

Power of Social Media in Cause-related Marketing in Egypt Case Study of "Free Palestine"

Dr. Amany Bassyouny*

1. Introduction

Egypt witnessed considerable growth in its internet penetration and social media users in the past two decades. Egyptian citizens, businesses and all types of organizations are going digital and increasingly depending on online activities. Statistics indicated that there are over 80.75 million Egyptian internet users in 2023, with internet penetration rate of 72.2%. The social media users reached 46.25 million users in the first quarter of 2023 (Kemp, 2023). Social media, as the user-generated content platforms, are intrusive powerful tools of public diplomacy that reflect the public's attitudes towards their surrounding environment and allows the public to build their own agenda away from the traditional media. The power of social media in Egypt was manifested on all levels; namely political, economic, social, educational, and commercial levels. Increased business organizations in Egypt have been intensifying their digital marketing activities on social media to engage with their consumers and enhance the brands' image and reputation (Ibraheem & Abdelsalam, 2021).

The destructive Israeli raids on Gaza and the Palestinians that erupted in October 2023¹, had an enormous effect on the business sector in Egypt. It caused Egyptian citizens, opinion leaders and influencers to advocate a nation-wide call for boycotting international brands that support Israel on one hand and parallel calls to promote the benefits of

* Associate Professor of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication and Mass Media
The British University in Egypt

¹ October 7th, 2023 marked the Palestinian Hamas operation in Israel, in which it took about 300 Israeli hostages and the consequent military raids on Gaza strip that killed over fifteen thousand Palestinian civilians and injured more than twenty thousand Palestinians within a three-week period, while bombing civilian houses, hospitals, churches and mosques in Gaza. Countries, international organizations, and international brands instantly declared their support for Israel's right to defend itself and to revenge the Hamas attack.

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consuming alternative Egyptian local brands on the other hand. The Egyptian public's expectations from the business sectors was to synchronize with the public sentiments and support the Palestinians under fire as well as actively donate to the cause. Egyptian businesses from various sectors resonated with the public sentiments towards Gaza and launched cause-related marketing campaigns and initiatives to demonstrate their support for Gaza and meet the consumers' expectations of their brand, which should contribute to the brand image and reputation (Hamza, 2023). Many businesses seized the opportunity of the attack on Gaza by Israel, and the consequent call for boycott of international brands, as vivid marketing opportunities to connect with the Egyptian customers through social media cause-related marketing communication (CRM) campaigns.

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is a strategic marketing approach that aligns a company's brand with a social cause to achieve mutual benefits. It involves businesses partnering with non-profit organizations or charities to promote awareness and raise funds for a particular cause while simultaneously enhancing their brand image and reputation (Beise-Zee, 2013). The theory of cause-related marketing (CRM) focuses on understanding how companies can benefit both commercially and socially by aligning themselves with charitable causes. It is a complex and multifaceted field, drawing on various theoretical frameworks to explain its effectiveness. According to Kotler (2005) CRM may take various forms like:

- Product donations, or corporate-cause promotions, where companies donate a portion of their product sales to a corresponding charity.
- Cause-branded products, when businesses create co-branded products where a percentage of the proceeds goes to the supported cause. For example, a product may partner with various brands to create products that contribute to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.
- Employee involvement, or volunteerism, when companies encourage employee participation in volunteer opportunities or fundraising events related to the cause they support.

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- Social media campaigns, where businesses utilize social media platforms to raise awareness about the cause and encourage donations or engagement.
- Cause-integrated marketing: Weaving the cause into the brand's overall marketing strategy and messaging including CRM events, when companies organize events, such as charity walks or concerts, to generate funds and awareness for the cause.
- Philanthropy: Direct financial contributions to a cause without any marketing connection (Kotler, 2005).

These Egyptian CRM initiatives related to Palestine took various forms and received controversial feedback from social media users. This paper intends to examine five social media CRM campaigns of Egyptian brands in support of the Palestinian cause through discourse analysis of social media posts. The researcher will also examine the users' size and nature of engagement with the companies' initiatives through the application of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The review of literature aims at highlighting the power of social media in Egypt and the role of social media in CRM campaigns through the survey of studies that were conducted globally and in Egypt.

2. Review of Literature

Since Egypt has over 80 million internet users and over 46 million social media users and is ranked number one country in the number of Facebook subscribers among the Middle East and North African Countries (MENA) (Kemp, 2023), it represents vast opportunities of growth for digital marketing and social media marketing activities including CRM campaigns. Before scanning the literature covering the role of social media in CRM activities, the researcher intends to explore the studies that discuss the power of social media to understand the intrusive power and mounting dependence on social media in Egypt and the intervening environmental factors that lead to this phenomenon.

2.1. Power of social media in Egypt

Politically, the power of social media as an advocacy tool was first revealed in Egypt in 2011, as social media was the main channel of communication between the Egyptian protestors, which led the regime to shut down the whole Internet service amidst the escalating conflict between the protestors and the police (Marchant & Stremlau, 2020).

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The 2011 Arab Spring events were the realization of the power of social media as it was the only free, uncensored, user-controlled communication channel, mobilizing the millions of protestors to join the marches and dissent the regime. All the events in Tahrir Square were documented by mobile phones of Egyptian protestors and broadcast on social media providing a rich source of news to the international media. Some scholars refer to it as the 'Facebook Revolution', based on how social media empowered millions of Egyptians to organize demonstrations that toppled the thirty-year-old oppressive political regime of former president Hosni Mubarak (Badr, 2021).

As the power of social media was comprehended by the Egyptian citizens, its supremacies and effects were also appreciated by the various political powers in Egypt. Henceforth, all emerging political sects after 2011 invested in strategic communication on social media platforms to mobilize public opinion and gain support for their ideologies and ideas (Badr, 2021). Social media played the leading role in those political activities. As Gumede (2016) argues, the battle for democracy in Africa is being increasingly fought over the Internet, and social media in Egypt is no exception (Gumede, 2016). With the restrictions on the freedom of expression in the public sphere, Egyptians' economic sufferings and their amassed problems pressed Egyptian citizens to go online to express their opinions and share their hardships with other users on social media.

Most average Egyptian citizens deserted traditional media and immigrated to social media for the purpose of updated, uncensored news, tailored entertainment programs, and to build the public agenda of issues that usually does not resonate with the state-controlled traditional media (Badr Z., 2021). Scholars confirm that television kept its position as the most popular medium for Egyptians, but the high percentage of unemployment, inflation, low ceiling of freedom of expression along with the young population of Egypt were the main reasons for the growing phenomenon of migration of the publics to social media (Abdalla, 2013). Egyptian public desertion of traditional news media and their accelerating adoption rate of social networks led the government to strongly use social media to communicate the President's and cabinet's activities and news on Facebook pages.

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Official social media pages included a section to post correction of spreading rumors (Allam, 2018), which indicates the state's acknowledgement of the power of social media in Egypt.

Socially, social media has performed role of the main advocacy instrument for females and minorities in Egypt to share their experiences of injustice of their communities and to host calls for their rights. Digital technologies provided Arab feminists the free and safe space to voice their frustrations and suffering in a male-controlled society. Educated Egyptian women, from the upper and middle classes, engaged in free discussions and created cyber counter-publics. This type of cyber activism aims at uniting the opinion of the marginalized groups to defy sociocultural norms and traditions away from surveillance (ElSheikh, 2021). Social media in Egypt facilitated the formation of large female networks that turned into movements with a considerable access to the dominant publics and increasing influence on the public sphere. Numerous advocacy groups were formed from social media networks, which did not reach the stage of lobbying to change legislation yet, but they have been building the agenda for the public sphere and creating strong counter publics regarding social problems like custody of children in case of divorce, cyber harassment, domestic violence, and inheritance for females (ElSheikh, 2021). Advocacy groups to fight online and offline harassment took ground like 'Harass map,' 'Catch the harasser,' 'Assault police' and 'Qawem.' Other social media groups revealed the defects and injustices in the personal affairs and children custody laws in Egypt. social media in Egypt represented the voice of the average Egyptians, who felt rarely represented by the traditional media.

Entertainment, which was an exclusive function of television for millions of Egyptians, became number one reason for the growing dependence on digital content and social media in Egypt. The Internet and social media provided most Egyptians with the right equation, namely personalized communication, and selective exposure to various entertainment content, in addition to the ability to create their own content for socialization, sarcastic commentary, entertainment, shopping, business purposes, and educational purposes. Social media was acknowledged as a formal educational platform in Egypt during the

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lockdown of COVID-19 in 2020 and was heavily used by many of millions of pupils and students enrolled in Egyptian schools and universities, especially those living in urban areas that enjoyed access to electricity, telecommunication infrastructure and Internet (Ibraheem & Abdelsalam, 2021). The increasing dependence of students on social media in the educational process was the focus of earlier studies in Egypt and in various other Arab countries like Algeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan. The conclusions of these studies were for the positive effects of the use of social media in the educational process more than the negative effects (Ibrahim, 2014). The Egyptian academic society enriched the libraries with tens of research papers in different academic disciplines about the benefits of Internet and social media in Egypt in education, entertainment, health awareness, self-development, employment in addition to its power as a free, interactive advocacy and empowerment tool in Egypt.

Economically, social media provided an alternative income opportunity for many segments of the Egyptian society in addition to its traditional function as the main source of economic news updates, foreign currencies exchange rates and stock market news. The economic reform policies, the devaluation of the Egyptian currency, the increasing prices of necessary goods and services, as well as the economic slow-down that resulted from Covid-19 pandemic, were reasons for the growing dependence on social media and digital activities (Ibraheem & Abdelsalam, 2021). The power of social media exceeded that of being an educational and entertainment tool during the lock-down, as social media became a strong business opportunity to many Egyptian companies and individuals. E-commerce applications and online shopping became a booming source of income for millions of Egyptians in the past few years (Ibraheem & Abdelsalam, 2021). The advanced cheap technologies of the satellites and the elevated level of Internet penetration in Egypt caused millions of Egyptians to transfer all their offline activities to online ones and drifted to social media (ZAID, 2018). Social media is considered a tool of economic empowerment for the minorities and marginalized groups in Egypt, especially the female community, people with disabilities, and rural communities. Social media educated many low-income, young, rural individuals to create

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and administer commercial groups that penetrated the E-commerce world, comprehending the rules of online business, adopting modern technologies, and adapting to the market forces. social media and the Internet empowered many Egyptian females, Bedouins, Nubians as well as members of the rural communities to become entrepreneurs, create their own brands, and sell their products online, like 'Imakethis' and 'Miss Basket.' A study on thirty women entrepreneurs in Egypt concluded that social media was the main factor that increased their social capital and their self-efficacy. Through social media they were able to sell their products, connect with many customers and suppliers, build their professional skills, and enhance their reputation and self-confidence (Beninger, Ajjan, Mostafa, & Crittenden, 2016).

COVID-19 was also considered a blessing in disguise, as the total lockdown and the economic pause of all business sectors in addition to the coinciding waves of lay-offs because of the pandemic, led to the realization of the growing power of social media as having great business potential for many segments of the Egyptian society. Its advantages as a cheap, fast, interactive tool of communication between buyers and sellers, motivated hundreds of previously Internet-unconnected Egyptians to consider its characteristics for business opportunities. In addition to that the lockdown revealed the potentials of social media as sources of income, personal business and for marketing of local products, which were unnoticed before lockdown time (Ibraheem & Abdelsalam, 2021). Based on the above review of the vast power of social media in Egypt, businesses were forced to turn all their activities to digital online activities to communicate directly with their current and potential customers. Many businesses launched various corporate social responsibility programs during the pandemic. Successful CRM social media initiatives commenced during the lockdown in Egypt, like the challenge of dairy producing factories to donate more food boxes to the Food Bank to support the poor families during the lockdown (Diab, 2020). The following section surveys the studies that discussed the role of social media in CRM campaigns.

2.2 Social media for cause-related marketing

Cause-related marketing is identified as one of the integrated marketing communication tools conducted by public relations professionals in any

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organization towards building the image and reputation of that organization, performing virtuous corporate social responsibility programs, and contributing to vigorous community relations. Beise-Zee (2013) defined cause-related marketing:

“Cause-related marketing is a promotional activity of an organization in which a societal or charitable cause is endorsed, commonly together with its products and services as a bundle or tie-in... The business community regularly defines cause-related marketing specifically as a cooperation between a commercial organization and a charity for mutual benefit.” (Beise-Zee, 2013).

Scholars in various parts of the world, including Egypt, have enumerated the benefits of CRM for companies, stating that CRM activities enhance brand image and reputation, strengthen brand loyalty and customer engagement, expand market reach, and attract new customers, boost employee morale and motivation, and gain competitive advantage over similar businesses in the market.

Deng (2023) study examined a sample of 360 users of CRM campaigns on social media to explore how such CRM campaigns influence consumers' response. Applying the balance and consistency theories and the quantitative analysis of social media responses, he noticed a positive correlation between the user's self-image, the brand-image, and the value of the CRM cause. The three dimensions fit together and drive the consumers positive citizenship behavior and engagement with the brand's CRM advocated cause on social media, implying the importance of choosing the cause that will fit with the brand personality and resonate with the social media users' community identity (Deng, 2023).

Numerous academic studies have explored the impact of social media on CRM campaigns, highlighting its potential to enhance brand image, increase consumer engagement, and generate donations for social causes. Singh & Pathak (2020) conducted a systematic qualitative case study on the top three E-commerce companies in India to examine the role of CRM in enhancing consumer engagement level and the factors that motivate consumers to engage themselves with the CRM initiatives of the online retailers. The findings of this research highlighted the role of social media in allowing brands to engage with consumers on a personal level, creating a sense of community and shared values. The

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results confirmed the role of online CRM initiatives in consumers-cause affinity, donation proximity, ease of participation, choice of cause, philanthropic motivation and rewards received. This engagement can lead to increased brand loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and a stronger connection to the brand's social cause (Singh, 2020).

As for the studies that tackled CRM in Egypt, assorted studies contributed to enriching the review of literature. A study conducted on the Egyptian market investigated the effect of CRM initiatives on Facebook of three dairy producing companies on consumer engagement during COVID-19. The study surveyed the companies' CRM posts in facing corona virus, and the nature and number of users' comments on these posts. By analyzing 595 users' comments, the results reinforced the power of Facebook as a cheap, fast, dialogic, far-reaching platform in delivering the CRM messages of companies directly to Egyptian consumers and consequently causing positive engagement with those posts. This study concluded the success of the sample companies in creating shared values and, managing the relationship with their customers via the CRM posts and consequently creating a positive image for those companies (Diab, 2020).

Another research article discussed cause-related marketing campaign dimensions affecting consumers' attitudes towards firms and intention to purchase on-demand ride services in Egypt. The quantitative study surveyed 270 users of on-demand ride services customers in Egypt. It concluded that cause involvement has a positive impact on attitude towards the firm and intention to purchase, while distrust negatively affected the intention to purchase. The charitable, selfless CRM initiatives of companies had a significant impact on the consumers' attitudes towards the companies (Shazly, 2020). The results of this study relate to the findings of the study of Homssi (2023), which concluded that effectiveness of CRM campaigns on social media are influenced by several factors, including the alignment between the brand and the cause, the credibility of the cause, and the quality of the social media content. The findings stated that customer's skepticism affected perception of brands and negatively moderated the relationship between cause-related marketing campaigns and brand image (Homssi, 2023).

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Cause -related marketing was the theme of a considerable number of research studies in Egypt, like the study by the international marketing center in Helwan University (2020) that emphasized that the most influential factors that contribute to the success of CRM to be the choice of the cause relative to the brand and its consumers, strategic CRM campaign, and strong partnership with a non-profit organization. The Social Studies Center of Ain Shams University conducted a study in 2021 to measure the effect of CRM campaigns in Egypt and it concluded that CRM has a positive effect on increasing awareness of social and environmental issues as well as motivating the public to participate in charity activities. Mohamed and Mousa (2019) explored the effect of CRM on the image of brands and consumers purchase intentions. The experimental study was conducted on a sample of 425 undergraduate university student in Egypt via an online survey. A two (cause importance: sudden /disaster vs. ongoing) by two (cause proximity: national vs. international) between-subjects categories were used in that study. Results confirmed the positive relationship between CRM and consumers' purchase intentions towards certain brands. Research also concluded that consumers would have a positively significant higher purchase intention when CRM campaign is related to disaster rather than ongoing cause as well as a detected significant higher purchase intention when CRM campaign is related to national cause rather than international one (Mohamed F & Mousa, 2019).

The review of literature tackled two main axes: the power of social media in Egypt and the social media cause-related marketing studies. The first axis covered the western and Arabic studies that drew a full picture of the power of social media in Egypt since the 2011 revolution intervening in every aspect of Egyptians' lives. Researchers' contributions in that regard covered the power of social media as a free channel of political participation, as a two-way alternative to the declining popularity of restricted one-way traditional media, and as a social advocacy tool to amplify the voices of women and minorities in Egypt. Studies also covered the increasing power of social media during the corona virus pandemic in education, health awareness and in launching various CRM initiatives by the businesses in Egypt.

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The second axis of the literature review uncovered the contributions of the researchers regarding the study of social media in cause-related marketing and employed qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the nature of CRM campaigns, propose criteria to evaluate their success or failure, measure the effect of users' engagement on the brand image and analyzing users' comments and engagement with the companies' CRM campaigns on the interactive social media platforms. The previous studies were extremely helpful in identifying the criteria for successful CRM campaigns on social media and in guiding this research to study a sample of Egyptian companies' CRM campaigns with application on one cause: namely 'Free Palestine.'

A few studies were conducted on the CRM campaigns during the corona virus pandemic, but there were no studies conducted in Egypt about the use of 'Free Palestine' cause in the marketing of brands and companies. The researcher realized that few studies were conducted on Egyptian brands CRM social media initiatives and campaigns, which insinuated the topic of this research paper, along with the heated events of the 'Al Aqsa Storm' and the Israeli retaliation military operations in Gaza. The objective of this research is to provide a qualitative assessment of the Egyptian brands' 'Free Palestine' CRM campaigns and social media users size and type of engagement on social media accounts of those brands according to the elements of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

3. Theoretical Framework

This is a descriptive study that aimed at analyzing the CRM efforts of brands in Egypt in support of the Palestinian cause and the extent of consumer engagement with the CRM promotional efforts. This research relied on the application of the elements of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in studying the pro-Palestine CRM initiatives in Egypt during the month of October 2023. As defined by Petty and Cacioppo (1984), ELM studies how messages take routes in the minds of the recipients, as they are being processed and how certain elements intervene in the processing operation (Petty, 1984). The model hypothesized that persuasive messages follow two main routes; namely 'the central route – representing highly engaged message cognition – and the peripheral route – informed by marginal factors such as

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attractiveness of the source, perceived credibility, or repetition of the message' (Petty, 1984). An experimental study that assessed the impacts of message complexity on perceptions of corporate image following the communication of a CSR initiative, concluded that simple CSR messages trigger more positive attitudes towards brands and companies. Research indicates that highly involved consumers are more motivated to process issue-relevant messages since they view such messages as more personally meaningful (Browning, 2018). ELM suggests that consumers engage in high or low levels of processing depending on the context. CRM can trigger high elaboration when the cause resonates with them, leading to deeper brand engagement and positive attitudes. This experimental study used ELM to inspect the effects of cause involvement, ability to process, and motivation to process on consumer judgments of organizational image following exposure to a corporate social responsibility (CSR) message. Results of this study indicated that the simplicity or complexity of CRM messages have insignificant effect on persuading the company publics with the CRM messages. On the other hand, consumers engage more with causes that they can relate to and consequently are more likely to positively affect the image of companies (Browning, 2018). The researcher will employ the ELM criteria to examine how the Egyptian social media users processed the CRM messages of varied brands and how they engaged with the 'Free Palestine' CRM initiatives through discourse analysis of the users' comments.

4. Research Methodology

This study aims at using two qualitative research methodologies, **multiple case studies and critical discourse analysis** to answer the two research questions: how the sample Egyptian brands used the pro-Palestinian cause in their social media CRM campaigns and how did the social media users engage with the brands' CRM campaigns. The multiple case study approach will be used to examine the components of CRM campaigns of a sample of five companies in Egypt through their published posts on social media platforms during the month of October 2023. The qualitative case study research methodology was acknowledged by social science scholars as the most widely used method in academia for researchers interested in qualitative research

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(Rashid, 2019). Case-study protocol procedure for this study included the following steps: first, consulting specialized marketing magazines to determine the population of this study, which are the companies that launched CRM campaigns using the 'Free Palestine' cause. Second, visiting all these companies' social media accounts to explore the size and nature of the CRM campaigns. Third, choose the five companies that represent the purposive sample for this research. Fourth, design a unified form of analysis to examine each CRM message's type, verbal language, visuals, creative idea, and users' interactive engagement indicators; namely likes and shares in addition to a discourse analysis of users' verbal comments to identify the likelihood of positive or negative attitudes towards the CRM initiatives. Like most case studies conducted in business and management disciplines, this study assumes the interpretive model (Rashid, 2019). The objective of the use of case studies is to analyze the components of the CRM campaigns related to 'Free Palestine' and to evaluate their success for failure variables as depicted from the social media users' engagement patterns and finally interpreting the findings through social media users' eyes.

This research aims at implementing the **ELM** as the theoretical framework for studying the social media users' engagement with the sample companies' pro-Palestine CRM applications in Egypt during the month of October 2023, which witnessed the breaking events of the Israeli military attack on Gaza. The researcher shall also employ the critical **discourse analysis** method to analyze the pro-Palestine cause-related marketing posts of a purposive sample of CRM initiatives of five companies in Egypt. According to Fairclough (2001) critical discourse analysis in social scientific research allows the 'interpretation of the social practices based on the relationship between language, body language and visual representation' (p.123). Critical discourse analysis is a qualitative research tool that analyzes units according to various elements like language, semiotics, and visuals. It permits the researchers to examine social practices and behavior (Faircoulgh, 2001). According to Martinez (2007) critical discourse analysis 'allows the researcher certain freedom in the formulation of new perspectives that help to translate the theoretical assumptions into instruments of analysis' (Martínez, 2007). The

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researcher intends to utilize the elements of the critical discourse analysis method as a qualitative method to analyze the copy and visual elements of the videos and posts included in the CRM campaigns of a purposive sample of five companies operating in Egypt and launched the 'Free Palestine' initiative on the social media accounts during the month of October, 2023, which is the time duration of this study. The purposive sample was selected out of a total of population of seven companies mentioned in an article in a specialized marketing magazine (Hamza, 2023). The researcher selected five social media accounts for five companies in Egypt that manipulated the Palestinian symbols and cause in their CRM campaigns based on the status of those companies in the Egyptian market and their perceived good image. The sample of this research included one telecommunication company, Vodafone, and four food and beverage companies, Edita, Juhayna, Buffalo Burger, and TBS. The researcher shall apply the ELM to analyze the nature of consumer engagement with these posts. The sample of this research included one telecommunication company, Vodafone and four food and beverage companies, Edita, Juhayna, Buffalo Burger, and TBS. The analysis of CRM 'Free Palestine' related initiatives took place during the month of October 2023, because it was the critical time of heightened news coverage of both the Hamas attacks on Israel and the brutal military actions in Gaza. These events were on top of the agenda of world countries' leaders, United Nations Organizations, and the global news media. The discourse analysis was confined to the consumers' engagement on the official social media pages of the above-mentioned companies. The qualitative research methods are employed to answer the following **research questions** for this study:

RQ1: How did the Egyptian brands use the pro-Palestinian cause in their social media CRM campaigns?

RQ2: How did the social media users engage with the brands' CRM campaigns?

To answer both the research questions of the study, the researcher adopted a simultaneous qualitative + qualitative mixed method research design. This is known as an 'inductive simultaneous design, where both the components are qualitative' (Singh, 2020). To answer the first

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question the researcher conducted a multiple case study approach and discussed the CRM campaign of five organizations operating in Egypt. To address the second research question, the researcher used a qualitative discourse analysis to induct the nature of comments of the social media users in response to the companies' CRM posts during the month of October 2023.

5. Results

The results of both research questions and the discourse analysis will be presented combined and correlated to each of the sample companies under study. The Telecommunication company CRM initiative was launched after ten days of Israeli raids on Gaza and cutting off all internet connections there. A one-week initiative, from October 19 -25, to offer five free international calls and five free messages to the sieged people of Gaza, was launched in coordination with the Egyptian National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA) (BusinessToday, 2023). The initiative included offering the Vodafone cash service and the Anavodafone application to receive donations to Gaza in cooperation to the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) and Mersal Foundation. The Telecom Company CRM was a result of Egyptian social media users' pressure to force them to act positively to support the people in Gaza. Following this initiative, Vodafone CEO posted a video on the company's twitter X account indicating preparedness to install five network towers in Rafah for people in Gaza (news, 2023). The video received 52K views, 386 likes, 161 reposts, and forty quotes. Analysis of the quotes' nature showed that most quotes were positive thanks and prayers, but there were fewer comments that showed skepticism of users of the seriousness of the company to conduct this project. An online article attacked the telecommunication company and accused it of manipulating the Gaza crises to make void promises (Mansour, 2023). The author quoted a political analyst, who described the CRM campaigns as a 'kind of a pacifier to the public opinion and social media activists', and he added that telecom companies could have acted to provide parts of Gaza with internet coverage, if they sincerely intended to.

Another CRM act was the introduction of 'Tele-medicine' service between Vodafone and Mersal Foundation for the people in Gaza on

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Facebook to provide medical advice over the telephone for the people in Gaza (Vodafone, Vodafone cooperates with Mersal to provide free medical services through 'Tele medicine', 2023). This post received 25K likes, 1432 shares. Analysis of the comments indicated that most users are praising this action, while there were calls for all telecommunication companies to provide Gaza with internet services through their existing towers on the borders. One comment complained that it could not use that service, as no one was answering the mobile phones and calls were transferred to AI bots. Other users wanted to communicate with customer service or someone from the management for other personal complaints regarding the service.

Vodafone offered on its social media pages a call-tone named 'Rage3en' and dedicated its revenues to the ERC for Gaza. This post received 871K views, 12K likes and 967 comments. Most Comments were prayers for the people in Palestine in addition to inquiries and complaints about personal problems and services. In a related post Vodafone thanked 150 thousand users for requesting the call tone 'Rage3en' in one week (Vodafone, Subscribe to this call tone and all revenues will be dedicated to ERC for Gaza, 2023).

Two companies of the study sample of food and beverage companies used strategic remarkable CRM related to 'Free Palestine', namely Juhayna and TBS. The analysis of the social media CRM posts and consumer engagement of two other companies of the same industry, Edita and Buffalo Burger, indicated users' increasing doubts associated with decreasing engagement with brand along with comments suspicious of the credibility of those companies' CRM campaigns.

Juhayna , a leading Egyptian manufacturing company since 1983, which is specialized in the production, processing and packaging of dairy, juice, and cooking products (Juhayna, 2023), used its website and social media pages to show its efforts in supporting people in Gaza: on October 16th, Juhayna published a release featuring its collaboration with Egyptian Food Bank (EFB), Egyptian Red Crescent (ERS), and Tahya Misr Organizations to send food supplies in the first convoy to the Palestinian people in Gaza (Media center, 2023). The company associated the news feature with a creative picture of its factory workers forming the word 'Palestine' ending the copy "The People of Juhayna

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Stand with Palestine.” On its Facebook page, it showed a picture of a container featuring El Aqsa Mosque and the logos of Juhayna along with the logos of charity partners. The English caption accompanying the picture stated:” Juhayna stands with humanity: Together for Palestine.” The Arabic caption was in colloquial Arabic reflecting the fast response of the company to aid the people of Palestine. It said: “مسافة السكة لأهالينا فى فلسطين”. This post received 130 likes and five comments. The most engaging post of Juhayna was a reel video on Instagram that showed the workers of Juhayna volunteering to pack food supplies and clothes for the people in Gaza in preparation of the second wave of aid. This Instagram post received 16.1K likes and eighty-nine comments, which were all supportive of the company efforts and prayers for people in Gaza (<https://www.instagram.com/p/C0JbdLCOFYu/>, 2023). The company also manipulated the hashtags #Supporting Palestine and #JuhaynaCares to increase the cross platforms cause-marketing.

In solidarity with the Palestinian people, and in collaboration with the @egyfoodbank and the @egyptianclothingbank , our dedicated employees diligently packed crucial supplies destined for Gaza to alleviate the affected families.
May peace swiftly embrace the region, bringing safety and solace to all.
#SupportingPalestine
#JuhaynaCares

Figure 1: Juhayna Instagram Message associated with the video of workers volunteering efforts.

The bakery shop TBS used creative CRM tool by changing the design of its coffee cups, removed the logo and replaced it with the Palestinian Kafia and green map of Palestine with the hashtag #Freepalestine. The word ‘coffee’ in the phrase the ‘wake-up coffee’ was stricken and changed to ‘call.’ The ‘Wake-Up Call’ cup with the Palestinian design occupied many posts and videos on the different TBS social media

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pages. It used an Instagram video to announce its support for Palestine through donating 20% of its coffee sales to the ERS to aid Gaza. The video was in English and almost all comments from the users were in English. This post received about 16K likes and all positive reviews (TBS, 2023). TBS offered to connect the suppliers of its Palestinian-design cup with other Egyptian brands, who wish to use their cup designs for their products.

**“Tbsegypt Embrace the #FreePalestine Cup. We are calling on all coffee brands to join our initiative and switch to the #FreePalestine cup. Together, we can make a difference. For more information about the cup design and supplier details, please send us a message.
#FreePalestine #Ceasefire #solidarity”**

Figure 2: TBS Instagram Message associated with the video of launching the ‘Wake Up Call’ Cup

Buffalo Burger, an Egyptian restaurant since 2008, seized the opportunities of increasing calls of boycott of all foreign brands supporting Israel, to announce its identity as 100% Egyptian company and promote its solidarity with people in Gaza by joining the call for boycott of foreign soda drinks and announcing the replacements with local soda brands. This Instagram post received 40.4K likes (Buffalo Burger, 2023). The analysis of the comments on this post indicated contradicting attitudes and not all comments were positive, as some users questioned the credibility of the company, others were describing the horrors in Palestinian territories, the shortage of food and medical supplies in a way that backlashes to the company initiative. Some users were trivializing the CRM gesture of Buffalo Burger in contrast to what the Palestinians are suffering from. The company posted another post on Instagram on November 14th, 2023, thanking the Egyptians for their donations to Baheya foundation and El Shifaa Bank through buying the company products, as the company dedicated a percentage of its sales to that cause in collaboration with the charity organizations (2023، بندد عم اهلنا في فلسطين،)

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Edita, a food and snacks company with many popular brands in the Egyptian market since 1996 was included in the calls for boycott on social media, as a subsidiary company of an American mother company, and social media users differed among themselves regarding its identity. After three week's silence in October 2023, the company issued a statement as an act of reactive public relations to confirm its Egyptian nationality. The company has published a well-crafted long position statement in both languages, English, and Arabic, on its social media platforms asserting that it is 100% an Egyptian brand and confirmed the company's commitment to support the rights of Palestinians. In related posts, it announced its "collaboration with Misr El-Kheir Organization and Edita's own social development arm 'Edita for Social Development' to aid the Palestinians in Gaza who are currently going through a genocide" (Edita, 2023). The social media users were hardly engaged with that statement and there were online articles on other platforms calling for the boycott of Edita's brands (Bisaraha, 2024).

6. Discussion

The analysis of the CRM messages indicated variation in the strategic CRM tools and showed different degrees of involvement with the pro-Palestine CRM initiatives. The common CRM strategy used by all companies was the affiliation with local non-governmental organizations NGOs to channel the donations to Gaza. The sample companies selected the NGOs according to two conditions. First, the NGOs that enjoyed a good reputation and relative trust by Egyptian citizens and individual donors like Misr El Kheir and Mersal foundation. Second, the NGOs that were directly connected to the Palestinian cause and were allowed to function in Gaza like the ERC and EFB. The sound choice of suitable NGOs reflected on the degree of users' engagement with some CRM posts and added to their visibility and credibility. According to ELM criteria, there was low engagement with CRM initiatives that coupled with unknown NGOS like 'Edita for Social Development' or with reputable NGOs, which activities were hardly affiliated with the needs of the Palestinian people like Baheya for breast cancer and El Shifaa Bank, which was

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discredited because of severe crisis in medicines in Egypt in the past few years.

Vodafone launched four main CRM initiatives related to 'Palestine' during the study period; one-week free calls offered to Palestinians, video of CEO announcing the company readiness to establish internet towers for people in Gaza, launch of Telemedicine service with Mersal foundation to offer online medical services to the injured people in Gaza and a call tone 'Rageen', which revenues were to be dedicated to ERC to support aid of the Palestinians. The video received the largest views, but few likes and some skeptical comments regarding the sincerity of the initiative. The highest engagement from consumers was the call tone, which according to the company post, received 150 thousand subscribers in one week (Vodafone, Subscribe to this call tone and all revenues will be dedicated to ERC for Gaza, 2023). ELM can best describe this high engagement. Its views confirm that simple messages are easier processed by the consumers and therefore will result in better engagement (Browning, 2018), positive reception and on the long run better image for the brand or company.

The author believes that the consumers' subscription in the call-tone service received high engagement from Egyptian consumers due to several reasons. First, the call-to-action was simple and direct which lead to the consumers' swift response in the form of behavior. Second, the mobile call tone will be heard in public, which is considered a public announcement for the subscribing consumers' sympathy with the Palestinian cause, and consequently boost the subscriber's own image among other publics. Third, the call tone offers a tangible mutual benefit between the consumers and Vodafone, which is known to increase the level of engagements with CRM programs (Beise-Zee, 2013).

Two companies of the study sample of food and beverage companies used strategic remarkable CRM related to 'Free Palestine', namely Juhayna and TBS. The analysis of the social media CRM posts and consumer engagement of two other companies of the same industry, Edita and Buffalo Burger, indicated users' increasing doubts associated with decreasing engagement with both companies along with skeptical comments regarding the credibility of those companies' CRM campaigns.

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The strategic CRM of Juhayna showed the integration of all messages to present the company's sincere CRM actions to help the Palestinian people. The company posted on social media videos and pictures showing the involvement of the factory workers in the packing of food and clothes, the workers' vests with Palestinian-supporting messages printed on them, the workers bodies' formation to create the word 'Palestine', the reels and videos showing the various types and high quality of donations being packed, and lastly Juhayna's trucks' designs heading to Rafah borders with Palestinian symbols (Al Aqsa Mosque) and emotional colloquial Arabic slogans. The most engaging CRM post of Juhayna was the video showing the factory workers enthusiastically filling boxes of food and clothes for the Palestinians. The author believes that the success of Juhayna's CRM campaign was due to the simple messages that were easily understood by the simple Egyptian people, who are also the typical consumers of Juhayna products. The company's previous CRM campaigns, especially during corona virus, were positively received by the consumers and social media users as concluded in a previous study (Diab, 2020). Matching the CRM cause and messages with the company consumers' values and psychographic features is another cue for the success of CRM messages (Deng, 2023). Involving the internal publics of an organization in the CRM activities and the community relations programs adds to the credibility of the company's activities and consequently contributes positively to its image and reputation (Deng, 2023).

Another successful strategic CRM pro-Palestine initiative was that of TBS. The company seized the opportunity of educated Egyptians' call-for-boycott of international coffee companies like Starbucks to differentiate itself from other brands in the Egyptian market. TBS integrated marketing communication campaign was based on changing its design of the coffee cups to host Palestinian flag and Kafia designs along with the slogan 'Wake-Up Call' to substitute the TBS original slogan on the old cups 'Wake-up Coffee.' The CRM posts were in English language to match the educational level and language of TBS loyal customers of A and B class Egyptians. Offering their newly designed Palestinian cup to other local competitors was an excellent

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business-to-business message that added to the boosting of TBS image and reputation and lead to higher levels of engagement with their posts. The company also used various social media platforms to announce dedicating 20% of its coffee sales during October and weekends in November to ERC to support the people in Gaza. This integrated cross promotion of the CRM messages assisted in increasing credibility and users' engagement with the CRM posts of the company.

On the other hand, the analysis of the CRM activities of Buffalo Burger and Edita reflected absence of well-planned CRM communication and latened reactive public relations which resulted in either skeptical and negative comments on social media or in lack of engagement with the posts.

Buffalo Burger wanted to make use of the market opportunity of calls of boycott for the famous McDonald's chain, so it confirmed its Egyptian identity along with messages about the company efforts to provide local beverage suppliers in consolidation with the Palestinian people. But their CRM message was vague and inconsiderate of the sentiments of the Egyptian people, who expected more tangible donations or aid for the people in Gaza, as indicated from the analysis of some comments to the company's CRM messages. The choice of the NGOs to affiliate with to channel the aid to Gaza was also not successful, as the selected NGOs were serving the Egyptian community needs with no proven record of existence in Gaza.

Edita's CRM initiative can hardly be considered strategically planned cause-related marketing, as there was latent response to the consumers' concerns about the company identity. The position statement was written in sophisticated language while lacking any specific evidence for the company's monetary or physical donations to the Palestinian people. ELM concepts confirm that simple messages are easier processed by the consumers and therefore will result in better engagement (Browning, 2018), positive reception and on the long run better image for the brand or company, which was not achieved by the public relations tool used by Edita. The author believes that the selected CRM tool, sophisticated position statement, was not matching with the cause, Egyptian social media users, nor with the typical

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description of the middle-class average Egyptian consumers of the company's low-involvement products.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the power of social media in some cause-related marketing initiatives in Egypt in association with 'Free Palestine' movement. The market in Egypt was severely affected by the October 7th 'Al Aqsa Storm' and the Israeli retaliation military acts in Gaza. The Egyptian consumers were immensely affected by these events and called for the perceived rich and powerful business community to act responsibly to aid the people in Gaza. Many business organizations started to respond to that public call and launched CRM campaigns and initiatives. The researcher applied the Elaboration Likelihood Model criteria to study the CRM messages and strategies of a sample of five companies in Egypt during October 2023, in addition to a qualitative discourse analysis of the social media users' engagement with those messages. Results indicated that the consumers showed appreciation for certain strategic CRM programs, which are well-planned, have simple messages, supported with visual evidence, relate to the Palestinian cause, offer mutual benefit between the company and its consumers, and are executed in collaboration with credible and well-selected local NGOs. These results correspond with other studies which confirmed that social media allow brands to engage with consumers on a personal level, creating a sense of community and shared values (Singh, 2020). The scope of this study was limited to one month and was applied to a small sample of the Egyptian companies. The researcher believes that CRM needs to be studied over a longer period and the study should include analysis of the change in social media users' attitudes towards companies based on their CRM efforts to better explain the power of social media in cause-related marketing and its influence on consumers' attitudes towards companies.

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