



THE ADOPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN INFORMAL HOME-BASED BUSINESSES IN KUWAIT

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research is to explore the adoption of social media platforms by informal home-based business owners. A qualitative multi-case study approach was applied, and in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 owners of home-based businesses, and all are located in Kuwait. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis technique. The results revealed that social media (mainly Instagram) is an important advertising and marketing tool for home-based business activities in Kuwait. It aids the launch of new informal ventures for home-based business owners and facilitates the acquisition of requirements for the business. Also, social media accounts can be used as catalogues for displaying photos and videos about informal home-based business activities. This research makes several contributions to existing literature on this topic by empirically exploring the adoption of social media platforms for home-based businesses. The limitation of this study is due to its small sample size, which means that the results should be generalized with caution. This study contributes to the existing literature by presenting new knowledge about informal home-based businesses and social media in Kuwait. Also, it makes an empirical contribution to home-based businesses and marketing literature by exploring the role of social media on the start-up of informal home-based businesses. This study is one of very few studies which have explored the adoption of social media platforms in informal home-based businesses in Kuwait, and it can be used as a base for future research on adopting social media platforms in informal home-based businesses in Kuwait.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, are rapidly proliferating in societies; these online platforms are "computer-mediated tools that make it possible for anyone to create, circulate, share, and exchange information in a variety of formats and with multiple communities" (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). The growth of social media users is not limited to teenagers, but is also dominated by members of Generation X, (individuals who were born between the 1960s and the early 1980s) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Improved hardware and faster wireless communication have increased the growth of smartphone industries, and the widespread use of

smartphones has facilitated the connection of people via social media regardless of time or place (Wally & Koshy, 2014). The leap in information and communication technology offers more flexibility to deliver services from home to any other location (Walker, Wang, & Redmond, 2008), which has provided small businesses with the same power and access as large firms but without losing the flexibility of being small (Mason, Carter, & Tagg, 2011).

“New social media, like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, are being adopted by a growing number of entrepreneurs who seek to deploy them for the benefit of their business” (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). Businesses and organizations become more accessible to customers wherever they are and while on the move. Mangold & Faulds (2009) stated that social media allows continuous connection between customers and enterprises. Most organizations have a social media strong presence as it is used for advertising and marketing campaigns as well as for sharing information with the public (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016; Durkin, McGowan, & McKeown, 2013; McCann & Barlow, 2015). Benwell (2014) stated that small businesses have utilized social media as a cheap alternative to time-consuming marketing campaigns due to its effectiveness in tracking consumer behaviors. This helped small businesses to identify new marketing strategies, as well as increase the credibility of brand awareness through enhancing their brand image (Tuten, 2008). Social media is reshaping businesses by improving firms’ profits and their relationships with their customers (Aral & Weill, 2007).

Social media platforms help businesses, including home-based business, to improve their performance (Emami, Molaei, & Khajeheian, 2019; Karakara & Osabuohien, 2020), increase their competitive advantages (Frederick, Maritz, & Mayal, 2012), advertise and market their products (Ramadani, Ademi, Ratten, Palalic, & Krueger, 2018), and communicate and attract more consumers (Palalic, Ramadani, Gilani, Gërguri-Rashiti, & Dana, 2020).

Most literature on home-based businesses focuses on women and work–life balance (Modarresi, Arasti, Talebi, & Farasatkah, 2016; Moore, 2006; Myrie & Daly, 2009; Tietze, Musson, & Scurry, 2009; Walker et al., 2008; Wynarczyk & Graham, 2013), gender differences (Breen, 2010; Loscocco & Smith-Hunter, 2004; Simon & Way, 2015), motivations of home-based business owners (Kapasi & Galloway, 2016; Serra & Garcia, 2010; Vorley & Rodgers, 2014), and geographical areas (home-based businesses are more prevalent in rural areas) (Dwelly, Maguire, Truscott, & Thompson, 2005; Mason et al., 2011). However, there is a need to move forward and examine the adoption of social media by home-based businesses, especially in the case of Kuwait, where home-based business activities are considered informal (Williams & Nadin, 2012) and permissible. Each country has its own business registration and licensing requirements regarding home-based business activities. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK) home-based businesses are formal business activities, and owners must register their business with government officials. While, in Kuwait, a home-based business is permissible but does not need to be registered with government authorities. There are no rules or regulations inhibiting home-based business owners from starting their business from/at home.

Social media play important roles for home-based businesses since they allow business owners to reach a wider audience. However, there is a lack of research when it comes to Kuwait (Alhaimer, 2019) compared to the Western world, as the Kuwaiti economy is quite fragmented (Ramadani, Palalic, Dana, & Bico, 2020). Therefore, the research gap that needs to be filled is not only about home-based business owners’ use of social media accounts, but also how this takes place in Kuwait, where such activities are considered informal. Most literature on home-based business that focuses on the use of social media platforms has been conducted in Western countries, and most of the existing research focuses on how companies, large or small, use social media to promote their operations (Ahmed, Ahmad, Ahmad, & Zakaria, 2019; Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015; Salo, 2017), rather than on how home-based business owners can adopt social media platforms in their informal businesses. Saleh (2021) refers to the importance of home-based business for the Kuwaiti economy and their contribution to the economy, along with the lack of research on the adoption of social media platforms, particularly in Kuwait. Hence, the contribution of this paper will help academics and practitioners to better understand the usage of social media from an informal home-based business perspective, and whether the practices used in Kuwait differ from those in other countries. This

paper can be the starting point for future research to better understand the examined topic. Thus, this research aims to explore the adoption of social media platforms in informal home-based businesses in Kuwait. Drawing on data collected by in-depth semi-structured interviews with 28 informal Kuwaiti business owners in 2019, this paper seeks to answer the following research question: “How can informal home-based business owners benefit from social media platforms in their business?”

This paper makes several important contributions to the literature. First, it presents new information regarding informal home-based businesses and social media in Kuwait; second, it makes an empirical contribution to home-based businesses and marketing literature by exploring the role of social media in the start-up of informal home-based businesses. As noted, in Kuwait, there is a gap in the literature on the adoption of social media platforms by informal home-based businesses.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 contains a review of the literature on home-based businesses, technology, and social media. Then, it contextualizes social media and home-based businesses in Kuwait and details the methodology adopted. Findings are then presented and discussed before limitations, recommendations and conclusions are identified.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Home-based Businesses in Context

Wynarczyk & Graham (2013) defined home-based business as “a business that uses family residential property as a substitute for commercial premises for the conduct of business”. The nature of home-based businesses varies across the world, this includes food production and serving, in-home hospitality, childcare, craft, and even trades such as plumbing and carpentry (Clark & Douglas, 2014).

Existing stereotypes of home-based businesses revolve around several popular ideas. One perception is that most home-based business owners are women who generate low income and their responsibilities fit around either childcare or household duties, therefore they are considered economically insignificant (Mason et al., 2011; Walker & Beverley, 2004). However, there are several studies that have reported a higher percentage of male home-based business owners, which seem to refute this view (Dwelly et al., 2005; Mason et al., 2011; Ruiz & Walling, 2005). Running a business from home can benefit some families and children by having one or two parents at home (Baines & Gelder, 2003), as it combines work and family (Mason et al., 2011). Some found that maximizing work-life balance was an important issue for both male and female home-based business owners (Kapasi & Galloway, 2016). Others believe that home-based businesses are more suitable for women with less financial need, i.e., hobby businesses (e.g., Loscocco & Smith-Hunter (2004)), while some believe that the owners of home-based businesses are older retired people, aged 50 or over, who have become self-employed to continue working (Mason et al., 2011).

Using home as a workplace can reduce start-up costs, but it is important to consider the acceptance of the clients themselves of homes as serious business entities. Running a business from home provides many benefits to home-based business owners, such as freedom to be creative, self-directed, and self-motivated. Also, working at home may provide an opportunity to work in a beautiful surrounding (Mason & Reuschke, 2015; Wynarczyk & Graham, 2013). On the other hand, home-based business owners experience some constraints in running a business from home. These constraints include inadequate places in which to work, especially in small homes. Others consider utilizing a home as a commercial entity may result in lack of boundaries between work and family which may contribute to family degradation (Mason & Reuschke, 2015).

2.2. Communication Technology, Social-Media, and Benefits for Home-based Businesses

The rapid and continuing growth and proliferation of communication technology, both hardware and software systems, and more recently the advent of cloud-based technologies, has changed almost every aspect of human life dramatically (Wynarczyk & Graham, 2013). Connectivity technologies, such as laptops and associated software,

cell phones, smart phones, high-speed broadband internet, and wi-fi, have provided a significant potential for flexible work opportunities (Wynarczyk & Graham, 2013). Laptops and associated software, mobile phones and high-speed internet access helped to break the locational restrictions on work, so that “where there’s a signal, there’s a workplace” (Enterprise Nation, 2014). In turn, these activities have been identified as essential to developing new forms of organizations, such as call centers and dot-com firms, in addition to e-commerce, which refers to “the process of buying, selling, or exchanging products, services and information via computer networks, including the internet” (Turban, Lee, King, McKay, & Marshall, 2008). The proliferation of technology-based networks has reduced reliance on face-to-face and direct interactions with peers and potential customers adding a whole new dimension to marketing for business and providing new routes for globalization and the ability for home-based businesses to compete with those companies that maintain traditional workplace models (Wynarczyk & Graham, 2013).

Over the past century, starting up a home-based business was considered relatively cost-effective. However, recent lifestyle changes, demographic changes, and the development of information technology have significantly contributed to the growth of home-based businesses (Mason et al., 2011). Developments in information and communication technology (ICT) offer more flexibility to deliver services from home to any other location (Walker et al., 2008), which has provided small businesses with the power and access of large firms without losing the flexibility of being small (Mason et al., 2011). At the same time, consumers are becoming more comfortable with online purchasing. As Ahmad, Abu Bakar, Faziharudean, & Mohamad Zaki (2015) stated, demand for conducting online selling is increasing among most internet users due to the many benefits, such as the existence of wider choices, lowers prices, and accessibility to new products that were inaccessible before internet technology.

With more exposure to the internet, consumers are more internet savvy and confident in adopting e-commerce practices, while also encouraging home-based business owners to offer their products and services online (Nathan, Victor, Gan, & Kot, 2019). The advent of the internet along with secure mobile money transfer mechanisms (notably PayPal) has enabled small businesses to serve geographically dispersed niche markets in a cost-effective manner (Mason & Reuschke, 2015). Mobile money refers to payment services regulated by financial regulation and performed from a mobile device (Hollow, 2016), which facilitates online money transfers between parties without any intermediaries (Kim, Mirusmonov, & Lee, 2010). The convenience, speed of transactions, and lower transfer costs have resulted in the adoption of mobile money technologies, not only for local transactions, but also for international transactions (Bångens & Söderberg, 2011; Gichuki & Mulu-Mutuku, 2018). While mobile money is used in medium and large enterprises, results show that small enterprises are more likely to use mobile money services (Gosavi, 2015). These services provide small firms with benefits in terms of higher profit margins, reduced operational costs, and more opportunities to access markets (Vong, Fang, & Insu, 2012).

Social media is based on electronic communication and is considered to change e-commerce markets (Alt & Klein, 2011). It evokes the fusion of two big digital trends – e-commerce and social networking media. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have increased in popularity which introduced social media as a new delivery platform in e-commerce called social commerce (Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011). “The rapid growth of social commerce has been driven by synergy between e-commerce and social media, which has enabled existing e-commerce business models to successfully utilize and adapt to the changes that resulted from the rise of social media” (Kim & Kim, 2018, p. 38). Social media is replacing traditional media (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012) and is becoming more popular among consumers, but is also becoming increasingly important as a tool for businesses.

Social media users are encouraged to share information about products with their friends or to introduce their products and/or services through their social media accounts. Moreover, consumers consult their social peers when seeking advice regarding purchases. To fulfil these purposes, Facebook has a “Like” button and Twitter has a “Tweet” button (Liang et al., 2011); there is also the power of “mention” on Instagram (Wally & Koshy, 2014).

2.3. Social Media and Home-based Businesses in Kuwait

The state of Kuwait is a small, oil-rich country located in the Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and is one of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. In the past few years, Kuwait has encountered budgetary deficits due to a fall in oil prices, which pushed the government to cut down expenditures, resulting in a decreased employment rate (Kuwait Business Center, 2019). According to the Kuwaiti constitution, the government remains compelled to employ all Kuwaiti citizens as per the Kuwaiti constitution (1962) part 3 article 41 (the right and duty to work), which states:

“Every Kuwaiti shall have the right to work and to choose the nature of his work occupation. Work is a duty of every citizen. Dignity requires it and the public welfare ordains. The State shall make work available to citizens and shall see to the equity of its conditions” (Diwan of His Highness The Prime Minister, 2019).

The Kuwaiti population is relatively young, and the number of young people who are seeking employment is very high (Ministry of State for Youth Affairs, 2019). New graduates are competing for limited jobs in the labor market; however, the government recognizes the need to shift into other forms of wealth generation including entrepreneurship (Bakhsh, 2015). For this reason, Kuwait is taking measures to encourage entrepreneurship. These measures are intended to secure the finance of new ventures, promote these ventures, and provide training and consultation for new entrepreneurs, establish business incubators as well as facilitate business licensing (Abu-Aisheh, 2018; Kuwait Business Center, 2019).

The Internet World Stats (2019) show that in Kuwait, there are 4,231,987 internet users, with 99.6% internet penetration rate. The emergence of social media platforms has created opportunities for Kuwaitis to start up their business from home (Etheridge, 2014). The top users of social media in the Arab world are youngsters (under 25 years old), who constitute one-third of the Arab countries' population (Arab Social Media Report, 2015). In Kuwait, Instagram is being used as an online store front (Yarow, 2013). home-based business owners are using their Instagram accounts to advertise and promote their products and services since they cannot afford the high rental costs associated with business premises (Alwazir, 2014). Running a business from home is not considered an illegal business activity, and there are no local laws sanctioning people who work or conduct business from their homes (Fattahova, 2014). These unlicensed home businesses offer new varieties of products and services, but on the other hand, customers do not have the right to claim for any losses incurred due to fake or damaged products.

It is important to note that Kuwait has a fragmented economy with high state intervention. The state of Kuwait allows informal ventures for Kuwaitis since most work for state-owned businesses, but there is an alternative to operate at the same time as an informal venture. The informal home-based businesses constitute a significant part of the Kuwaiti economy, while the fact that they cannot have a physical presence means that they will have to rely on social media (Al-Enezi, Aldabbagh, Shaikhli, & Alwuhab, 2019). Because home-based businesses can have an international presence, and also have a legit presence without the need to follow bureaucratic and lengthy processes to operate a physical business, social media offers great value for these businesses (Alhaimer, 2019; Ramadani et al., 2020).

In 2017, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued ministerial Decree No. 330, enabling 19 micro-business activities (e.g., fashion design, jewelry making, shoe design, interior design, painters, translators, photographers, web and application developers, gardeners) to be undertaken at/from home without the need for a commercial shop (Kuwait Business Center, 2019). However, food businesses were excluded from these 19 business activities.

3. METHODOLOGY FOR THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

3.1. Data Sampling and Collection

Focusing on a relatively recent phenomenon in Kuwait, a qualitative approach is used to understand how informal home-based business owners adopt social media in their businesses. Such an approach is useful to examine

the life experiences and thoughts of the individuals who choose to adopt social media platforms to start or run their informal home-based businesses. Because home-based businesses in Kuwait are informal and permissible (if not dealing with anything illegal), individuals can combine their fixed (full time) jobs with a part-time home-based business activity and may operate a home-based business on a part-time and/or full-time basis. Given the absence of home-based business data, as they are hidden business activities in Kuwait, accessing a representative sample is difficult. In such a sampling situation, [Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill \(2016\)](#) recommended a snowball sampling technique consistent with qualitative research methods. The snowball sampling data were drawn from family, friends, and acquaintances, Hence, 28 Kuwaiti informal home-based business owners were recruited and participated in this research.

To address the research question, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which was considered to be the most suitable way to collect the detailed and contextual data needed ([Saunders et al., 2016](#)). Before commencing the interview sessions, the necessary approval from the ethical committee was obtained. The participants were guaranteed that their identities as well as their organizations would not be exposed in this research or other related publications. Also, their information would not be shared with any unauthorized parties without their agreement. Pretest interviews were initially to ensure that the interview questions were clear and understandable ([Rothgeb, Willis, & Forsyth, 2007](#)). This procedure led to some minor changes in some of the interview questions. Interview sessions were conducted face-to-face and/or via mobile applications (WhatsApp, Viber, Skype). The interview questions were split into two parts; the first part gathered participants' socio-demographic background information, such as age, gender, marital status, and education level. In addition, we asked about the nature of business activity, the expansion of the home-based business, active social media channels, and the year they started using social media. The second part asked for information such as the description of the home-based business, which social media platforms were used, and what the motivation was behind the decision to start up a home-based business. These kinds of questions encouraged the participants to articulate their own thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and experiences about adopting social media platforms for their home-based businesses. Interviews were conducted in the Kuwaiti dialect (the participants' native tongue) over a duration of 30–40 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission and were immediately translated and transcribed into English. The interviews were fully transcribed verbatim to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected. [Table 1](#) summarizes the characteristics of the 28 informal home-based business owners.

3.2. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. Thematic analysis is a 'foundational method for qualitative data analyses' ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). "Thematic analysis involves a researcher coding her/his qualitative data to identify themes or patterns for further analysis, related to his/her research question" ([Saunders et al., 2016](#)). The interview transcripts were analyzed in a multi-step iterative process. The researchers read and re-read the interview transcripts many times to become familiarized with the transcripts. This prompts the researchers to generate summaries of each case, which aided the analysis. Then, coding procedures started by labelling each unit of data within the transcripts with a code. The purpose of this step was to make each piece of data accessible for further analysis. For example, when a new piece of data had a similar meaning to a previously coded unit of data, it was labelled within the same code, which means that the original data were grouped by coding for the next stage of analysis. This enabled an understanding of logics where similar data are merged into sub-themes. As an example, we organized codes such as 'positive feedback from customers', 'people mentioning my account', 'positive feedback from customers' and 'established a good base of customers' under the sub-theme of word of mouth.

Table 1. Characteristics of home-based business owners in Kuwait – 2019.

Anonymous	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education Level	Business Activity Type	Expansion of the Home-based Business	Active Social Media Channels	Started on Social Media
Abrar	Female	28	Married	Bachelor's degree	Flowers and events	Kuwait and GCC countries	Instagram	2015
Ahmed	Male	37	Married	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2018
Alaa	Female	28	Married	Bachelor's degree	Service/make-up artist	Kuwait and GCC countries	Instagram and Snapchat	2013
Altaf	Female	27	Single	Master's degree	Flowers and events	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2016
Amal	Female	31	Single	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2012
Bedoor	Female	31	Single	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram and Snapchat	2018
Fatma	Female	25	Single	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram and Snapchat	2019
Hamad	Male	28	Single	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram and Snapchat	2017
Hanan	Female	33	Single	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram and Snapchat	2019
Hesa	Female	32	Single	Master's degree	Food/hot drinks	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2012
Jamela	Female	48	Married	Bachelor's degree	Food/cooking and providing consultations	Kuwait and GCC Countries	Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat	2010
Jumana	Female	34	Married	Master's degree	Fashion/clothes	Kuwait and GCC Countries	Instagram	2015
Khadeja	Female	41	Married	Bachelor's degree	Service/photography training courses	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2019
Khaled	Male	35	Single	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram and Twitter	2011
Mariam	Female	26	Married	Bachelor's degree	Food/ice cream and sweet	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2014
Muhammad	Male	31	Married	Diploma	Food/dessert	Kuwait and GCC Countries	Instagram	2017
Naser	Male	26	Single	Diploma	Food/seafood	Kuwait and GCC Countries	Instagram	2014
Nivine	Female	45	Single	Master's degree	Food/French bakery	Only in Kuwait	Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat	2015
Noura	Female	29	Single	Diploma	Fashion/accessories & clothes	Kuwait and GCC Countries	Instagram	2019
Nuha	Female	41	Single	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Kuwait and GCC Countries	Instagram	2013
Reham	Female	41	Married	Bachelor's degree	Fashion/accessories & clothes	Kuwait and GCC Countries	Instagram	2012
Sara	Female	32	Married	Bachelor's degree	Fashion/clothes & accessories	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2015
Sondos	Female	38	Married	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2015
Talal	Male	30	Married	High school	Food/organic	Kuwait and GCC countries	Instagram	2011
Yaser	Male	39	Married	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2019
Yasmeen	Female	31	Single	Bachelor's degree	Food/dessert	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2019
Zahra	Female	34	Married	Master's degree	Service/life improvement training courses	Kuwait and GCC countries	Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook	2012
Zainab	Female	26	Married	Bachelor's degree	Fashion/cloth & accessories	Only in Kuwait	Instagram	2018

The next step was searching for themes, patterns, and relationships within the data. Interview transcripts were read and re-read to re-code them in a process referred to as 'constant comparison', which provides consistency in the analyzing and coding processes (Saunders et al., 2016). Then, lists of sub-themes were created to identify the relationships between the sub-themes to abstract the main themes. This is an important stage of the analysis which focuses on identifying patterns and relationships in the lists of sub-themes related to the research question. After careful examination of the codes and sub-themes, similar sub-themes were combined into themes (e.g., advertisement tool, social media as a catalogue, word of mouth) and then into another new theme (social media is an effective marketing tool). Table 2 demonstrates an example of thematic analysis process in this research.

Table 2. Demonstration of the thematic analysis process in this research.

Indicative quotation	Code	Sub-theme	Theme
<p>"I <u>announced</u> my upcoming training courses in cooking <u>free of charge</u> through my Instagram account and found immediately that the customers subscribe to these courses".</p>	<p>Announcement for upcoming events. Display photos free of charge.</p>	Advertisement tool	Social media is an effective marketing tool
<p>"From my point of view, when I used some bloggers <u>to advertise my</u> products, I noticed some changes in demand; I was receiving many calls and messages from people, which fulfilled the demand for one month".</p>	<p>Quick name and fame. Using celebrities or bloggers to promote their products/services.</p>	Social media as a catalogue	
<p>"My customers love my products, and they <u>mention my account to their friends</u>, then it goes on as a chain. In this way I increase my number of customers".</p>	<p>Positive feedback from customers People mentioning my account helped me to establish a good customer base.</p>	Word of mouth	

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section outlines the findings of the 28 interviews with the Kuwaiti owners of informal home-based businesses conducted in 2019. Empirical analysis concerning the venture type revealed that food activities (including food production and services) constituted 64% of home-based business activities; fashion activities (including accessories and clothing) constituted 18% of home-based business activities; services activities (including makeup artistry and life improvement training courses) constituted 11% of home-based business activities; and floristry activities (including flower design and flower bouquets) constituted 7% of home-based business activities. All participants were using their Instagram accounts as their main active platform for their businesses, in addition to other platforms, such as Twitter, Snapchat, and Facebook.

Data analysis revealed two key themes that underpin the usage of social media platforms in home-based businesses in Kuwait: social media aids the launch of informal home-based businesses, and social media provides effective marketing and advertising tools.

4.1. Social Media Aids the Launch of Informal Home-based Businesses in Kuwait

Whilst most of the participants claimed that social media platforms helped with the launch of their informal home-based business, this does not mean that home-based businesses cannot be started up without it, but rather social media made the start-up of their informal home-based business easier and, at the same time, allowed them to test their business. As home-based business activities in Kuwait are informal and permissible, individuals with business ideas exploit such opportunities because starting a social media account is free of charge and running a home-based business in Kuwait is free of charge as well (e.g., no registration or follow-up fees). Here are some

examples of how social media made launching informal home-based businesses easier, as explained by home-based business owners Sara, Mariam, and Talal, respectively:

“Of course, without social media, I couldn't imagine myself starting a business. Through my Instagram account, I launched my new venture; people recognized me and tried my products then continued to order because they liked my products for their quality.”

“My social media account is the foundation of my business. From the first post on my Instagram account, I got three orders, which encouraged me to continue making ice cream, receive more orders, and earn more money.”

“The only social media account I have is on Instagram. When I opened my account, Instagram was at its highest activity levels and people were interested in it, also the celebrities at that time were using organic food for their diets, which meant that it was a good opportunity for me.”

Other participants received fruitful feedback from their followers, which helped them to develop their businesses according to customer demand. As emphasized by Zahra and Nivine:

“I started my home-based business from Instagram without a need for start-up funding.”

“Thank God my followers through my Instagram account reacted to me when I posted a photo asking for help. I was searching for a company to change the style of my packaging and I received many comments from my followers mentioning many company names with attractive prices.”

Some participants mentioned that closing their social media accounts can be done easily and free of charge, without complications and commitments. This was illustrated by Khaled and Hesa, respectively:

“I consider Instagram as a free shop and a free of charge showroom where I can display and sell my products.”

“Social media helped me so much to connect with people. I am free to close my account any time I want without any legal complications.”

Most participants added that social media facilitates the acquisition of business requirements, such as delivery companies and business resources. This can be obtained through browsing platforms, which leads home-based business owners to a list of companies that can fulfil their requirements. As Sondos explained:

“Social media facilitated the search process for my home business requirements. For example, a small search on Instagram by writing one requirement, such as delivery companies, immediately opens a list of many delivery companies, where you can choose your requirement and contact them.”

4.2. Social Media is a Marketing and Advertising Tool for Home-based Businesses

The participants stated that they display photos and/or videos of their products/services on their social media accounts since it is free of charge, compared to costly traditional advertising media, such as newspaper or TV. At the same time, the proliferation of social media platforms, and the prevalence of smart phones where accessing the internet become easier, has facilitated browsing social media on the go. As emphasized by Zahra:

“My account on social media serves as a catalogue to display my products for customers. In Kuwait, I found that people want instant gratification, in other words, if customers see a photo on my account, they want it immediately. Even though I have an online store, they do not want to visit my online store, they prefer to buy from my Instagram account.”

Social media can be used as an advertising tool to announce future events in relation to a home-based business. As Jamela claimed:

“I benefited a lot from my social media account as a marketing tool. For example, I announced my upcoming training courses in cooking free of charge through my Instagram account and found immediately that customers had subscribed to these courses.”

Some participants noted that they recruit bloggers/celebrities on agreed payment terms to promote their businesses. As illustrated by Hesa and Mariam, respectively:

“From my point of view, when I used some bloggers to advertise my products, I noticed some changes in demand, I was receiving many calls and messages from people fulfilling the demand for one month.”

"I need social media for more advertising of my products. I paid a lot of money for social media celebrities to advertise my account and I am planning to sell in supermarkets, but I need more time to accrue more money."

Social media can also be used as an advertising tool through word of mouth. The power of mentions in social media echoes the traditional word of mouth. Home-based business owners benefit from the power of mentions when their followers mention their accounts to friends and relatives when they like the products/service. This results in the establishment of a good base of customers. This was emphasized by Hesa, Nuha, Amal, and Reham respectively:

"My customers love my products, and they mention my account to their friends then it goes on as a chain, in this way I increase my number of customers."

"Through my Instagram account, people know me and have tried my products, then continued to order more products because they liked them. They mentioned my account to their friends and family and in time my number of followers increased, and more customers were ordering from me, even from outside Kuwait."

"I benefited from using my account on social media as a marketing tool in addition to word of mouth; people became familiar with my company, which helped me to expand outside Kuwait."

"Social media helped me to reach more customers all over the world; I have clients from Kuwait and other GCC countries."

5. DISCUSSION

This paper makes an important contribution to literature on home-based businesses adopting social media platforms, especially in the context of Kuwait. The findings in this research provide new knowledge about home-based business activities in Kuwait in addition to providing important insights about home-based businesses adopting social media platforms. The research revealed two important key findings. The first is that social media is a marketing and advertising tool for home-based businesses, which is in line with other studies conducted on the Gulf area. The first study was conducted by [Wally & Koshy \(2014\)](#) on female Emirati entrepreneurs to investigate the use of Instagram as a marketing tool for their businesses. They found that social media, such as Instagram, is a cheap and easy tool that can be used in marketing. Similarly, [Alghamdi & Reilly \(2013\)](#) conducted a study on female Saudi home-based business owners who benefited from social media platforms as the only way to market their homemade products, such as baking or events planning businesses. The Emirates, Saudi and Kuwait, which are part of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, share the same culture, religion, and language, and hence have similar contextualized views of home-based businesses. As [Welter \(2011\)](#) emphasized the importance of context in shaping entrepreneurial activities, this paper illustrates how a contextualized view of home-based business contributes to our understanding of the phenomenon.

Looking at social media as a marketing tool, this is not to say that adopting it as a marketing tool is unconditional. Some participants emphasized that customers keep buying their products/services because of their high quality, which means that using social media to advertise a low-quality product can help as a marketing tool in the beginning but cannot continue to give the same results when the customers try the products/services and become unsatisfied with them. Another important point is that social media have added a new sponsoring feature. This service is not free of charge, but business owners still have the option to continue advertising through their account on social media platforms free of charge or use this service and pay for it.

Our second key finding is that social media aids the launch of informal home-based businesses. Unfortunately, to the best of our knowledge, the literature review revealed no studies in this field. This paper is the first to explore the adoption of social media platforms by informal home-based businesses in Kuwait.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An important insight which this research revealed is that no matter how much the state of Kuwait is compelled to provide jobs for each Kuwaiti, many young Kuwaitis still seek to generate new ideas and transform them into

business ventures. The government of Kuwait is moving towards entrepreneurship as one of the sources of wealth generation, and this research showed that social media can provide enhanced opportunities for Kuwaiti entrepreneurs to start their own home-based business. Without a doubt, and according to the Kuwaiti context, Instagram and other social media platforms are not just marketing tools, but we believe that they have the potential to be valuable tools that, if deployed well, can enable home-based businesses to grow beyond home.

People in Kuwait have great potential and an abundance of free time since most of them work in the governmental sector where working hours are limited and even school times for students are limited. In effect, this gives people the opportunity to use the internet and social media frequently throughout the day. Interestingly, the Kuwaiti population is small and interconnected through marriage and family, and an inherent path was paved for social media to thrive. This has helped with the successful launch of home-based businesses through the use of social media platforms.

As with any study, our research has limitations. The limitations of this study provide some interesting ideas for future research as we exclusively focused on Kuwaiti informal home-based business owners. Also, a sample of 28 informal home-based business owners in a small state such as Kuwait means that generalization outside the scope of this research should be done with caution, as the findings may not fully reflect the context of Kuwait. Moreover, the impact of demographic and socio-economic factors, particularly gender, on the interpretation of the results should not be neglected. In this research, out of the 28 participants 18 were female business owners, but this is not to say that the home-based business in Kuwait is a gendered phenomenon.

Our recommendations for future research are to conduct more studies on larger sample sizes regarding the adoption of social media when starting up informal home-based businesses. There is a need to compare the role of social media in informal home-based businesses in the Kuwaiti context with other Gulf countries. Another important recommendation is that as the government of Kuwait is encouraging entrepreneurship as an alternative source of income, it must view home-based businesses from a more business centric perspective, and document and follow up the growing number of home-based businesses since documentation of these businesses in Kuwait is not available.

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