



“The impact of consumer-based brand equity on consumer attitude and intention towards electronic word-of-mouth: An empirical study on luxury brands in Saudi Arabia”

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THE IMPACT OF CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY ON CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND INTENTION TOWARDS ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON LUXURY BRANDS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Abstract

Branding strategy is crucial in strengthening firms' market competitiveness. This study examined the influence of brand equity of luxury brands on attitudinal responses and behavioral intentions of consumers towards electronic word-of-mouth. The population of this study was consumers in Saudi Arabia who search about online reviews of luxury brands on social media platforms. This study used a convenience sampling technique. The research data were collected on-line from 277 luxury brand consumers in Saudi Arabia using a quantitative Likert-type survey. SPSS and Pearson's correlation coefficient were used to examine the research hypotheses. The results of this study showed that brand equity and its components (brand image and brand awareness) have significant positive relationships with consumer attitude towards electronic word-of-mouth, as values of correlation coefficient were $r = 0.440$ and $r = 0.396$, respectively, at a significance level less than 0.01. Additionally, the results indicated that brand image and brand awareness have significant positive relationships with consumer intention to follow electronic word-of-mouth, as values of correlation coefficient were $r = 0.336$, $r = 0.360$, respectively, at a significance level less than 0.01. The findings of this study provide valuable theoretical and practical implications for managers and marketers in the luxury brand sector.

Keywords

brand equity, brand image, brand awareness, electronic word of mouth, consumer attitude, consumer intention

JEL Classification

M31, M15

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business market, it is essential for managers and marketers to design an effective branding strategy that enable them to distinguish their offerings in the mind of the consumer (Gilitwala & Nag, 2022; Liu et al., 2017). The adoption of a branding strategy can help firms to improve their performance and achieve a distinctive competitive advantage in the market (Mizik, 2014). It has been noted that brand equity plays a critical role in shaping consumers' evaluation and purchase decision-making processes of products and services (Liu et al., 2017). Brand equity can increase self-confidence in decision-making process and support the buying process, which consequently enhances brand loyalty (Tuominen, 1999). With the significant increase in the use of social media platforms during the past two decades, scholarly attention has been directed towards investigating brand equity in relation to social media marketing efforts (Ebrahim,

2020; Zarei et al., 2022). Such research can help to understand how users influence each other with their opinions and reviews about brands. Additionally, it has been noted that advices and recommendations that are made by other customers could influence the consumer's purchasing decision more than marketing campaigns (Casaló et al., 2011).

However, few studies have investigated brand equity in the context of social media marketing (Ebrahim, 2020; Liu et al., 2017). Additionally, social media marketing activities have increasingly been explored as a promising marketing strategy to promote luxury brands, but precise mechanisms to operationalize this channel have not been identified (Godey et al., 2016). It has been noted that brand equity can generate positive consumer responses (Kim & Ko, 2010). A large number of studies have been conducted to identify the influence of brand equity on a variety of consumer behavioral responses (e.g., Amegbe, 2016; Buil et al., 2013; Latha, 2016; Minh et al., 2022; Naeini et al., 2015; Rizwan et al., 2021). However, no prior study has attempted to examine the relationship between brand equity and consumers' behavioral patterns of responses towards electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand equity can be explained as a “set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers” (Aaker, 1991, p. 7). It refers to the impact that a brand has on the customer, formed in the customer's mind, which is exceptional and would not occur without the brand's existence (Keller, 1993; Liu et al., 2015). Several studies have attempted to define brand equity based on the consumer perspective (e.g., Keller, 2003; Jillapalli et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2015; Palomba, 2022). Customer-based brand equity emerges when consumer memories have a unique, strong favorable association with the brand (Keller, 2003). Thus, brand equity plays a crucial role in measuring consumer's response when they are exposed to the brand marketing activities (Faircloth et al., 2001; Zarei et al., 2022). Customer-based brand equity can result in several positive outcomes, such as effective marketing communications, higher prices, and long-term revenues (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 2003; Palomba, 2022).

As this study aims to capture the customer perspective, Keller's (1993) customer-based conceptualization of brand equity is adopted, as used by numerous recent studies (e.g., Biplap & Srabanti, 2017; Hayford et al., 2016; Jillapalli et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2015; Palomba, 2022; Zarei et al., 2022). Keller (1993) identified that brand equity includes two main constructs: brand image and brand awareness. Brand awareness is about the degree

to which a brand can be recalled or recognized in different circumstance (Keller, 2003). Aaker (1991) explained brand awareness as the ability of prospective buyer to identify that a brand belongs to a specific category. Due to the importance of brand awareness, it has been identified in a large number of studies as a key construct in brand equity model (e.g., Aaker, 1991; Alwan & Alshurideh, 2022; Keller, 1993; Krishnan, 1996; Liu et al., 2017; Park & Namkung, 2022).

Furthermore, brand awareness as a major aspect of brand equity can aid consumers in making a faster decision compared with those who are not aware about the brand (Liu et al., 2017). Brand image can be defined as the accumulated of experiences that have been gained throughout time (Park & Namkung, 2022). It is related to customers' perceptions of intangible aspects of brands (Keller, 2003). Personal experience, advertisements, and other sources of information can play a major role in forming brand image (Keller, 2003).

During the 2000s, there was a dramatic increase in the number of consumers using digital platforms to exchange their opinions about brands, products, and services in many markets (Lee et al., 2008). By the 2020s, given a fillip by the surge in e-commerce associated with COVID-19 lockdowns, social media discussion of products is ubiquitous, with a vast volume of continuous content being produced and published by consumers worldwide (Park & Namkung, 2022). E-WOM (the positive and/or negative statements that are expressed by former, actual, or potential customers through the

Internet about goods or brands) has long been recognized as essential in the modern digitized economy (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). It can be considered as a process of personal influence, where communication between sender and recipient may influence the recipients' attitudes and purchasing decisions (Park & Lee, 2008). The formation and exchange of e-WOM has been enabled by social media (Bronner & De Hoog, 2010), manifest in the exchange of posts for product review sites, blog posts, Facebook posts, and tweets (Bronner & De Hoog, 2010). This study is concerned with investigating consumer responses towards e-WOM through addressing two major behavioral patterns: consumer attitude towards e-WOM, and consumer intention to follow e-WOM.

The element of attitude can be defined as a learned tendency to respond in a negative or positive manner towards an object (Zainal et al., 2017). Consumer attitude towards e-WOM is based on the trust that customer holds to its source. Two major aspects of attitude were identified by Yang and Yoo (2004): effective and cognitive attitudes. The degree to which individuals inherently like something represents an affective attitude, but beliefs and opinions held about and attributed to that thing (i.e., product) reflect cognitive attitudes. Researchers have usually used attitude to determine and predict the different behavior of customers (Casalo et al., 2011).

Consumer intention to follow e-WOM has been examined by several studies in different contexts, referring to a consumer behavioral intention which can be used to assess the possibility of a consumer responding to a certain object (Zainal et al., 2017). It can be said that consumer intention to follow e-WOM determines the way that consumers will act in response to the e-WOM message; the most important means of "following" e-WOM is to make purchase and repurchase decisions associated with the product or brand (Casaló et al., 2011).

Though the relationship between brand equity and consumer attitude towards e-WOM has not been directly addressed by most prior research, several studies have investigated the relationship between brand equity and other attitudinal responses. Additionally, constructs of brand equity were examined in relation to various attitudinal

responses. Liu and Wang (2008) concluded that attitude towards both private labels and promoted brands can be influenced by the store image. Anwar et al. (2011) confirmed that brand image and brand trust can affect customer attitude towards a brand extension. Torlak et al. (2013) found that religious brand image and religious orientation have a significant positive impact on customer attitudes towards religious brand names. Shahrokh et al. (2012) revealed that brand awareness, image, and loyalty can positively affect consumers' attitudes towards the brand extension. Lu et al. (2014) concluded that high brand awareness can lead to highly positive attitudes towards sponsored recommendation posts. Wu and Lo (2009) validated that brand awareness can influence the core-brand attitude in the field of extended products. Deshpande (2017) examined the impact of brand awareness on teenagers' attitudes towards famous food brands in India, and found that children aged between 10 to 18 make their choices about food based on taste, popularity, and trust.

Additionally, reviewing of existing literature reveals that the relationship between brand equity and consumer intention to follow e-WOM has not been examined empirically by prior research. However, a number of studies have tested the relationship between constructs of brand equity and other behavioral intentions. Chen et al. (2012) conducted a study on university students in Taiwan to explore the influence of brand image on purchase intention and found that brand image has a great influence on purchase intention. Nagar (2015) examined the effect of green advertisement on brand image and on consumer responses towards it, and demonstrated that positive attitudes towards green advertisements, brand image, and attitudes towards the brand improves the likelihood of shoppers intending to purchase such brands.

Wu (2015) found that building a good brand image can increase consumers' intention to purchase sport products, reporting that brand image can stimulate customers' feelings and perceptions, and positively affect the process of evaluating and selecting products, which in turn would enhance his/her purchase intention. Park and Namkung (2022) identified brand image as a major factor which can impact the intention to re-use brands encountered on Instagram. Kim and Kim (2016) studied the in-

fluence of brand awareness on consumer purchase intention in the South Korean cosmetic industry segment. Their study findings demonstrated that brand awareness of cosmetics positively impacts consumer purchasing intentions. Lin et al. (2014) found that tourists' purchase intentions can be directed by their brand awareness about well-known franchised stores in Taiwan. Minh et al. (2022) maintained that a higher level of brand awareness would influence customer intention to purchase fashion brands.

The empirical findings of the research reviewed above confirmed that brand image and brand awareness can influence attitudinal responses, and indicated that both brand image and brand awareness can exert significant impacts on customer behavioral intentions.

2. AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

This study aims to investigate the impact of brand equity of luxury brand and its components (brand image and brand awareness) on: (1) consumer attitude towards e-WOM, and (2) consumer intention to follow e-WOM. Based on the reviewed literature, a number of research hypotheses were developed, as expounded below, which were tested as per the developed research model, illustrated in Figure 1.

H1: *Brand image is positively associated with consumer attitude towards e-WOM.*

H2: *Brand awareness is positively associated with consumer attitude towards e-WOM.*

H3: *Brand image is positively associated with consumer intention to follow e-WOM.*

H4: *Brand awareness is positively associated with consumer intention to follow e-WOM.*

3. METHODS

A quantitative research strategy was adopted to examine relationships between the research main concepts. This deductive approach enables the clarification of causal relationships between research variables. A structured questionnaire was developed based on the reviewed literature (as described below), and was translated into Arabic, which is more convenient and allows a better understanding for the target population.

The first part of the questionnaire is about participant's socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education, and household monthly income. The second part includes two questions which were used to exclude participants who did not fulfil criteria of the intended sample. The first question was designed to identify participants who have dealt

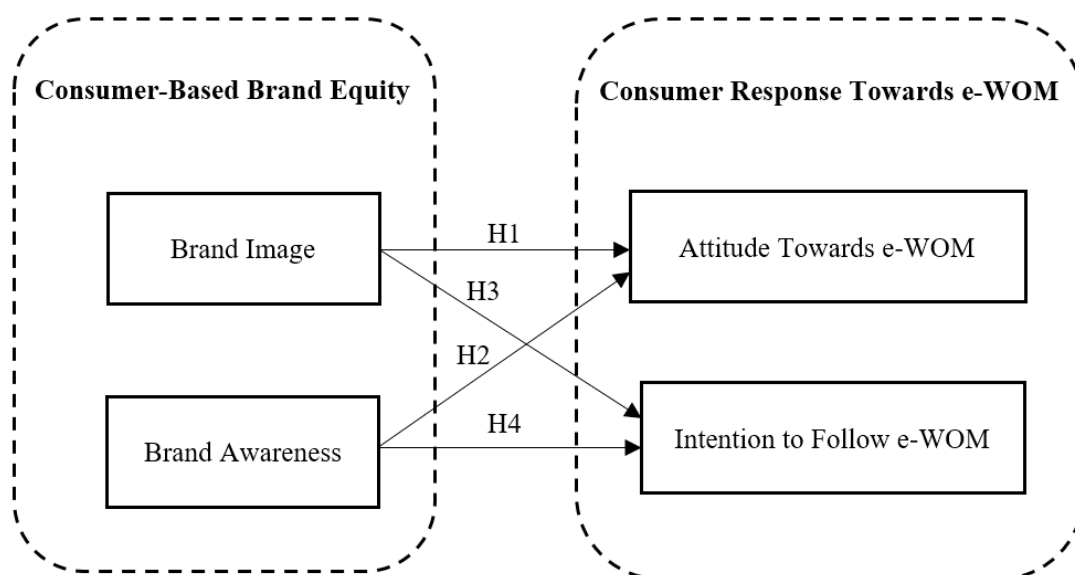


Figure 1. Research framework

with luxury brands or have the intention to do so in the future. The second question was designed to determine participants who check other consumer reviews on social media about luxury brand products. The third part of the questionnaire designed to measures the research main concepts. To obtain a valid response, respondents were asked to choose a luxury brand that they had dealt with before, or which they were thinking of buying in the future, dubbed "Brand X".

The target population of this study was consumers in Saudi Arabia who search on social media platforms for online reviews about luxury brands. As there is no available database about consumer of luxury brands in Saudi Arabia, this study used a non-probability sampling technique. A convenience sampling method was applied. The questionnaire was distributed and collected online. A sample size of 277 valid responses was received. All the information collected was used for research purposes, and was treated as confidential.

The research variables were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale, with responses to items ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*. As shown in Table 1, brand image and brand awareness were measured using a five-item and a three-item scale (respectively), adapted from Kim and Hyun (2011). The constructs of consumer attitude

towards e-WOM and consumer intention to follow e-WOM were each measured with five-item scales derived from and validated by Zainal et al. (2017).

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, to estimate the internal consistency among items of each scale. Conducting this test can help to confirm that each of the research scales is measured by the bundle of items that are included in the scale. It is recommended that the value of Cronbach's alpha not to be below 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha value for brand awareness was 0.717, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency. For brand equity, the value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.836, which showed a satisfactory level of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha of attitude towards e-WOM was high with a value of 0.875, which indicated a satisfactory level of reliability. Finally, the Cronbach's alpha value for intention to follow e-WOM was 0.852 which reflected an adequate level of internal consistency.

Table 2. Reliability analysis

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand equity	4	0.836
Brand awareness	3	0.717
Attitude towards e-WOM	5	0.875
Intention to follow e-WOM	5	0.852

Table 1. Measurement scales

Constructs	Measurement Items	Sources
Brand Image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. X brand is a leading luxury company 2. X brand has extensive experience 3. X brand is a representative of the luxury industry 4. X brand is a customer-oriented company 	Kim and Hyun (2011)
Brand awareness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am always aware of X brand 2. Characteristics of X brand come to my mind quickly 3. I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of X brand 	Kim and Hyun (2011)
Attitude towards e-WOM	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have a positive opinion about the advices/information obtained about brand X on social media 2. I think following the advices/information obtained on social media about brand X would be beneficial for me 3. Overall, my attitude towards the advices/information obtained on social media about brand X is favorable 4. I like the advices/information obtained on social media about brand X 5. I think following the advices/information obtained on social media about brand X would be good for me 	Zainal et al. (2017)
Intention to follow e-WOM	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I would feel secure in following the suggestions made by brand X user 2. I would rely on the recommendations made by brand X user 3. I will closely follow the suggestions of the positive comments made by brand X user on social media 4. I would feel comfortable behaving according to the advices/information I obtain on the social media about brand X 5. I would not hesitate to take into account the comments and suggestions made by another brand X user 	Zainal et al. (2017)

4. RESULTS

Regarding the demographic profile of the sampled participants, of the 277 respondents, 73.3% were females, whereas male participants represented 26.7% of the sample size, indicating that female participants constituted the majority of the sample. The high response rate of females in this study might be attributed to women being more interested in luxury brands than men. In terms of the age distribution of the participants, the majority (76.5%) were aged 18-30 years old, while 18.4% were 30-40 years old; only 5.1% were older than 40 years old. In terms of the educational level, the majority of participants (61.7%) had bachelor's degrees. Furthermore, statistics indicate a fair distribution for participants across the defined monthly income groups.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to test the research hypotheses. H1 predicts that brand image is positively related to consumer attitude towards e-WOM. According to Table 3, the correlation coefficient of this association was equal to (0.440), at a significance level less than (0.01). This indicates that a statistically significant positive association exists between brand image and consumer attitude towards e-WOM, which provides support for H1. Thus, it can be concluded that consumer attitude towards e-WOM is influenced by brand image.

Table 3. Correlation between brand image and consumer attitude towards e-WOM

Construct	Consumer Attitude Towards e-WOM	
	Pearson's correlation coefficient	P-value
Brand image	0.440**	0.00

Note: ** correlation coefficient significant at 0.01.

H2 predicts that brand awareness is positively related to consumer attitude towards e-WOM. According to Table 4, the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient between the two variables brand awareness and consumer attitude towards e-WOM was equal to 0.396, at a significance level less than (0.01). This indicates that there is a statistically significant positive association between brand awareness and consumer attitude towards e-WOM, confirming H2.

Table 4. Correlation between brand awareness and customer attitude towards e-WOM

Construct	Consumer Attitude Towards e-WOM	
	Pearson's correlation coefficient	P-value
Brand awareness	0.396**	0.00

Note: ** correlation coefficient significant at 0.01.

H3 predicts that brand image is positively related to consumer intention to follow e-WOM. According to Table 5, the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient between the two variables brand image and consumer intention to follow e-WOM was equal to 0.336, at a significance level less than 0.01. This means that there is a statistically significant positive association between brand image and consumer intention to follow e-WOM. This finding provides evidence supporting H3. Hence, it can be concluded that consumer intention to follow e-WOM is positively influenced by brand image.

Table 5. Correlation between brand image and consumer intention to follow e-WOM

Construct	Consumer Intention to Follow e-WOM	
	Pearson's correlation coefficient	P-value
Brand image	0.336**	0.00

Note: ** correlation coefficient significant at 0.01.

H4 predicts that brand awareness is positively related to consumer intention to follow e-WOM. As shown in Table 6, the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient between the two variables brand awareness and consumer intention to follow e-WOM was equal to 0.360, at a significance level less than 0.01. This indicates that there is a statistically significant positive association between brand awareness and consumer intention to follow e-WOM. Therefore, this finding confirms H4, and it can be concluded that consumer intention to follow e-WOM is positively influenced by brand awareness.

Table 6. Correlation between brand awareness and customer intention to follow e-WOM

Construct	Consumer Intention to Follow e-WOM	
	Pearson's correlation coefficient	P-value
Brand awareness	0.360**	0.00

Note: ** correlation coefficient significant at 0.01.

Table 7. Results of testing hypotheses

Hypothesis assumption	Result
H1: Brand image is positively associated with consumer attitude towards e-WOM.	Supported
H2: Brand awareness is positively associated with consumer attitude towards e-WOM.	Supported
H3: Brand image is positively associated with consumer intention to follow e-WOM.	Supported
H4: Brand awareness is positively associated with consumer intention to follow e-WOM.	Supported

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships between brand equity, consumer attitude towards e-WOM and intention to follow e-WOM. Findings of statistical analysis show that brand image has a significant positive relationship with consumer attitude towards e-WOM. This means that consumers' perceptions of luxury brand image can stimulate their consumer attitude towards e-WOM. This finding is consistent with the results of Anwar et al. (2011), which highlighted that there is a significant relationship between brand image and consumer attitude towards brand extension. Kahle and Kim (2006) explained that brand image has a major role in influencing the process of buying making decision.

The findings of this study confirm that there is a positive relationship between brand awareness and consumer attitude towards e-WOM. This result is in line with the research findings of Lu et al. (2014), who reported that products with high brand awareness can generate positive attitude towards sponsored recommendation posts.

The study findings also demonstrate that there is a positive association between brand image and consumer intention to follow e-WOM. This finding indicates that brand image can trigger the intention of luxury brand consumer to follow e-WOM. This affirms the earlier findings of Chen et al. (2012), and the recent conclusions of Zarei et al. (2022), indicating that brand image has a positive influence on consumer responses.

The findings of this study reveal that a positive relationship exists between brand awareness

and consumer intention to follow e-WOM. This implies that consumers' awareness about luxury brands can affect their consumer intention to follow e-WOM, consistent with the findings of Kim and Kim (2016) proving that brand awareness of cosmetics brands can influence consumer purchasing intention. Similarly, Minh et al. (2022) found that brand awareness has a significant impact on consumer intention to buy fashion brands.

Regarding the descriptive statistics of participants, the findings of this study show that the majority of them were female (73.3%), aged 18-30 years (76.5%), and were relatively educated bachelor's degree-holders (61.7%). Luxury consumer spending and behavior is highly affected by the related variables of gender, age, and socio-economic status (including education). Put simply, the findings of this study cannot be generally extrapolated for male, older, and less educated luxury consumers. Thus, more studies are needed to explore consumer behaviors in the context of Saudi Arabia's culture, as a major luxury consumption market, where particular factors (including religiosity) may influence behavioral responses of consumers towards luxury products (Rehman et al., 2022).

The results of this study draw the attention of luxury brands marketing managers towards the importance of enhancing attributes of brand equity. By maintaining a high level of brand equity, luxury brands can stimulate consumers' attitude toward e-WOM and consumer intention to follow e-WOM, whereby they will be predisposed towards positive advice and information obtained on social media regarding these brands. Marketing managers can improve brand equity of luxury brands by building a good brand image and by increasing the level of customer awareness about their brands. Doing this can generate positive consumer responses towards e-WOM. However, marketers should ensure that consumers will be directed towards positive word of mouth. This can be facilitated by increasing the spread of positive word of mouth; marketers are advised to encourage loyal customers to provide feedback and share their experience about the luxury brand (Zainal et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the impact of brand equity of luxury brands on behavioral responses of consumers towards e-WOM, by developing and empirically validating a theoretical framework, which integrates dimensions of brand equity with consumer attitude towards e-WOM and consumer intention to follow e-WOM. The results confirmed that brand equity and its dimensions (brand image and brand awareness) can affect consumer attitude towards e-WOM and consumer intention to follow e-WOM. The findings of this study offer important insight for managers and marketers of luxury brands. They highlight the need to maximize brand equity in relation to e-WOM advice and information on social media. Loyal customers can be encouraged to provide feedback and share luxury brand experiences to build brand image and increase customer awareness to promote positive e-WOM.

This study has a number of limitations that provide useful directions for future studies. An obvious limitation of this study relates to the industrial market segment considered in this study, as the scope was restricted to luxury products. Future studies are advised to test the research model within other contexts, which would increase the generalizability of the research findings. Another limitation is that this study analyzed two dimensions of brand equity (brand image and brand awareness). Though this two-dimensional conceptualization of brand equity has long been adopted by prior research, it is recommended for future studies to test the research model by incorporating other dimensions of brand equity such as brand loyalty and brand quality. This would provide valuable insight about brand equity. Additionally, it is advisable to investigate the effect of brand equity on consumer's attitude towards e-WOM and intention to follow e-WOM, especially negative e-WOM. This would enhance understanding about the impact of brand equity on consumer responses towards e-WOM.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Amani Ahmed Basif, Nada Saleh Badawi.

Investigation: Amani Ahmed Basif.

Methodology: Nada Saleh Badawi, Amani Ahmed Basif.

Project administration: Nada Saleh Badawi, Amani Ahmed Basif.

Supervision: Nada Saleh Badawi.

Validation: Nada Saleh Badawi, Amani Ahmed Basif.

Writing – original draft: Amani Ahmed Basif.

Writing – review & editing: Nada Saleh Badawi.

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