creativity, flexibility, cost, customer response, and efficiency and effectiveness). The five-dimensional Likert scale was used to measure the responses of the questionnaire.

The researchers applied the following statistical tools to analyze the data: descriptive statistics to evaluate the study sample, Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation. Also, to determine the reliability and consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was applied. Additionally, to calculate the internal consistency and structural validity of the questionnaire and test the relationship between the variable, Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used. Finally, the researchers used Multiple Linear Regression and independent Samples T-Test to test the hypothesis.

3.1. Sample Description

This section includes a presentation of data analysis and test hypothesis, answering the study questions and to explore the main findings of the questionnaire. The respondents' general data included gender, age, position, and education level. In addition, companies' location, years in operation, and size of capital.

Table 2. Sample Description.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	176	60.1	60.1	60.1
	Female	117	39.9	39.9	100.0
Valid	18-30	170	58.0	58.0	58.0
	31-40	87	29.7	29.7	87.7
	More than 40	36	12.3	12.3	100.0
Valid	Less than 5 years	108	36.9	36.9	36.9
	6-10 years	90	30.7	30.7	67.6
	11-20 years	74	25.3	25.3	92.8
	More than 20 years	21	7.2	7.2	100.0
Valid	CEO	43	14.7	14.7	14.7
	Marketing	89	30.4	30.4	45.1
	Production	91	31.1	31.1	76.1
	Other	70	23.9	23.9	100.0
Valid	Less than High School	77	26.3	26.3	26.3
	High School	110	37.5	37.5	63.8
	Bachelor Degree	79	27.0	27.0	90.8
	Post Graduate Degree	27	9.2	9.2	100.0
	Total	**293**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 2 illustrates the respondents' demographic description. In gender distribution where (60%) male and (40%) female. The dominance of male respondents is due to several factors including the nature of customs and traditions that prefer male. Also, the nature of the industrial work requires pressures and hard physical work for significant periods.

The ages of the respondents, where (87%) were less than 40 years old. This shows the effective role of youth in Syrian Food Companies.

Work experience shows (36.9%) of respondents have less than five years in experience. Also. (30.6%) have between 6-10 years of experience. On the other hand, (25.3%) have 11-20 years of experience. Finally, (7.2%) have more than 20 years of experience.

In regard to position in the companies, (14.7%) of respondents were company presidents, (30.4%) were marketers, (31.1%) were involved in production work, and (24%) held different positions such as engineers, accountants, assistant managers, sales and public relation.

Finally, the educational level of respondents where (37.5%) had high school diploma, (27%) had bachelor degree, (9.2%) had post-graduate degree, and (26.3%) had less education than high school.

3.2. Companies' General Information

The following section will describe the 85 food industry companies concerning years of existence, location, and the total capital of each company.

Table 3. Years of Existence.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Less than 5 years	32	37.6
	5-20 years	42	49.4
	20-30 years	11	13.0
	Total	**85**	**100.0**

Table 3 shows that (49.9%) of the companies studied been in existence for more than 5 years and (37.6%) are new companies that were established after the crisis of 2011. This shows the entrepreneurial spirit of Syrian investors especially in risk taking. A (13%) of companies studied had been in the Syrian market for more than 20 years.

Table 4. Company's Location.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Damascus	21	24.7
	Homs	9	10.5
	Aleppo	22	25.8
	Hama	6	7.0
	Tartous	9	10.5
	Latakia	12	14.1
	Suwaidaa	5	5.8
	Hasaka	1	1.6
	Total	**85**	**100.0**

Table 4 shows that the industrial city of Aleppo had the biggest share of the food companies in the study (25.8%), followed by Damascus with (24.7%), and Latakia with (14.1%), the rest of the companies were in other small cities.

Table 5. Company's Capital.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	$100,000-500,000	15	17.6
	$500,000-1,000,000	36	42.4
	$1,000,000 and more	34	40.0
	Total	**85**	**100.0**

Table 5 shows that (82.4%) of the companies had capital worth more than $500,000, the rest were small companies with capital of less than $500,000.

3.3. Reliability

The researchers applied Cronbach's Alpha to measure the reliability of the questionnaire; the result of the test is illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Reliability Statistics.

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Create	0.871	5
Increase	0.732	5
Reduce	0.849	5
Eliminate	0.822	5
Quality	0.775	4
Creativity	0.776	4
Flexibility	0.839	4

Cost	0.789	4
Customer Response	0.832	4
Efficiency and Effectiveness	0.835	4

The results in Table 6 showed high value of Cronbach's Alpha between (.871 and .732). Therefore, the questionnaire statements are highly reliable and consistent. This result gives the research the absolute confidence of the validity of the questionnaire in analyzing the data and answer the research question.

3.4. Structure Validity

Structure validity measure the objective attainment and shows the correlation between study variables. As shown in Table 7, all Coefficients are statistically significant at the level where ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). Thus, all variables in the questionnaire are valid.

Table 7. Pearson Correlation for All Questionnaire Statement.

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Create	0.871**	0.000
Increase	0.819**	0.000
Reduce	0.833**	0.000
Eliminate	0.865**	0.000
Blue Ocean Strategy Indicators	0.922**	0.000
Quality	0.625**	0.000
Creativity	0.721**	0.000
Flexibility	0.852**	0.000
Cost	0.669**	0.000
Customer Response	0.833**	0.000
Efficiency and Effectiveness	0.849**	0.000
Dimensions of Competitive advantage	0.947**	0.000

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. Analyzing the OBS Statements

The mean, standard deviation and T test were used to determine the degree of approval for BOS indicators. The result is shown in the Table 8.

Table 8. One-Sample Statistics for Blue Ocean Strategy.

	Mean	SD	T	Sig.	Rank
Create	3.58	0.74	8.01	*0.000	4
Increase	3.96	0.76	14.17	*0.000	1
Reduce	3.93	0.68	13.11	*0.000	2
Eliminate	3.68	0.75	8.21	*0.000	3
All Indicators	**3.78**	**0.69**	**12.23**	***0.000**	

Table 8 shows that the mean score for all blue ocean strategy indicators equals 3.78, and the t-test score was 12.23 with a probability value (sig.) less than 0.05, and this indicates a substantial homogeneity of the sample with the Blue Ocean Strategy indicators in general. The highest indicator was "increasing", while the "creating" indicator had the lowest approval level. These results indicate that blue ocean indicators create new markets, innovate new products and brands, and attracting new customers. In addition to attracting new customers which will increase the market share and the growth of the company, it will increase its profits. As for the indicator that received the highest response, the researchers attributed this to the interest of companies to the need to increase the quality of their products. This result corresponds with (Albyati & Saeed, 2016); what emerged from the study is that many companies seek to improve the way their products are presented through improvements in their products. In addition to using new methods of marketing and introducing systems that are more responsive to customers' needs. As for the indicator "creating" which receive the lowest acceptance score, the researchers attributed this to companies who have the ambition to innovate and activate

their role in achieving a competitive advantage, but some companies do not have full awareness of modern forms of innovation or technology because of the high risk and cost involved. Current markets are discouraged by the deteriorating economic situation and weak purchasing power in Syria.

These findings have corresponded with some studies such as (Kamuhuro, 2018) which clarified that the Blue Ocean Strategy tools and its framework for action can help organizations to add innovative value to their products as well as creating new markets. Also, a study by (Zhao & Jinwei, 2010) specified that the utilizing of blue ocean strategy tools and principles help companies to enhance the competitive advantage of existing markets and create new customers from other industries.

4.2. Analysis of Sustainable Competitive Advantage Statements

The mean, standard deviation, and T-test were used to determine the degree of approval for sustainable competitive advantage variable. The result was illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9. One-Sample Statistics for Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig.	Rank
Quality	4.08	0.74	14.41	*0.000	1
Creativity	3.78	0.79	10.11	*0.000	5
Flexibility	3.83	0.69	11.78	*0.000	3
Cost	3.61	0.81	7.77	*0.000	6
Customer Response	3.82	0.77	11.25	*0.000	4
Efficiency & Effectiveness	3.87	0.70	14.14	*0.000	2
All Competitive Advantage	**3.83**	**0.66**	**13.99**	***0.000**	

Table 9 shows that the mean score of all sustainable competitive advantage statements is equal to 3.83 with a t-test score of 13.99. Also, the probability value is smaller than 0.05, this indicates a substantial agreement of the respondents with the feature statements. Overall, "quality" had the highest approval score, while the "cost" field had the lowest approval level. The researchers attributed this to the interest of Syrian companies in the dimensions of competitive advantage and sustainable application to their firms in order to attain the competitive advantage and all the dimensions are not less important, but it was noted that the respondents focus on the quality of the product and consider it more important. While some owners of companies studied stressed that continuous improvement of the product to suit the needs of customers is the main factor and stressed the importance of other factors, which are considered complementary to each other to achieve excellence and uniqueness of the company.

These outcomes do correspond with other studies such as (Lădaru *et al.*, 2012) which stressed on the role of quality and continual improvement of the product, which leads to customer satisfaction. Also, as indicated by (Alnosur, 2016) that the continuous review of the level of renewable services introduced to customers contributes to achieving a competitive position for the company.

4.3 Testing the Hypothesis

Testing Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the blue ocean strategy in terms of its indicators individually (create - eliminate - reduce - increase) and sustainable competitive advantage dimensions combined.

Hypothesis 1 was tested by Pearson Correlation Coefficient. Table 10 indications that the value of correlation coefficient is 0.855 and that the probability value is below the significant level 0.05. This proves a statistically significant relationship between the blue ocean strategy and sustainable competitive advantage.

Table 10. Correlations Between BOS and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

		Blue Ocean Strategy	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Blue Ocean Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.855*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.855*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

		N	293	293

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

This is attributed to the importance of BOS indicators and its role in achieving competitive advantage. The adoption of strategic indicators (create, increase, reduce, and eliminate) had a significant impact on the overall performance and growth of the company through the creation of new markets and the search for new demand, as well as the adoption of value innovation as a towards the launch of blue market and achieve the competitive advantage of low cost and value innovation.

The results of Table 10 correspond with earlier studies like Alhaddi (2014), confirming that companies implementing Blue Ocean Strategy indicators achieved high growth and high profitability. Also, Silva (2011) confirmed that through the implementation of the BOS, innovation can be achieved. Finally, Al-Taie (2006) emphasized that encouraging innovation in the production process helps companies achieve market competitive advantage through the implementation of the BOS.

Table 11. Correlations Between Create and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

		Create Strategy	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Create Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.727*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.727*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	293	293

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient score of 0.727, is presented in Table 15. The probability value (sig.) is less than 0.05. This shows a statistically noteworthy relationship between the creating strategy and sustainable competitive advantage.

The researchers attribute the importance of creating to its role in establishing of a new brands and products; this will help the firm in escaping from the competitive markets to non-competitive markets. The strategy of the Blue Ocean creates value that benefits the customer and the company and thus achieves the competitive advantage. These results were consistent with Al-Mutairi (2012), which indicates the essential role of creating and innovating new and distinct markets that contribute to achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

Table 12 also present that the correlation score of 0.817, and that the (Sig.) value is below the significance level of 0.05. As a result, there is a significant relationship between the strategy of increasing and sustainable competitive advantage.

Table 12. Correlations Between Increase and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

		Increase Strategy	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Increase Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.817*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.817*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	293	293

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The researchers attributed this to the importance of increasing strategy, which is to increase some of the elements that have the aptitude to advance product quality required for the consumer, such as increasing the places of sale, presentation, increasing the quality level, and seeking to satisfy customers' needs. Thus, in this way the organization seeks to achieve competitive excellence. These outcomes were consistent with previous studies (Al-Taie, 2006), which indicated that the application of the increasing in organizations helps the organization achieve competitive advantage. The Eurasian study 2016 also confirms that the Blue Ocean strategy, including the increase indicator, helps the

organization to enhance competitive advantage through opening branches of the organization as well as finding scientific ways to deal with suppliers.

Table 13. Correlations Between Reduce and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

		Reduce Strategy	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Reduce Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.772*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.772*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	293	293

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In regard to the correlation between reduce and sustainable competitive advantage as seen in Table 13, the correlation coefficient was 0.772 with probability less than the significance level of 0.05. This shows a strong relationship between the reduction and the sustainable competitive advantage.

The researchers attributed this to the importance of the reduction indicator, which contributes to reducing the total costs by reducing some unnecessary work procedures that contribute to reducing costs. Many companies exaggerate the provision of service to customers that raise costs without profit, for example reducing some ideas or applications harmful to the environment or the development of ideas that stimulate the application of new ideas, which may distinguish the organization from its competitors to customers and stakeholders. These results were consistent with the (Albyati & Saeed, 2016) studies, as reducing costs and raising value through rapid response will result in a competitive advantage.

Table 14. Correlations Between Eliminate and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

		Eliminate Strategy	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Eliminate Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.855*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.855*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	293	293

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 14 illustrates the correlation between eliminate and sustainable competitive advantage with the coefficient score of equal to .855, with probability value below the sig. level of 0.05. It is an indication that the eliminating strategy and the sustainable competitive advantage have significant relationship between them.

The researchers attributed this to the elimination of some marketing and operating activities that result in high expenses, as well as the elimination of unnecessary production equipment and marketing personnel will contribute to enhancing the competitive advantage. This outcome was consistent with previous studies such as (Lădaru *et al.*, 2012), which emphasized the elimination of expensive storage costs and organizing the purchasing cycle, which helps to achieve an advantage for the company.

According to the results of correlation, we accept the research hypothesis that (There is a statistically significant relationship between the blue ocean strategy in terms of its indicators individually (create - eliminate - reduce - increase) and sustainable competitive advantage dimensions combined)

Testing Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant effect of BOS indicators (eliminate, reduce, increase and create) on adopting sustainable competitive advantage in food industry companies in Syria.

To test this hypothesis, multiple linear regressions were applied to determine the impact of BOS indicators on the adoption of sustainable competitive advantage.

The correlation coefficient = 0.866, and the adjusted R^2 coefficient = 0.762. This indicates that 76% of the change in the competitive advantage is explained by the linear relationship and the remaining 24% may be due to other factors

affecting the competitive advantage, such as the experience of the owners of companies or the age of the company in the field of providing expertise.

The value of the f calculated test is 80.151 and the significance level is 0.000. According to the regression results, we accept the research hypothesis that (There is a statistically significant effect of BOS indicators (eliminate, reduce, increase and create) on adopting sustainable competitive advantage in food industry companies in Syria).

Table 15. Regression Analysis.

Independent Variables	Regression coefficient	T-test	Sig.
Constant	0.428	2.355	0.022
Create	0.122	1.968	0.032
Increase	0.353	4.953	0.000
Decrease	0311	4.377	0.000
Eliminate	0.081	1.356	0.218
Correlation Coefficient = 0.866		**Adjusted R² coefficient = 0.762**	
F Test = 80.151		**Sig. = 0.000**	

Create Strategy: The value of t-test is equal to 1.968 and (Sig.) level is equal 0.032, is lesser than 0.05, indicating that there is a positive impact of the creating strategy in adopting sustainable competitive advantage. This demonstrates the essential role of create strategy in generating new markets for companies and thus achieving a competitive advantage through the creation of new products and marks for the company.

Increase Strategy: The value of t test is equal to 4.953 and the significance value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This means that there is a positive effect of the increasing strategy to the adoption of sustainable competitive advantage. Increasing means, the improvement of the quality of the products and increases the places of sale and supply.

Decrease Strategy: The value of t test is 4.377 and the significance is equal to 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the decrease strategy has a positive effect on adopting sustainable competitive advantage. The decreasing strategy is an important factor in reducing costs as owners seek to reduce their fixed costs and operating costs, as well as reduce the volume of investment, especially in light of the economic recession and the weakness of purchasing power in Syria.

Eliminate Strategy: The value of t test is 1.356, and the probability value is 0.216, which is greater than 0.05. This means that the elimination strategy has no effect in adopting the sustainable competitive advantage. The results of the analysis show that there is no effect of the elimination strategy on the adoption of sustainable competitive advantage. The elimination strategy may be more desirable to work if the sample of the study is larger than the current number. The exclusion of some elements from the industry may be a burden on the owners of companies or rather expensive.

In conclusion, there is a significant impact of the increase indicator on the improvement of the quality of the product or service. Therefore, the customers are going to be satisfied, attracting more customers, and increasing the market share. In regard to decreasing strategy, it affects the reduction of fixed and operational costs, this will help the organization to grow and increase its profits. The creating strategy will help the company to produce new products and continuously develop its services, which will help to create new markets and avoid competition. Finally, the elimination strategy has results show the lack of impact of the elimination strategy in adopting sustainable competitive advantage and this may be due to companies to adopting the decreasing strategy as a safe alternative to the elimination index which may result in an unbalanced risk.

These outcomes were consistent with other studies such as Al-Taie (2006) where the promotion of innovation in the production process and its design helps companies achieve a competitive edge in the market. Also, these results are consistent with Alhaddi (2014), which highlighted that, the creation innovative can reduce competition. As for the increase strategy, the results were consistent with Adila (2014) study results which indicated the increase in distribution channels for customers and the opening of new markets. In regard to decreasing index, the results were consistent with Albyati and Saeed (2016), which showed that the reduction in costs and the increase in the value submitted to the customer, will be reflected positively in achieving a competitive advantage for the company. Finally, Zhao and Jinwei (2010) study indicated that the reduction in investment services contributes to the reduction of the total costs of the company. As for the elimination strategy, the results showed that there is no effect on the adoption of the competitive advantage, due to the forefathers' reasons mentioned earlier.

5. Conclusion

Through the objectives that the researchers tried to achieve, a number of results have been reached such as: A noteworthy interest and consent by Syrian food industry companies for the application of BOS indicators in general. This indicates how well owners are aware of the application BOS principles and tools in creating new markets and product innovation attract customers to increase market. Also, there is considerable interest in the study areas related to sustainable competitive advantage (product quality /Service - Creativity - Flexibility - Cost - Customer Response - Organization Efficiency and Effectiveness). The result showed a major acceptance rate by the sample respondents of these areas and its role in achieving sustainable competitive advantage. Finally, with regard to the BOS indicators, there is a strong relationship between BOS in terms of its individual indicators and sustainable competitive advantage combined.

The researchers suggested that Syrian Companies should emphasize on the importance of the innovation indicator and its role in producing new brands and creating markets free of competition. This creates new demand that contributes to increasing the market segment of the firm. In addition to encouraging employees to provide creative ideas that help in decreasing the total costs, and work to strengthen the research and development department so that they are responsible for creating and developing innovative ideas. Also, Syrian Companies must emphasize on the increase indicator and its role in the development of product quality, and continuous improvement of the method of product presentation, further diversify new ways of marketing and introduce modern systems to increase production and satisfy customer needs, as well as opening new branches of the company. Also, adherence to the reduce indicator, which helps companies to reduce errors in the production processes and improve the quality of its products, as well as reducing high storage costs and other costly elements of the company such operational and marketing costs. Finally, Syrian Companies should emphasize on the eliminate indicator through the exclusion of activities and actions that lead to increase the total cost as well as excluding activities and people who are a huge burden on the company, this includes eliminating the company's flaccid production systems. This will generate revenues, increase growth, and achieve a competitive advantage.

The limitations of the study include the difficulty of securing an appointment and direct access with some owners and top managers in the companies' studied. Thus, we depended on middle and lower-level managers.

This study sought to explore the impact of blue ocean strategy indicator on sustaining the competitive advantage in Syrian Food Industry companies. Future studies can be done on factors impeding the implementation of blue ocean strategy in Syrian food industry. This article further suggests a study to be done on the effectiveness of strategic management practices by other industry in Syria.

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The Impact of People in Cooperation on Cooperative Management of the Private Sector

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Abstract

Cooperation among employees is one of the main determinants of a successful business because people are the main protagonists of cooperative management. Therefore, organizations have to give more attention to establish a cooperative management. This study examines the impact of people in cooperation on cooperative management. The research also included recommendations for organization managers, as well as a theoretical basis of cooperative management and people in cooperation, based on a management model developed by Mondragon Cooperation. The SMART PLS3 was used to analyze data collected through the distribution of questioners to employees and academic staff at two private universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Researchers believe that the presence of integral development and cooperative leadership helps in the implementation of cooperative management by the staff. However, organizations are recommended to strengthening the power of staff and allowing them to practice the role of managing, as well as, being authorized at a certain level in order to increase cooperative conduct between employees and management in terms of organizational management concerns.

Keywords: Cooperation, People Management, Leadership, Smart PLS, Mondragon Model.

1. Introduction

Cooperation may not always be simple to achieve at work but making an effort to do so is essential for creating a productive workplace (Alabass et al., 2019). Some businesses, on the other hand, put pressure on their employees to take on greater responsibilities without considering the repercussions (Mahmood et al., 2019). As a result, a cooperative workplace boosts employee productivity and ensures that tasks are completed efficiently (Raewf & Thabit, 2017). Correspondingly, Conflicts between employees and management will not detract from the value of time in a cooperative workplace (Rohmetra, 2000). Teamwork is an indication of workplace cooperation. The voluntary involvement in an open conversation is the consequence of a cooperative workplace (Raewf et al., 2021). One of the most important responsibilities of managers is to motivate employees, which needs compassion and skills to promote a cooperative environment and decrease conflicts (Decoene & Bruggeman, 2006).

Sometimes executives do not really recognize how to assemble an extremely successful team. The foundation of teamwork is cooperation, and it is indeed a part of every team that wishes to succeed (Raewf & Thabit, 2015). As a result, cooperation refers to a group of persons employed together for the benefit of all.

Researchers, on the other hand, investigate the importance of employee cooperation in gaining in-depth knowledge and enhancing the conceptual base. Besides, statistical analysis is being used to determine the elements that influence employee cooperation.

However, the elements that influence attaining cooperation at work are not well explained. Therefore, the cooperative management model was established and assumed that cooperative management can be achieved if the employees were working with the availability of team spirit, dedicated co-owners, cooperative conduct, leadership, and integral development those factors need to be measured in order to understand the relation between these factors and cooperative management.

In addition, the objectives that this research is willing to achieve are investigating the relationship between people in cooperation and cooperative management, attempting to provide recommendations to in-charge managers who want to create a cooperative workplace, as well as providing a theoretical foundation for the influencing variables on cooperative management.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Cooperative Management
Cooperation was originally employed in business in the mid-twentieth century, when it was described as a group of individuals who got together voluntarily to reach their desires to manage their enterprises, and it was classified as follows: The principal company activity, the market, and the ownership (Zeuli & Cropp, 2004).

Cooperative management, according to some researchers, is a strategy for managing and expanding collaboration in a world of global competition (Lafleur, 2005), (Thabit & Jasim, 2019). On the other hand, others believe that it is a strategy to achieve creativity as well as promote the activities and efforts of people (Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014). Whereas Raewf *et al.* (2021) think that cooperative management is a viable solution to the workplace management problem. Though, for the purpose of achieving that the United States Agriculture Department (USDA) shed light on three elements for management (USAD, 1997):

- Capital: It serves as the foundation for all financial activities.
- People: It is recognized as a major source, due to its importance in achieving cooperation and all the needed actions rely on people
- Facilities: It covers all of the tools that employees will need to work together.

As stated by Raewf and Mahmood (2021), establishing cooperation may provide management with benefits such as improved relationships between suppliers and buyers, improved communication, the opportunity to manage the internal environment, and project execution (Thabit & Jasim, 2017). Furthermore, Cooperation will not be achieved unless the essential principles are maintained, as stated by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) (Guidance Notes for Cooperative Principles, 2015).

2.2. Cooperative Core Principles
The ICA approved the basic principles and values of cooperatives in 1995, and they are the same all around the world. Such principles may be linked back to 1844, when Rochdale, England's first modern cooperative, was established. The following are the stated principles (Guidance Notes for Cooperative Principles, 2015):

- Voluntary and open membership: Regardless of religious or political beliefs, anybody who decides to join and become a member is free to volunteer.
- Justice: Men and women alike participate in events, make decisions, and exercise all rights (voting) in the organization's governing decisions.
- Member's participation in economic: When the essential actions are supported, all members can profit from the cooperative capital and contribute to the cooperative capital.
- Independency: Members of an organization (government or private) should ensure their independence in terms of controlling their obligations when they sign a contract with the organization.
- Development: Participants should be supplied with the required knowledge and training programs to educate them on the intended degree of collaboration during the procedures of selecting frontrunners, staff, and actions.
- Teamwork: Members acquire influence on a local and global level when they cooperate together.
- Community concerns: The roles, policies, and instructions should all aim to offer the best possible service to their members, which will benefit the community.

2.3. Corporate Management Model (Mondragon Model)

A corporate management model has been created by the Mondragon cooperative organization. The Mondragon model combines economics and business by creating a cooperative work environment to stay ahead of the competition. The Mondragon model is made up of circle structures (cycles), each of which reflects a critical component for the cooperative process to start. Individuals who are in charge of the cooperative process are shown in the second circle (Mondragon Corporation, 2012). Figure 1 demonstrates the Corporate Management Model (Mondragon Corporation, 2012).
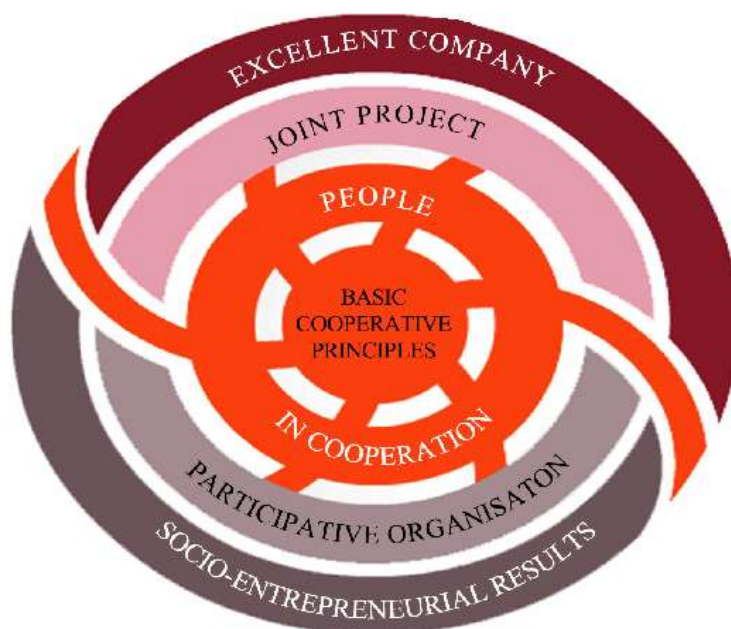

Figure 1. Corporate Management Model (Mondragon, 2012).

Consequently, certain conditions must be met in order for people to carry out the needed procedure, and those conditions are as follows (Mondragon Corporation, 2012):

- Team Spirit: staff should feel themselves as part of the team and they have to understand that their personal development is linked to the development of the team (Uzoamaka *et al.*, 2015).
- Dedicated Co-owners: let employees feel like they are the owners of the business and think about the future with taking responsibility, as well as participating in implementing projects.
- Cooperative Conduct: allow employees to be engaged with the management to share their knowledge and experience.
- Leadership: let employees to exercise leadership by being committed to firm values, practicing positive attitude, and being respondent to change and innovation.
- Integral Development: providing employees the opportunities to improve their skills in different aspects and ensure the availability of health and safety at work.

  Based on the above literature the following hypotheses can be developed:

  H1: the team spirit of employees has a significant impact on cooperative management.

  H2: the dedicated co-owners of employees has a significant impact on cooperative management.

  H3: the cooperative conduct of employees has a significant impact on cooperative management.

  H4: the leadership of employees has a significant impact on cooperative management.

  H5: the integral development of employees has a significant impact on cooperative management.

3. Research Method and Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the research. There was a mix of primary and secondary data. Researchers used a two-sectioned questionnaire to collect primary data. The first section is about demographic questions, while the second section contained 25 questions regarding the research variables. However, the questionnaire has been distributed to employees and the academic staff of two private universities operating in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. SMART PLS3 was used to do the analysis. Secondary data was also collected from books, journals, and internet.

3.1. Demographic Data

Table 1 summarizes the demographic data for the study. However, the research sample size was 132 responses out of 375 study participants.

Table 1. Demographic Data.

Factors	Sub-factors	Percentage
Age	Less than 25	5.3%
	26 – 35	37.8%
	36-46	30.4%
	More than 46	26.5%
Gender	Male	69.6%
	Female	30.4%
Experience	1- 5 year	25.8%
	6- 10 year	27.3%
	11- 15 year	19.6%
	More than 15 years	27.3%

3.2. Measurement Model

To assess the reliability and validity of instruments, we utilized convergent validity and discriminant validity, as follows:

3.2.1. Convergent Validity:

Said by Hair *et al.* (2014), the construction loading should be more than 0.70; this also applies to composite reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be more than 0.50 in order to establish convergent validity. However, in this study, all of the item loadings were more than the minimum. Figure 2 and Table 2 show that DC3 has the lowest loading (0.711), whereas ID2 has the greatest loading (0.975). All variables exceeded the necessary level of 0.5 in terms of AVE. Dedicated co-owners had the lowest AVE value (0.629), while cooperative conduct had the highest (0.865). To examine internal consistency and the reliability of all items, this study used CR and Cronbach's Alpha. As shown in Table 2, the validity and reliability findings were adequate.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability.

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Cooperative Conduct	CC1	0.973	0.948	0.962	0.865
	CC2	0.913			
	CC3	0.917			
	CC4	0.916			
Dedicated Co-owners	DC1	0.856	0.851	0.894	0.629
	DC2	0.766			
	DC3	0.711			
	DC4	0.849			
	DC5	0.773			
Cooperative Management	CM1	0.922	0.937	0.954	0.84
	CM2	0.875			
	CM3	0.937			
	CM4	0.93			
Integral Development	ID1	0.861	0.916	0.942	0.802
	ID2	0.975			
	ID3	0.85			
	ID4	0.89			
Leadership	L1	0.795	0.824	0.88	0.647
	L2	0.785			
	L3	0.823			
	L4	0.814			
Team Spirit	TS1	0.886	0.875	0.91	0.718
	TS2	0.837			

TS3	0.802			
TS4	0.862			

3.2.2. Discriminant Validity:

To evaluate if a construct discriminates against other constructs in the same model, discriminant validity is required. The Fornel-Larcker test identifies the latent variable that explains its indication better than other latent variables and is the first method to assess discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 shows the Fornel-Larcker criterion for discriminant validity.

Table 3. Fornell–Larcker Criterion Discriminant Validity.

	Cooperative Conduct	Dedicated Co-owners	Cooperative Management	Integral Development	Leadership	Team Spirit
Cooperative Conduct	0.93					
Dedicated Co-owners	0.683	0.793				
Cooperative Management	-0.134	-0.201	0.916			
Integral Development	-0.16	-0.109	0.455	0.895		
Leadership	-0.091	-0.153	0.774	0.399	0.805	
Team Spirit	0.257	0.158	-0.083	-0.167	-0.047	0.847

The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio, which had to be less than 0.90, was the second method of discriminant validity (Gold *et al.*, 2001). Table 4 indicated that all of the values were less than 0.90, suggesting that the data did not have a discriminant validity problem.

Table 4. HTMT Discriminant Validity.

	Cooperative Conduct	Dedicated Co-owners	Cooperative Management	Integral Development	Leadership	Team Spirit
Cooperative Conduct						
Dedicated Co-owners	0.77					
Cooperative Management	0.139	0.225				
Integral Development	0.17	0.126	0.481			
Leadership	0.099	0.181	0.841	0.445		
Team Spirit	0.271	0.18	0.086	0.18	0.086	

3.2.3. Structural Model

As the second step of PLS, the structural model was assessed. This step is accomplished through bootstrapping. The structural model could be determined using a variety of approaches. However, in this study, the p-value was initially analyzed to determine the hypothesis testing findings. The next step was to figure out what the R2 and Q2 were.

The R2 indicates how much of the variance in an internal variable can be explained by external factors. Figure 2 shows the R2 value of 0.631. The Q2 (Blindfolding) value indicated the overall influence of an endogenous variable, and it should be larger than zero (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). The value of Q2 was 0.513, which was deemed acceptable. The structural model is depicted in Figure 2, and Table 5 shows the findings of the hypothesis testing. When the hypothesis is tested at 5% error, 95% confidence level, and p-value 0.05, the t-statistics should be higher than 1.96 to accept the hypothesis.

The first presented hypothesis was that team spirit of employees has a significant impact on cooperative management. The t-statistics in this study was 0.218 > 1.96 and the p-value was 0.414 > 0.05, indicating that the first hypothesis was rejected. The second hypothesis proposed was that dedicated co-owners of employees has a significant impact on

cooperative management. The second hypothesis was rejected since the t-statistics 1.255 < 1.96 and the p-value 0.105 > 0.05. The third hypothesis was cooperative conduct of employees has a significant impact on cooperative management. The t-statistics was 0.28 < 1.96 and the p-value was 0.39 > 0.05. Therefore, the third hypothesis is rejected. Meanwhile, the fourth hypothesis which is leadership of employees has a significant impact on cooperative management. The p-value 0.000 < 0.05, and the t-statistics was more than 1.96; thus, H4 was accepted. The fifth hypothesis was integral development of employees has a significant impact on cooperative management. This hypothesis was accepted because the t-statistics 2.976 > 1.96 and the p-value 0.002 < 0.05.

Table 5. Result of Hypotheses.

|	B	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
Cooperative Conduct -> Cooperative Management	0.019	0.015	0.069	0.28	0.39	Rejected
Dedicated Co-owners -> Cooperative Management	-0.087	-0.085	0.069	1.255	0.105	Rejected
Integral Development -> Cooperative Management	0.17	0.166	0.057	2.976	0.002	Accepted
Leadership -> Cooperative Management	0.694	0.696	0.042	16.489	0	Accepted
Team Spirit -> Cooperative Management	-0.014	-0.023	0.063	0.218	0.414	Rejected
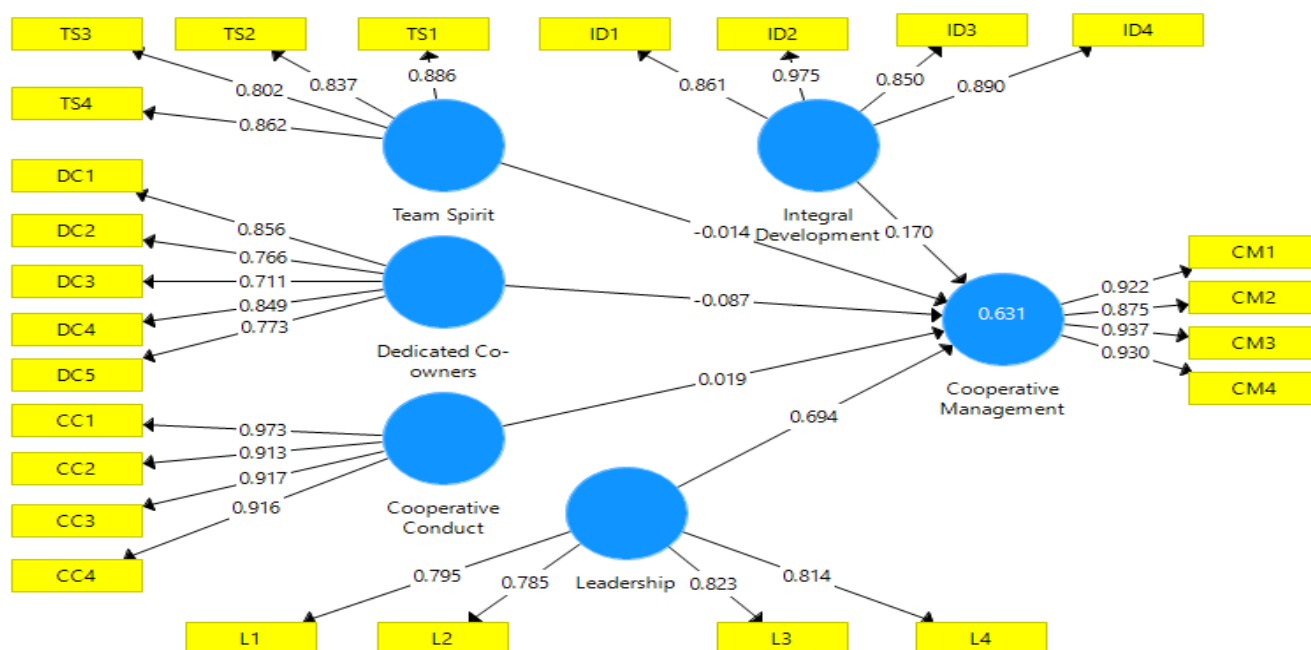
Figure 2. Structural Model.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion
Researchers came at the following conclusions based on their study and literature review:
- Leadership and staff development have a tremendous influence on cooperative management.
- Even if it is at an early stage, the presence of integral development and cooperative leadership supports the implementation of cooperative management by the staff.
- The researchers identified some reasons beyond the unsuccessful cooperation:
  - The staff are not permitted to share their opinions on any corporate decisions.

- o Organizations do not fully utilize their employees' leadership talents or willingness to offer something beneficial to their business.
- o Because of the limitations of employees' cooperative conduct and the lack of support in the internal environment, the adoption of such cooperation will be ineffective.

4.2. Recommendations

The following are the researchers' recommendations, according to the study's conclusion:

- In terms of management and authority, increasing employee power and skills.
- In terms of concerns pertaining to the organization's management, encourage staff and management to work together.
- Top management's non-exclusivity involves issuing some directives that define work styles without seeking employee participation in them.
- Encourage staff to work together in solving problems by sharing knowledge and assisting one another.

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Comparing COVID-19 Control Model Between Iraq and Iran

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic has reached almost every country in the world. The pandemic and its response have had several short-term as well as long term impacts on human health, society, economy, and environment. For instance, the severe lockdowns imposed in certain countries have caused a widespread economic and humanitarian crisis. Therefore, it is crucial to draw important lessons from this pandemic to amplify our future preparedness and response capacities to similar situations. In this paper, the response strategies utilized by Iraq and Iran is analyzed with comparison of the impacts and outcomes of each strategy used for controlling the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The results show that travel ban, restrictive containment, and supports from the international community in controlling the spread of the virus had a more positive impact in Iraq compared to Iran.

Keywords: COVID-19, containment, lockdown, Iraq, Iran.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 has a devastating effect, globally. With time the mode of transmission of COVID-19 was understood and the controlling measures to limit the spread of the virus were adopted by most of the countries worldwide. Most of the countries across the world adopted policies like compulsory use of face masks, maintaining social distancing, adequate sanitization measures, restricting travel and public gatherings (including religious gatherings), and finally implementing partial to complete lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19. After the World Health Organization (WHO), declared COVID-19 a global public health emergency, almost all the countries of the world took steps for their respective countries. However, different countries have been acting differently based on their caseload, infrastructures, the wave of the infection, socio-economic conditions. Some countries implied strict lockdown from the beginning while others applied gradually and sequentially. Interestingly, there is a dearth of explanations regarding the various rates of case fatality, caseload, and infection spreading regardless of the protection measures that demands further studies.

Iraq and Iran are two countries of the Middle East that have faced many socio-political and religious challenges, for several decades. Despite that, these two countries attempted to contain the pandemic by adopting certain measures at

the national level. The statistics of COVID-19 revealed a different scenario while comparing these countries albeit, having similar socio-political statuses. Conducting scientific research on two countries with substandard health infrastructure nevertheless vastly different COVID-19 control strategies is critical in determining the mechanisms underlying the strategic disparities in combating COVID-19 in those countries. This study was aimed at comparing Iran's policies for combating COVID-19 with Iraq policies and answering the question of why this disease in Iran spread extensively more than any other country in the Middle East? This is the first study to compare COVID-19 control models between two Middle Eastern neighbor countries, according to the literature and study results that would act as baseline evidence for nearby countries and/or a different setting and different waves and global infection breakouts.

2. Methodology

This study employed the narrative review approach to examine publicly available data from credible online sources, namely the websites of the Iraqi Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education in Iran, as well as other academic and official online sources and academic papers and recent research works in the area. In June 2021, an exploratory search was conducted on the mentioned websites for published documents and news reports on COVID-19 fighting strategies in Iraq and Iran from January 2020 to June 2021. It is worth mentioning that narrative review is considered to be a quite efficient approach for comparing the two country strategies in response to COVID-19 spread and investigation such models.

3. Iraq's Perspective

3.1. Case Load

The first case of COVID-19 in Iraq, an Iranian student, was detected in the Najaf governorate on 24 February 2020. The Ministry of Health reported four COVID-19 cases in Kirkuk Province on 25 February 2020; the patients are family members who have recently returned from Iran (Wilson & Chen, 2020). After two days, two more confirmed positive cases of Coronavirus arrived in Baghdad from Iran. As the crisis worsened, many Iraqis, including religious pilgrims and merchants, were evacuated from Rome. Iraq has 2085 confirmed cases out of 92061 cases that have been tested positive. Ninety-three people have died, with 1375 recovered as of 30 April 2020. As of 11 May 2021, Iraq has 1,122,914 infected cases, 15,834 deaths, and 1,018,167 recovered cases (worldometers, 2021b).

3.2. Social and Political Context

Due to Iraq's ongoing crisis since 2003, the country's health system has faced significant challenges in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a shortage of critical medical supplies. In Baghdad's public hospitals, only a small number of patients from their families are being served. As a result, the Iraqi government leaned heavily on foreign policies and the WHO instructions, and several stringent national lockdowns and international support. According to (USAID, 2021), the US government was given nearly $60 million to Iraq through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO in Iraq, 2021) reported in 2021 that the WHO presented the Ministry of Health in Iraq's Kurdistan region with 13 tons of medical supplies and equipment in February 2021 (WHO in Iraq, 2021). This donation expanded intensive care capability in Iraq in response to efforts to monitor the recent rise in COVID-19 cases. The supports include personal protective equipment (PPE), COVID-19 diagnostic kits, oxygen concentrators, oximeters, intensive care beds and instruments, hospital bedding, and related medical furniture, patient monitors, and other products.

3.3. Controlling Measures of the COVID-19 Pandemic from February 2020 to May 2021

3.3.1. Travel Ban

Government of Iraq (2020d) claims that on 23 February 2020, the Iraqi Ministry of Health issued advice to fight COVID-19. The Prime Minister authorized the Government Crisis Cell to implement a travel ban on nationals of the Islamic Republic of Iran from entering the country. The patient, who is a student from Iran, entered Iraq before the government's decision. Italy, Thailand, South Korea, Singapore, and Japan have been added to Iraq's travel ban list, including Iran and China. In addition, flights to and from Iraq were from 22 March 2020 until 28 March 2020 (Government of Iraq, 2020d). The Higher Committee for Health and National Safety (HCHNS) agreed on the following measures on 31 May 2020: permit Iraqis to travel abroad because they self-quarantine for 14 days at home when they return to Iraq and are checked for COVID-19 at the Iraqi border crossing site. All Iraqi nationals returning home must undergo clinical and rapid COVID-19 examinations. Those who test negative were required to self-quarantine for 14

days at home. Those that test positive for COVID-19 or had signs of the disease were sent to specialized hospitals (Government of Iraq, 2021e).

On 9 April 2020, Iraq's High Committee for Health and National Safety (HCNS) decided on quarantine rules for returning Iraqi nationals. Countries with an infection rate of more than 500 per million people are deemed high risk (Group A), although states with a lower-case rate are deemed to be low risk (Group B). Iraqi nationals returning from countries listed in this group were subject to medical examinations at Iraq's border crossings.

As stated by (Government of Iraq, 2020f) on December 23, 2020, in response to the latest Coronavirus variant detected in several countries, the Cabinet agreed to several steps, including travel from and to the United Kingdom, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Iran, South Africa, Australia, and Japan is prohibited. Iraqis, on the other hand, would be subjected to a 14-day mandatory quarantine. Except in emergencies, all land border crossings will be closed.

The committee reviewed the most recent COVID-19-related developments on 14 January 2021 and agreed to include a travel ban to and from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Zambia. Passengers from these countries should not be allowed to enter Iraq, except for Iraqi nationals subjected to a 14-day mandatory quarantine. Envoys, government delegations, and international organizations, and specialists acting on humanitarian projects, are excluded from the entry ban if they present a PCR test completed within 72 hours of their arrival (Government of Iraq, 2020f).

3.3.2. Raising Awareness

Government of Iraq (2020b) reported that on 26 February 2020, the Cabinet received a comprehensive briefing on COVID-19 from the Minister of Health and the steps announced by the Government Crisis Cell to curb the virus's spread, including the Ministry of Health's public health awareness campaign. The Cabinet also instructed relevant authorities to maintain close cooperation with neighboring countries and the WHO.

3.3.3. Containment Strategies

Government of Iraq (2020c) released a meeting of senior ministers chaired by Prime Minister in Baghdad on 16 March 2020, to discuss additional steps to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Iraq. The meeting agreed to various new steps, including declaring a curfew in Baghdad for a week beginning on 17 March 2020, following WHO guidelines, directing competent authorities to take appropriate action.

The Iraqi government's Crisis Cell declared several additional steps on 22 March 2020, including the extension of the curfew in Baghdad and across Iraq until 11:00 p.m. on 28 March 2020. Pharmacies, medicine shops, grocery stores, bakeries, and gas stations are all exempt from the curfew. Medical, defense, and media workers and employees of internet service providers, employees of the Iraqi Central Bank, state and private banks, and e-payment firms are not included. By 28 March all schools, universities, and colleges were closed. Also, on 26 March 2020, the Cabinet agreed to extend the curfew in all Iraqi regions until 18 April 2020 (Government of Iraq, 2020a).

The HCHNS agreed on the following measures on 31 May 2020: Grocery shops, bakeries, and pharmacies were excluded as long as no more than five customers enter at a time, and all employees and customers wear face masks. Restaurants must remain locked; however, they are permitted to have home delivery. Except for the ministries of health, electricity, agriculture, water resources, and security ministries and municipal services, all ministries were closed during this period. Face masks are also required to be worn in public, with penalties imposed on those who do not comply (Government of Iraq, 2020d). Iraq's HCHNS has extended the nationwide curfew until 13 June 2020. Also, beginning on 14 June 2020, impose a partial curfew between 6 p.m. and 5 a.m., as well as a 24-hour curfew every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, and maintain the ban on all gatherings in any manner. Correspondingly, new measures announced by the HCHNS on 7 July 2020 like enact a partial national curfew between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. from Sunday to Wednesday, and a complete curfew from Thursday to Saturday.

As stated by (Government of Iraq, 2020d) on 23 December 2020, in response to the latest Coronavirus variant detected in several countries, the Cabinet agreed to several steps, including Restaurants, malls, shopping centers, and nightclubs were closed for two weeks starting 24 December 2020.

During the month of Ramadan, a partial curfew was imposed from 20:00 to 05:00 the following morning for the first three weeks of Ramadan. A complete curfew on Fridays and Saturdays every week was implemented. Many who work in retail stores, restaurants, malls, warehouses, and other locations where health regulations apply will need to be inoculated. Sports clubs were authorizing any of the players to participate unless they have a COVID-19 vaccine inoculation pass (Government of Iraq, 2020d).

3.3.4. Testing Facility

Iraq's Ministry of Health opened a new molecular biological laboratory in Baghdad's Medical City on 25 March 2020 to screen for the COVID-19 suspected cases (Government of Iraq, 2020c). Besides, exemption of all drugs, medical supplies, and instruments, diagnostic and laboratory equipment from import license regulations was one of the steps decided upon by the Committee transferring $50 million to the General Company for Medicines and Medical Supplies Marketing by creating a committee to determine current and potential consumer needs for food, medical supplies, and agricultural products, to promote Iraqi products.

3.3.5. Vaccine
As stated by (Government of Iraq, 2020) on 23 December 2020, in response to the latest Coronavirus variant detected in several countries, the Cabinet agreed to several steps, including directing the Ministry of Finance to pay for the Pfizer Coronavirus vaccine. The National Coronavirus Vaccination Campaign was begun on 30 March 2021, and the Ministry of Health has established an easy system for citizens to register and obtain vaccinations by registering online https://cov19reg.phd.iq/, which was sent to citizens through SMS (Government of Iraq, 2020d).

4. Iran's Perspective
The emergence of COVID-19 in China has affected almost all countries around the world, but some countries are excessively more affected than others. Iran, a country with a population of over 80 million, is one of those countries affected by COVID-19 more than any other country in the Middle East.

4.1. Case Load
Iran's first recorded cases of infection were registered in Qom on 19 February 2020. The virus may have been brought to the country by merchants from Qom who had travelled to China. The Iranian government reported two death cases related of COVID-19 in Qom city, 150 kilometers south of Tehran, on 19 February 2020. The disease spread more quickly in neighboring provinces such as Tehran, Markazi, Isfahan, and Semnan, and then quickly spread across the country's 31 provinces, and most cities and towns (Abdi & Mirzaei, 2020). As of 16 March 2020, 14991 cases of COVID-19 were recorded from all Iran provinces, with 853 deaths (GRF, 5.69%). Tehran had the highest rate, with 3774 positive cases. (Ministry of Health and Medical Education, 2020). According to a spokesperson of the Iranian ministry of health and medical education, the overall positive infected individuals have reached 71688 cases, plus 4474 fatalities, as of 12 April 2020 (Ministry of Health and Medical Education, 2020). Iran has experienced four waves of coronavirus infection spread since announcing the first two deaths in February 2020. According to Worldometer daily data, Iran has a record of 2,691,352 confirmed cases, with 75,568 deaths and 2,144,197 recovered cases by 11 May 2021 (worldometers, 2021a).

4.2. Social and Political Context
Since 1979, the United States has imposed commercial, trade, science, and military sanctions against Iran. In addition, the United States has placed a trade embargo on Iran and a ban on exporting aircraft and reparation sections to Iranian flying companies (Haidar, 2017). As an outcome of these sanctions, the government decided to double the gasoline price to compensate for a stark decline in revenue from oil exports, while official media said that the price increase was unrelated to the budget. Soon after announcing raised gasoline prices, protestors erupted across the main cities, and the government suppressed all public demonstrations violently. The suppression of youth demonstrations has further exacerbated the Islamic Republic's legitimacy problem. Furthermore, in light of the celebrations for the anniversary of the revolution and the parliamentary elections in February, Corona cases were not made public for quite some time (Zamirirad, 2020). The need for mass participation in the Islamic Revolution anniversary celebration and the need for maximum participation - in the Islamic Republic's word - in the parliamentary election forced the Iranian government not to make Corona cases publicly. Nevertheless, it is evident that under the conditions mentioned above, corona virus has spread more extensively than any other countries around the world; therefore, for comparing Iranian health policies and strategies for crisis management to other countries, these factors must be scrutinized.

4.3. Iran's strategies for combating COVID-19
Although Iran was more effective than other developed territories, for instance Italy, in managing and preventing patient deaths (GFR, 6.815), this country faced more difficulties in controlling this pandemic.

4.3.1. Testing and Healthcare Facility
COVID-19 patients receive free diagnostic and treatment services, forming at least one hospital in each district to provide specialized care for patients.

4.3.2. Raising Awareness and Support for the Community

Using the Islamic Republic of Iran broadcasting system and other media to carefully educate and promote a healthcare community, as well as introducing mobile apps, blogs, and a telephone answering system to answer questions regarding COVID-19. In addition, under the auspices of the national headquarters for coronaviruses, the government funded small and large enterprises to compensate (Mohammadzadeh *et al.*, 2020).

4.3.3. Containment Strategies

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran, among the most successful actions were reassuring citizens to remain at home. The government took several strategies like sanitizing communal transport such as metros, buses, and taxis daily, and canceling sports competitions, providing students with distance and online infrastructures, and increasing the capacity of mask and disinfectant production by more than seven times. Iran focused on social distancing in the early days of the disease's spread. However, Iran avoided forced quarantine and lockdown of cities and provinces. Universities, schools, churches, mosques, and Friday prayers were also closed, resulting in the cancellation of sporting events. One of the steps taken to separate the government from the public was the closure of government organizations, with the exception of important functions (Abdi, 2020). The Iranian government eased its lockdown measure on 11 April 2020 and permitted low-risk businesses and government office to operate. Following a dramatic surge in coronavirus infections, businesses in Iran have been forced to close for two weeks, as Iranian health officials urged people to stay home and stop unnecessary travel in June 2020.

4.3.4. Vaccine

The first shot of the Russian Sputnik-V vaccine was given to the Health Minister's son on 9 February 2021, marking the formal launch of Iran's mass COVID-19 vaccination program. The first party to obtain the vaccine is healthcare staff who are fighting the Coronavirus (REUTERS, 2021). According to (REUTERS, 2021), Iran has administered at least 1,767,570 doses of COVID-19 vaccines, with 1.8% receiving at least one dose and 0.4% receiving complete vaccination. It is now doing 64,147 doses a day, which is the fastest 7-day pace it has ever done (Eqbali & Rasmussen, 2021).

A comparative statistic of different variables of Iraq and Iran has been mentioned in Table 1. The above statistics clearly show that Iran's policies and strategies for combating COVID-19 have not been efficient.

Table 1. Comparison of COVID-19 statistics parameters between Iraq and Iran*.

COVID-19 statistics parameters	Iraq	Iran
Total population	40,990,787	84,911,245
Total cases	1,122,914	2,691,352
Total cases/ million population	27,394	31,696
Total deaths	15,834	75,568
Total deaths/ million population	386	890
Total recovered	1,018,167	2,144,197
Total tests	9,745,496	17,343,586
Total tests / million population	237,748	204,255

*Data till 11 May 2021.

5. Discussion and Findings

This study attempts to analyze the response strategies utilized in Iraq and Iran in controlling coronavirus and provide insight and in-depth detail of the impacts and outcomes of each strategy. In addition to that, answer the question of why Iraq has a more positive and successful experience in preventing the spread of the virus compared to Iran.

The review pointed out some variations of controlling measures. Although the experiences of other countries have shown that two strategies of the travel ban and implementing forced quarantine can prevent the rapid spread of the pandemic, the Iranian government has not utilized these two strategies efficiently. The Iranian government at first lingered on lockdown the entire city of Qom, and despite declaring 2 deaths in February 2020.

Qom is a holy and religious city, and it has many pilgrims and religious passengers every day. In the first days of announcing two deaths in this city, the Iranian state cabinet lingered on lockdown in the city and implemented mandatory quarantine; therefore, the disease spread to vast areas of the country, and therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran was incapable of imposing a forced quarantine on provinces and towns, while China, the US, and Italy used this method.

Despite these successful measures, Iran was unable to monitor the spread of COVID-19 due to difficulties in quarantining provinces and towns, or at the very least, locking down the entire city of Qom and imposing a curfew across the nation.

In spite of the previous experiences from SARS and Ebola and WHO recommendation, Iranians were only permitted to stay at home and continue their self-quarantine; there was also no law enforcement to ensure that the home stay for contact reduction was carried out. Initially, Iran did not impose any quarantine or travel restrictions, which may have aided in the rapid dissemination of COVID-19 through all 31 provinces in less than two weeks, and the country's lockdown was ineffective and incomplete.

Almost all infected countries used strategies of quarantine and travel bans, and these two policies may delay the spread of the disease, but, under the effect of severe sanctions imposed by the United States and fearing of an economic collapse from the pandemic, the Iranian government eased its lockdown measure on 11 April 2020 and permitted low-risk businesses and government office to operate. All was silent in Iran till June 2020, after the mass media verified a worrying sharp increase in COVID-19 cases, which reflected the peak level in March 2020: 3574 new infections in 24 hours as of June 3. The WHO registered 171789 cases and 8281 deaths in Iran as of June 8. The country seems to have been hit by a second wave of the virus (Venkatesan, 2020). Iraq got support from several international organizations including WHO whereas we couldn't find any evidence of such support for Iran.

Conducting a greater number of tests proactively, may be helpful in detection of maximum number of cases and early detection may help in effective management of COVID-19. Iran had more than double the death rate than Iraq. Facilitating the healthcare service for critically ill is supposed to reduce the mortality. We know from previous experience with SARS and Ebola that travel bans positively affect case growth (Errat *et al.*, 2020). To prevent spreading the virus, WHO also recommended that countries prepare service centers, labs, and healthcare providers with sufficient supplies of appropriate equipment, establish a resource management system, create an inter-sectoral crisis management work group in cooperation with other organizations, and inform and educate the public and healthcare providers (World Health Organization, 2020). Enhancing capacity building to expand the healthcare delivery was expected to control the pandemic effectively. Ensuring the policy implementation and monitoring measures to periodically update it as per the need is fundamentally important to combat a pandemic like COVID-19.

The findings have several implications. It is important to understand that how various socio-political and policy related factors influence the COVID-pandemic control in two countries of similar population characteristics. Moreover, these variations would be the potential considerations for further waves during this and/or future pandemic in the same and/or different settings.

The major and evident parameters are taken into consideration while doing the cross-national comparison. There might be several other factors that might be responsible for the difference in the progression of the pandemic. We referred to the published scientific articles, reports, and news articles as matters of evidence. The level of evidence may vary among this literature and there may be potential biases in the media reports discussing the socio-political scenarios.

6. Conclusions

This narrative review reviewed the COVID-19 controlling measures adopted by two the Middle East Muslim countries i.e. Iraq and Iran that revealed several differences between these countries while emphasizing the strategies. The travel ban, strict lockdown measures were implemented in Iraq whilst Iran was reluctant to restrict the movements and containment strategies. Additionally, Iraq got more support from the international community than Iran to combat this COVID-19 pandemic. This is the first study to compare COVID-19 control models between two Middle Eastern neighboring countries that would provide insight for the prevention of COVID-19 in other settings or during the further waves. Nevertheless, a prudential interpretation is warranted because of the method of this review and the quality of the data. Further studies focusing on the exploration of attributing factors to these differences are recommended. Moreover, from the data it could be noticed that the time of response had a great impact on the spread of the virus as Iraq started the response much earlier than Iran, and this resulted in a much positive impact.

Data Availability Statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be provided on request from the corresponding author.

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