

The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises: Its Impact on Opportunity and Crisis Management

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Abstract

This study examines the role of the marketing department in small enterprises and its impact on managing opportunities and crises. The study focuses on the importance of marketing functions in helping small enterprises understand customer needs, identify market opportunities, respond to crises, and strengthen their competitiveness and sustainability. A descriptive and quantitative approach was adopted. Data were collected through digital interviews with small-enterprise owners and marketing managers and through an electronic questionnaire administered to more than 60 participants from the target population. The findings indicate that marketing plays an important role in supporting small enterprises, particularly during periods of uncertainty and crisis. The results show that small enterprises provide a flexible environment that can support creativity, innovation, and opportunity exploitation. The study also indicates that an effective marketing manager and a well-organized marketing team are important for activating marketing functions and responding effectively to market changes. The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated the importance of marketing flexibility, particularly through the increased use of digital platforms, online promotion, delivery services, and new customer communication channels. The findings further highlight the importance of the marketing mix, including product, price, distribution, and promotion, in exploiting market opportunities and responding to crises. In addition, 57.8% of respondents preferred opportunities over crises, while 85.9% recognized the importance of marketing-related activities in supporting small enterprises. The study concludes that an effective marketing department can contribute to maintaining sales, creating new opportunities, strengthening customer relationships, and enhancing the ability of small enterprises to adapt to changing market conditions. The study recommends establishing clearer and more effective marketing functions within small enterprises, strengthening the competencies of marketing managers and teams, and conducting further empirical research using larger samples and more advanced statistical techniques.

Keywords: Marketing Department, Small Enterprises, Marketing Mix, Market Opportunities, Crisis Management, Innovation, COVID-19, Entrepreneurship.

Introduction

The world is currently witnessing a rapid transformation in the business environment, accompanied by the growing prominence of entrepreneurship and the expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These enterprises are receiving increasing attention from governments, investors, and supporting organizations due to their important role in stimulating economic activity, creating employment opportunities, and promoting innovation and competition. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this trend is consistent with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, which has placed significant emphasis on the SME sector because of its role in economic diversification, enhancing private-sector participation, and achieving sustainable development. The General Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (Monsha'at) also emphasizes that its vision is for the SME sector to become a fundamental pillar of economic development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and an enabler of Vision 2030 and beyond (Monsha'at, 2022).

Against this backdrop, marketing has emerged as one of the fundamental business functions contributing to the success, sustainability, and competitiveness of small enterprises. Marketing is not limited to promoting products and services; rather, it encompasses understanding customers' needs and preferences, analyzing markets and competitors, identifying target segments, building customer relationships, and developing strategies that enable enterprises to reach their markets and achieve their objectives. From this perspective, the marketing department, or the team responsible for marketing activities, represents a critical link between the enterprise and its external environment. It plays an important role in gathering market information, monitoring changes in consumer behavior, identifying opportunities, and developing appropriate responses to the challenges facing the enterprise.

The importance of this role is particularly evident in small enterprises because of their limited financial and human resources compared with larger organizations and their greater dependence on their ability to understand the market and respond rapidly to changes. Small enterprises may face various types of crises, including economic changes, health crises, supply chain disruptions, changes in customer behavior, and intensified competition. Such crises may threaten the continuity and survival of an enterprise if they are not managed with flexibility and effectiveness. At the same time, however, crises can create new opportunities when an enterprise has a marketing team capable of analyzing market changes, reassessing customer needs, developing products and services, utilizing digital channels, and reaching new markets or customer segments.

Accordingly, crises should not be viewed solely as defensive situations requiring the reduction of losses; rather, they can be transformed into strategic opportunities for identifying new possibilities and strengthening the enterprise's capacity to adapt and sustain its operations. In this context, the marketing team plays an important role in identifying opportunities arising from

market changes and transforming them into actionable marketing initiatives. This can contribute to retaining existing customers, attracting new customers, strengthening competitiveness, and achieving profitability. Moreover, rapid responsiveness and flexibility in modifying marketing strategies are important factors that can help small enterprises cope with unstable and changing business environments.

Despite the growing importance of marketing in small enterprises, the literature indicates a relative shortage of knowledge and marketing practices specifically related to this type of enterprise. Klassen and Davis noted the lack of sufficient information that can be relied upon to understand and practice marketing in small enterprises, while Hill argued that further theoretical development is needed to understand the nature of marketing in small enterprises in a way that reflects their distinctive characteristics and differentiates them from larger organizations in terms of resources, organizational structures, and decision-making processes. Therefore, examining the role of marketing in small enterprises, particularly during times of crisis, represents an important area of inquiry for understanding how limited marketing resources can be utilized more effectively and how challenges can be transformed into opportunities for growth and sustainability.

Accordingly, this research focuses on examining the role of the marketing department in small enterprises in managing crises and exploiting market opportunities. It addresses the importance of establishing a clear and effective marketing function within the enterprise, understanding marketing functions and practices, and analyzing the ability of marketing teams to identify opportunities and respond to crises. It also seeks to identify the practices and additional measures that may contribute to activating the marketing role in a more positive and effective manner. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of adopting marketing practices that enable small enterprises to understand markets and customers, achieve market presence and promotion, reach target segments, accomplish profitability objectives, and strengthen their ability to adapt and remain sustainable.

Research Problem

The research problem arises from the need for a clearer understanding of the role of the marketing department in small enterprises, particularly during periods of crisis, and the extent to which marketing teams are capable of exploiting emerging market opportunities and transforming challenges into genuine opportunities for growth and sustainability. Although marketing plays an important role in communicating with customers, understanding markets and target segments, and developing marketing strategies, limited resources and weak marketing practices may restrict the ability of some small enterprises to respond effectively to crises and capitalize on available opportunities.

Accordingly, the research problem centers on understanding the role of the marketing department in small enterprises in managing crises and exploiting available market opportunities, as well as identifying the practices and additional measures required to activate this role more efficiently

and effectively. Such practices may contribute to reducing the effects of crises, strengthening organizational adaptability, achieving customer satisfaction, reaching target segments, improving profitability, and ensuring business continuity.

Research Objectives

This research aims to understand the importance of the marketing department in small enterprises and to identify its role in supporting the success and continuity of small enterprises. It also seeks to understand the major marketing functions and practices within such enterprises and clarify the importance of marketing in dealing with crises facing small enterprises. Furthermore, the research aims to identify the nature and extent of opportunities available to small enterprises in the marketplace, analyze the role of an effective marketing team in managing crises and exploiting opportunities, and examine the extent to which previous studies and research have addressed the role of marketing in small enterprises. In addition, the research seeks to identify practices and additional measures that can help activate the marketing function within small enterprises and provide recommendations that can assist these enterprises in understanding crises, responding effectively to them, and transforming them into genuine marketing opportunities that contribute to growth, adaptation, sustainability, profitability, and customer satisfaction.

Significance of the Research

The significance of this research stems from the growing role of small enterprises in the national economy and the increasing support provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized enterprises within the framework of Saudi Vision 2030. The study is also significant because of the need to clarify the actual role of marketing within small enterprises, particularly in light of rapidly changing markets, increasing competition, and the growing possibility of exposure to crises.

The research highlights the role of marketing in supporting the continuity of small enterprises, strengthening their ability to achieve profitability, and contributing to economic activity. It also helps enterprise owners and managers understand the importance of establishing a clear marketing function and utilizing it more effectively. In addition, the research clarifies the role of marketing in understanding customers, markets, and competitors; identifying target segments; and developing appropriate strategies for reaching them.

The significance of the research also lies in clarifying how marketing teams can contribute to reducing the effects of crises and responding to unexpected changes, while emphasizing their ability to identify opportunities arising from changes in customer needs and behavior and transform these opportunities into avenues for growth and expansion. From a practical perspective, the research provides practices and recommendations that small-enterprise owners and marketing professionals can use to improve their performance and enhance their ability to adapt and respond to crises. From an academic perspective, the research contributes to

addressing an aspect of the existing gap in the literature on marketing in small enterprises, particularly with regard to the relationship between the marketing function, crisis management, and opportunity exploitation. Finally, the research contributes to strengthening knowledge of practices that can help small and medium-sized enterprises fulfill their role as a fundamental pillar of Saudi economic development and support the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030.

Theoretical Framework

Definition of Marketing

Marketing is considered an Anglo-Saxon term that was introduced into France during the 1950s. It refers to all activities that contribute to attracting and acquiring the largest possible number of new customers while maintaining the loyalty of an enterprise's existing customers. In general, marketing represents the various mechanisms that an enterprise effectively employs to sell its goods and services (Elias et al., n.d., p. 7).

Several definitions of marketing have been proposed by scholars and researchers. The American Marketing Association defined marketing in 1985 as “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives.” Kotler, meanwhile, defined marketing as a social and managerial process through which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want by creating, offering, and exchanging value and products with others.

Definitions of marketing vary according to the organization and the theoretical school to which the scholar or researcher belongs. However, the various definitions share a common emphasis on the relationship between products and customer needs, as well as the importance of appropriate promotion to reach customers. These elements contribute to establishing an effective marketing function within small enterprises.

Definition of Strategy

Strategy is a widely used concept across different disciplines and fields of knowledge. It should be noted that the concept of strategy was initially used in the military and warfare context, where it represented an art of leadership aimed at achieving victory. One definition describes strategy as “the science and art of carefully developing and designing general plans in an integrated, interactive, and coordinated manner, utilizing various resources to achieve major objectives” (Al-Sayed, 5881: 51). Another definition describes strategy as “the tool or means that helps management think holistically about the present and future in an organized and directed manner based on coexistence with the external environment” (Al-Jani, 0008: 501).

In the context of small enterprises, strategy is particularly important because it provides a framework for directing limited resources toward priorities that support growth, competitiveness, adaptation, and sustainability. A well-developed strategy can also help small enterprises respond to changes in the market and identify opportunities while reducing the potential effects of crises.

Definition of the Marketing Mix

The marketing mix can be defined as “a set of interrelated and interacting marketing tools used to achieve the objectives of an organization” (Zikmund & d'Amico, 1994, p. 10).

The marketing mix provides a framework through which enterprises can coordinate their marketing activities and achieve a balance among the various elements affecting their relationships with customers and markets. For small enterprises, the effective application of the marketing mix can be particularly valuable because it enables them to allocate their limited resources toward the areas most likely to generate customer value and competitive advantage.

Marketing Approaches for Small Enterprises

Product-Focused Approach

Under the product-focused approach, the product and its associated added value represent the elements receiving the greatest attention within the marketing mix. This approach emphasizes the brand, increasing the perceived value of the product in the market, and maintaining an appropriate balance between production and competing products that are widely available in the market.

Some products can effectively market themselves because of their quality or the trust that customers place in them. For example, some consumers consistently purchase particular brands and may prefer Japanese or German products despite their higher prices compared with competing products. Companies and organizations adopting this approach rely heavily on product or service quality and quality-control processes, which can strengthen their ability to compete (Mahmoud Hreidi, *The Art of Contemporary Marketing*, 2012).

Sales and Promotional Approach

Under the sales and promotional approach, promotion represents the marketing-mix element receiving the greatest attention. The underlying assumption is that the greater the reach to customers, the greater the potential sales and availability of the product.

This strategy focuses on creating consumer demand for a product through promotional campaigns, with less emphasis on product quality or long-term customer satisfaction. Under this approach, companies may focus primarily on persuading consumers to purchase the product, while treating customers as temporary consumers rather than developing long-term relationships with them (Mahmoud Hreidi, *The Art of Contemporary Marketing*, 2012).

Target-Market-Focused Approach

Under the target-market-focused approach, customers represent the primary focus of the marketing mix. Particular attention is given to satisfying customers and maintaining their loyalty in order to develop a larger and more sustainable customer base.

In this approach, the customer occupies the highest priority, and the organization adopts a market-oriented strategy designed to achieve customer satisfaction and support continued business growth. The marketing concept requires the organization to investigate the wants and needs of a specific group of customers, namely the target market. The process begins with identifying customer needs, followed by coordinating all marketing activities to satisfy those needs, ultimately leading to profitability. This approach is based on establishing long-term relationships with customers who are likely to return and make additional purchases. Therefore, marketers must achieve a balance between responding to customer needs and achieving the organization's profitability objectives (Mahmoud Hreidi, *The Art of Contemporary Marketing*, 2012).

Viral Marketing Approach

The viral marketing approach focuses primarily on creating broad awareness and facilitating the spread of a product, service, or marketing message among people. It seeks to maximize exposure through communication and social interaction and can be particularly relevant to small enterprises because of the potential to achieve broad reach with relatively limited financial resources.

Hreidi (2012) discusses social marketing as an approach concerned with designing, implementing, and monitoring programs intended to increase the acceptance of a particular social idea or practice among a specific audience. Such activities may be undertaken by profit-oriented or nonprofit organizations and seek to encourage behaviors that benefit individuals and society. Social marketing can therefore be viewed as the marketing of social behaviors by institutions or organizations toward specific target audiences. Historically, social marketing represents one of the stages in the development of marketing thinking, during which organizations began to consider the social dimension of their activities and increasingly adopted practices demonstrating their social responsibility toward consumers (Mahmoud Hreidi, *The Art of Contemporary Marketing*, 2012).

Other marketing approaches can also be examined based on the principles of the marketing mix, particularly in light of technological developments, changing consumer behavior, and the increasing importance of digital marketing for small enterprises.

Opportunities in Small Enterprises

Innovation

Innovation represents an important opportunity for small enterprises because of their relatively high level of flexibility in creating products and services, improving and developing them, and promoting and distributing them through appropriate channels. Small enterprises can simultaneously demonstrate creativity and innovation in colors, designs, presentation methods, and delivery or fulfillment processes. In this context, innovation encompasses product or service

design, characteristics, tools and materials used, development standards, and the level of improvement, renewal, and enhancement incorporated into the product or service offered.

The flexibility of small enterprises can enable them to respond rapidly to emerging customer needs and market trends. Unlike larger organizations, which may require lengthy decision-making processes, small enterprises can often modify their offerings more quickly and experiment with new ideas with fewer organizational constraints.

Creating Added Value

Small enterprises can create added value in a flexible and rapid manner, often without the bureaucratic procedures and traditional administrative processes that may hinder continuous improvement. Their relatively simple organizational structures can facilitate faster decisions and allow them to continuously develop and improve the products and services they provide.

Creating added value may therefore constitute an important competitive opportunity for small enterprises, particularly when they are able to understand customer expectations and translate this understanding into improvements in product quality, service delivery, customer experience, and overall value.

Crises in Small Enterprises

Market Threats

Small enterprises may face significant market threats, including intense competition among small businesses and competition from large and multinational corporations. Rapid market changes can also create additional pressures, particularly the need for financial liquidity, adaptability, and appropriate professional and technical expertise within the workforce.

Such threats can become particularly challenging for small enterprises because of their limited financial resources and smaller operational capacities. Consequently, the ability to monitor market developments, respond quickly to changes, and maintain strong customer relationships becomes an important component of crisis management.

Business Relationships

Strong business relationships can enhance the ability of small enterprises to deal flexibly with external stakeholders. Maintaining effective relationships with suppliers, service providers, chambers of commerce, and major customers can provide valuable support during periods of uncertainty and crisis.

Such relationships can facilitate access to resources, information, services, distribution channels, and potential business opportunities. They may also help small enterprises respond more effectively to disruptions and reduce the negative effects of unexpected changes in the business environment.

Strengthening the Marketing Mix in Small Enterprises

One of the important responsibilities of the marketing department in small enterprises is to increase awareness of the marketing mix and ensure that its principles are effectively applied. Effective implementation requires the enterprise to understand the relationship among the different elements of the marketing mix and to coordinate them according to customer needs, market conditions, and organizational objectives.

For small enterprises, strengthening the marketing mix can provide a practical framework for identifying opportunities, responding to market changes, improving customer satisfaction, and developing sustainable competitive advantages.

The Marketing Mix and Opportunities

McCarthy introduced the well-known **4Ps marketing mix**, consisting of product, price, place (distribution), and promotion. These four elements provide an important framework for organizing marketing activities and coordinating the enterprise's interaction with the market.

One of the major responsibilities of the marketing department is therefore to manage and balance the elements of the marketing mix in a manner that enables the enterprise to identify and exploit available market opportunities. From this perspective, the opportunities available to small enterprises can be examined through each element of the marketing mix.

Product: Small enterprises can enter markets with new products that respond to developments and modern consumer preferences, particularly through innovative designs and improvements that increase the value and appeal of products and strengthen customer loyalty.

Price: Small enterprises can study appropriate pricing strategies for their target segments by considering customers' purchasing power and determining prices that provide an appropriate balance between affordability, perceived value, competitiveness, and profitability.

Distribution: Small enterprises can focus on the geographic areas and distribution channels that are most appropriate for their products and customers. By establishing a presence where target customers are located and facilitating the purchasing experience, enterprises can enhance convenience and create greater customer value.

Promotion: Small enterprises can focus their advertising campaigns on the platforms and communication channels most frequently used by their target customers. This enables them to capture customer attention and reach potential buyers through the fastest and most accessible means available, particularly through digital and social media platforms.

The Marketing Mix and Crises

To clarify the nature and implications of crises, the world recently experienced a major global crisis that significantly affected businesses and the functions and responsibilities of various administrative departments, namely the COVID-19 pandemic. This research uses the COVID-19

crisis as a practical example to illustrate how market conditions changed and how the marketing function responded during a major disruption.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that crises can significantly alter customer needs, purchasing behavior, distribution systems, pricing strategies, and promotional practices. It also illustrated how the elements of the marketing mix can be adapted in response to changing circumstances.

Product: During the COVID-19 crisis, numerous products emerged or gained significant popularity that had previously been unavailable or had limited market penetration in some regions. Examples included semi-prepared and ready-to-cook meals, which became increasingly integrated into contemporary lifestyles and represented a new commercial trend arising from changes in consumer behavior during the crisis.

Price: Many enterprises adjusted and developed their pricing strategies and reduced prices in response to changing market conditions. As products became easier to deliver to customers through improved logistics and inventory-management processes, the costs associated with certain products declined, enabling some businesses to reconsider their pricing strategies.

Distribution: Delivery services and logistics operations became increasingly important during the crisis, providing customers with products and services at their homes and reducing the need for physical visits to stores and commercial locations. The rapid expansion of delivery and logistics services represented one of the major changes in the distribution element of the marketing mix.

Promotion: The crisis also contributed to the development of new promotional practices, including the use of product samples delivered to customers with their orders. Sending samples of related or complementary products enabled customers to experience new offerings, potentially encouraging trial, increasing awareness, and converting existing customers into repeat buyers or new customers.

Previous Studies

Previous studies support the importance of the role of the marketing department in small enterprises. One relevant study by Sherif Murad (2006) examined the role of marketing research and the effectiveness of advertising in economic enterprises. The researcher investigated the impact of marketing research on increasing advertising effectiveness. The study problem centered on answering the main question concerning the role of marketing research in increasing advertising effectiveness and the relationship between marketing research and the content of advertising messages. The study aimed to highlight the role of marketing research in improving and activating advertising, as well as to demonstrate the importance of advertising and its role in supporting sales. The study hypothesized that marketing research plays a significant role in activating advertising within economic enterprises. Marketing research supports marketing decisions in general and advertising-related decisions in particular by providing information that helps identify the various variables and characteristics of the environment surrounding the

enterprise. The study employed several analytical approaches, including the descriptive-analytical method, the case-study method, and the historical method. The study reached several important findings, including that the accuracy of marketing information contributes to advertising efficiency and that greater attention to marketing research related to advertising campaigns leads to increased sales for companies that invest in such research. The study recommended the necessity of conducting marketing research in business organizations because it enhances the effectiveness of advertising campaigns and emphasized the importance of marketing information related to advertising campaigns in improving advertising effectiveness (Sherif Murad, 2006).

Over the past years, various studies have examined the needs and challenges facing small enterprises. One of these international studies was conducted by Attahir (1995), who concluded that marketing factors are particularly important, including the appropriate location of the enterprise, the level of demand, customer service, and the ability to achieve customer satisfaction. These factors were identified as important determinants of the success and performance of small enterprises (Attahir, 1995).

Other studies have focused on models of effective marketing. Hill (2001) developed a comprehensive model of effective marketing in small enterprises. The study concluded that small enterprises tend to adopt a purely sales-oriented approach despite their proximity to the market and their ability to understand customer needs and satisfy their wants. These enterprises place considerable emphasis on relationships, friendships, personal business networks, and the use of these relationships through various effective activities. In many cases, however, systematic marketing planning is also employed (Hill, 2001).

The study by Alshumaimry (1423 AH) concluded that managers of small enterprises have positive marketing orientations and generally hold favorable views toward modern marketing. However, the actual implementation of modern marketing activities remains limited. The study found that 88% of enterprises did not conduct any form of marketing research, while the marketing budget represented less than 10% of the enterprise's total budget in 75% of enterprises. Furthermore, approximately 40% of the enterprises did not have a marketing manager. The Riyadh Economic Forum also conducted a comprehensive study in 1435 AH covering various issues related to small and medium-sized enterprises in the Kingdom, including diagnosing their current situation, examining the role of financing and enterprise size in their growth, and assessing the governmental role in their development. The study confirmed that these enterprises face several marketing problems and difficulties, particularly in the areas of competition and lack of information.

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from the preceding analysis is that failure to adopt the marketing concept, excessive reliance on the sales concept, limited attention to marketing research and marketing information systems, and insufficient marketing planning among small and medium-sized enterprises can contribute to the emergence of numerous marketing obstacles

and problems. Indeed, these practices concerning marketing activities can be considered among the major barriers to effective marketing in this type of enterprise.

Researchers Walsh and Lipinski (2009) conducted a study closely related to the subject of the present research. Their study provided a comprehensive examination of the role of the marketing function in small enterprises. The main findings indicated that marketing processes and activities in small enterprises remain limited and below the level required or expected, whether in terms of the scope and development of marketing activities or their impact on achieving organizational objectives, particularly when compared with the level of development and marketing activities expected and implemented in large enterprises. The researchers found that the sales department generally has greater influence than the marketing department across a range of marketing activities. These activities included periodic measurement of customer satisfaction, improving and enhancing customer satisfaction, achieving complete customer satisfaction, expanding distribution points, entering new markets, developing organizational strategic plans, and developing products (Walsh & Lipinski, 2009).

In another study, Talib and Al-Kinani examined the impact of adopting entrepreneurial marketing processes on achieving strategic innovation capabilities. The researchers defined entrepreneurial marketing as “effective interconnected marketing methods that help an organization exploit available marketing opportunities, generate and innovate new sources of productivity within the organization, and build long-term relationships with customers.” This definition highlights the importance of entrepreneurial marketing as an approach that integrates opportunity recognition, innovation, productivity, and long-term customer relationships.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design to examine the role of the marketing department in small enterprises, with particular emphasis on its contribution to managing crises and identifying and exploiting market opportunities. The empirical investigation combined exploratory digital interviews with an electronic questionnaire to obtain complementary perspectives on the marketing function within small-enterprise contexts.

The study was conducted in two sequential phases. The first phase involved digital interviews with selected marketing managers and small-enterprise owners to explore their practical experiences concerning the role of marketing, challenges encountered during periods of crisis, opportunity identification, marketing-team development, innovation, and organizational learning. The second phase involved the administration of an electronic questionnaire to a broader group of respondents with relevant professional experience. The insights obtained during the interview phase informed the development and refinement of the questionnaire, enabling the quantitative instrument to reflect practical issues associated with marketing activities in small enterprises.

Population and Sample

The study population comprised individuals with professional or managerial experience relevant to marketing activities in small enterprises. The target participants included marketing managers, small-enterprise owners and managers, entrepreneurs, and professionals with knowledge of marketing functions and practices within small-business environments.

A purposive sampling approach was adopted to identify participants with direct knowledge and practical experience relevant to the research objectives. Particular emphasis was placed on individuals who had worked in marketing-management positions or had ownership or managerial responsibilities within small enterprises. This approach ensured that the collected responses were informed by participants with substantive experience of marketing activities, crisis situations, and opportunity development.

The electronic questionnaire was administered to the target population, resulting in 64 valid responses included in the final analysis. Participants who did not meet the study's eligibility requirements were excluded from the analytical sample. The final respondents represented a range of demographic and professional characteristics, providing variation in age, educational attainment, specialization, organizational position, geographical location, and professional experience.

The gender distribution consisted of 37 male respondents (57.81%) and 27 female respondents (42.19%). With respect to age, 30% of participants were aged 18–29 years, 41% were aged 30–39 years, 20% were aged 40–49 years, and 9% were aged 50 years or older. Educational attainment varied across the sample, with 3.1% holding a high-school qualification, 10.9% a diploma, 42.2% a bachelor's degree, 35.9% a master's degree, and 7.8% a doctoral degree.

In terms of specialization, 35.5% of respondents were specialized in Business Administration, 30.6% in Marketing, and 34.9% in other fields. The occupational distribution included company managers (21.9%), department managers (21.9%), supervisors (18.8%), employees (28.1%), self-employed respondents (7.8%), and respondents in other positions (1.5%). Geographically, respondents were primarily located in Jeddah (46.9%), Riyadh (23.4%), and Dammam (23.4%), with 6.3% located elsewhere.

Research Instruments

Two complementary instruments were employed: semi-structured digital interviews and an electronic questionnaire. The instruments were developed in accordance with the research objectives and the conceptual dimensions examined in the study, including the marketing function, crisis management, opportunity exploitation, innovation, organizational learning, and marketing-team effectiveness.

Semi-Structured Digital Interviews

The first instrument consisted of a semi-structured digital interview guide administered to selected marketing managers and small-enterprise owners. The interviews were designed to obtain detailed perspectives on the practical role of marketing within small enterprises and to explore participants' experiences of managing marketing activities under changing market conditions.

The interview guide comprised eight questions covering the clarity of the marketing function, challenges arising during crises, managerial experience, opportunities and crises, marketing-team development, opportunities generated during the COVID-19 crisis, and learning opportunities within small enterprises. The questions were formulated as open-ended prompts to encourage participants to explain their experiences and provide practical examples.

Table 1. Digital Interview Guide

No.	Interview question
1	Is the role of the marketing department clear to you?
2	What challenges emerge during times of crisis?
3	How long have you been managing a marketing team?
4	Which do you consider more beneficial: opportunities or crises?
5	Would you prefer to face crises during your work, or would you prefer to have opportunities?
6	What are the challenges involved in building a marketing team, and what are the most important roles?
7	What opportunities did you identify or create for your organization during the COVID-19 crisis?
8	To what extent are there learning opportunities within the marketing department of small enterprises?

The interviews provided important contextual insights into the operation of marketing departments in small enterprises. Participants indicated that the scope of marketing responsibilities varies according to enterprise size, organizational structure, team composition, marketing resources, employee specialization, and the nature of the business. The interviews also highlighted the increasing importance of digital platforms, customer communication, innovation, and organizational flexibility in responding to changes in the business environment.

Electronic Questionnaire

The second instrument was a structured electronic questionnaire developed to obtain broader empirical evidence concerning the role of marketing departments in small enterprises. The questionnaire focused on respondents' professional experience, marketing responsibilities, organizational practices, crisis-related activities, opportunity identification, innovation, learning, and marketing-team characteristics.

The questionnaire included questions addressing previous experience as a marketing manager, establishment of marketing departments, ownership relationships, employment opportunities, managerial autonomy, innovation and value creation, experience managing marketing activities during the COVID-19 crisis, changes in organizational attention to marketing, marketing contributions during the crisis, marketing activities undertaken during the COVID-19 period, learning outcomes, creativity, perceived opportunities within marketing, marketing-team size, and the roles and specializations required within marketing teams.

Instrument Development and Validation

The research instruments were developed from the study objectives, the theoretical framework, and the practical issues identified during the exploratory interview phase. The questionnaire was structured to capture the principal dimensions of the research topic while maintaining clear and accessible wording appropriate for respondents with different professional backgrounds.

The development process focused on ensuring alignment between the questionnaire content and the central research themes, particularly the role of the marketing department, crisis management, opportunity exploitation, innovation, organizational learning, and marketing-team effectiveness.

The questionnaire was reviewed to ensure the clarity and relevance of the items and their alignment with the research objectives. The final instrument incorporated both respondent-profile questions and substantive questions concerning marketing practices and experiences in small enterprises.

Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire consisted of questions covering two broad areas: respondent characteristics and substantive research variables.

The first group captured respondents' demographic and professional profiles, including gender, age, educational attainment, academic specialization, number of organizations in which they had worked, organizational position, and geographical location.

The second group addressed respondents' experiences and perceptions concerning the marketing function in small enterprises. These questions examined experience with marketing departments, establishment of marketing functions, employment opportunities, managerial autonomy,

innovation, marketing activities during COVID-19, organizational responses to the crisis, learning and creativity, opportunity recognition, marketing-team size, and the importance of different marketing roles.

This structure enabled the study to examine the marketing function from both an organizational and practitioner perspective and to identify patterns in respondents' experiences of opportunities and crises.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted electronically in two stages. Initially, selected marketing managers and small-enterprise owners participated in digital interviews. The interviews provided an opportunity to explore participants' professional experiences and obtain detailed perspectives concerning the role of marketing in small enterprises.

Following the interview phase, the electronic questionnaire was distributed to eligible participants. Respondents were asked to provide information based on their professional experience and knowledge of marketing activities in small enterprises. The electronic format facilitated participation across different geographical locations and enabled the systematic collection of standardized responses.

The questionnaire responses were subsequently screened to ensure that participants met the study's eligibility criteria. Responses from individuals who did not have the required professional or organizational experience were excluded from the final analytical sample.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, primarily frequencies and percentages. These procedures were employed to summarize the characteristics of the study sample and describe respondents' experiences and perceptions concerning marketing activities in small enterprises.

The analysis examined patterns relating to respondents' professional backgrounds, experience with marketing departments, establishment of marketing functions, marketing activities during the COVID-19 crisis, opportunity recognition, innovation, learning, creativity, marketing-team size, and the perceived importance of marketing roles.

The findings were organized and presented using tables and graphical representations to facilitate the comparison of response categories and provide a clear overview of the empirical patterns identified in the study.

Questionnaire Sample Characteristics

The final questionnaire sample comprised 64 respondents. The demographic profile indicates a diverse group of participants with respect to gender, age, educational attainment, specialization, organizational position, and geographical location.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	57.81
	Female	42.19
Age	18–29 years	30.00
	30–39 years	41.00
	40–49 years	20.00
	50 years or older	9.00
Education	High school	3.10
	Diploma	10.90
	Bachelor's degree	42.20
	Master's degree	35.90
	Doctoral degree	7.80
Specialization	Business Administration	35.50
	Marketing	30.60
	Other	34.90
Organizations worked for	1–3	53.10
	4–6	34.40
	7–10	7.80
	More than 11	4.70
Position	Company Manager	21.90
	Department Manager	21.90
	Supervisor	18.80
	Employee	28.10
	Self-employed	7.80
	Other	1.50

Variable	Category	Percentage
Location	Riyadh	23.40
	Jeddah	46.90
	Dammam	23.40
	Other	6.30

The sample included a substantial proportion of respondents with direct managerial and marketing experience. Specifically, 51.6% reported having worked as marketing managers, while 48.4% represented other managerial or ownership-related experiences within small enterprises.

Questionnaire Response Measures

The questionnaire captured respondents' experiences and perceptions using categorical response formats appropriate to the nature of the questions. The resulting data were summarized using frequencies and percentages.

The reported responses indicate that 51.6% of participants had experience working as marketing managers, while 48.4% had not. In addition, 57.8% reported having established a marketing department, compared with 42.2% who had not.

The questionnaire also examined participants' perceptions of employment opportunities, managerial innovation, the role of marketing during COVID-19, learning experiences, creativity, opportunities within marketing departments, and the composition of marketing teams. The results provide a descriptive profile of the experiences and perceptions of professionals working in or with small enterprises.

Analytical Framework

The analysis was organized around the principal dimensions emerging from the research objectives:

Marketing function → Crisis response → Opportunity identification → Innovation and creativity → Organizational learning → Marketing-team effectiveness

The marketing function was examined in terms of its responsibilities, organizational position, and contribution to customer and market activities. Crisis response focused particularly on the experience of COVID-19 and changes in marketing practices during periods of disruption. Opportunity identification concerned the ability of small enterprises and their marketing teams to recognize and exploit emerging market opportunities. Innovation and creativity captured respondents' perceptions of their ability to develop new ideas and approaches. Organizational learning addressed knowledge and skills acquired through opportunities and crisis experiences,

while marketing-team effectiveness concerned team size, roles, managerial responsibilities, and professional specializations.

This analytical structure provided an integrated basis for interpreting the empirical evidence concerning how marketing functions operate within small enterprises and how they contribute to organizational adaptability in changing business environments.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents provided information based on their professional experiences and perceptions. The data were collected and analyzed for academic research purposes, with the findings presented in aggregate form. The reporting of the results focused on overall response patterns rather than individual participants or organizations.

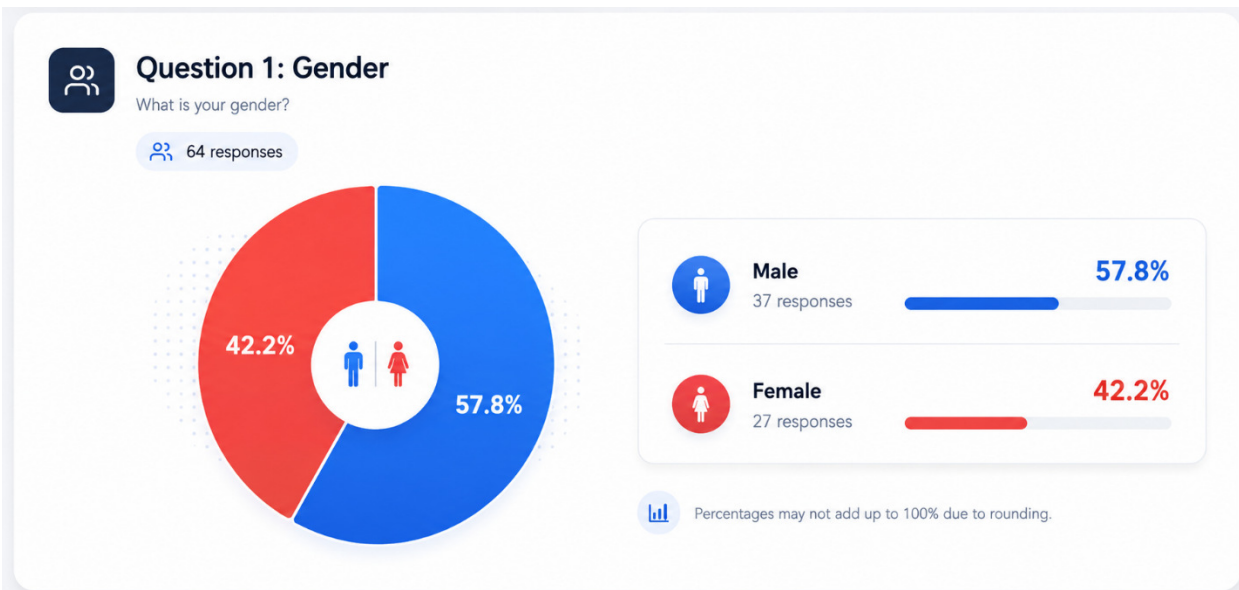
Methodological Summary

In summary, the study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design supported by exploratory digital interviews. The questionnaire component comprised 64 valid respondents drawn from individuals with relevant professional experience in marketing and small enterprises. The study employed purposive sampling to reach participants with direct knowledge of the research phenomenon. Data were collected through digital interviews and an electronic questionnaire, and the quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and percentages.

The methodological design enabled the study to examine the role of marketing departments in small enterprises from multiple practical dimensions, including crisis management, opportunity exploitation, innovation, organizational learning, customer-oriented activities, and marketing-team development.

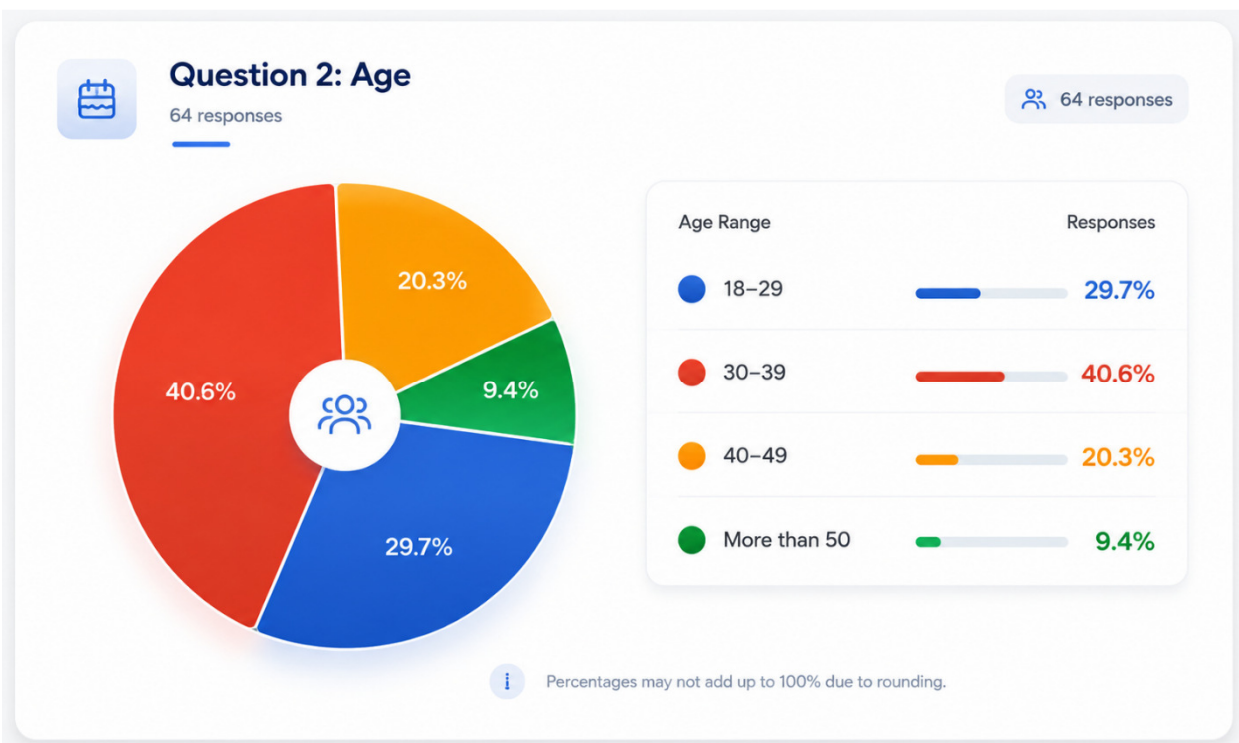
Results

The following section analyzes and presents selected questionnaire questions individually in order to obtain a more accurate understanding of the findings and provide a clearer presentation of the research results.



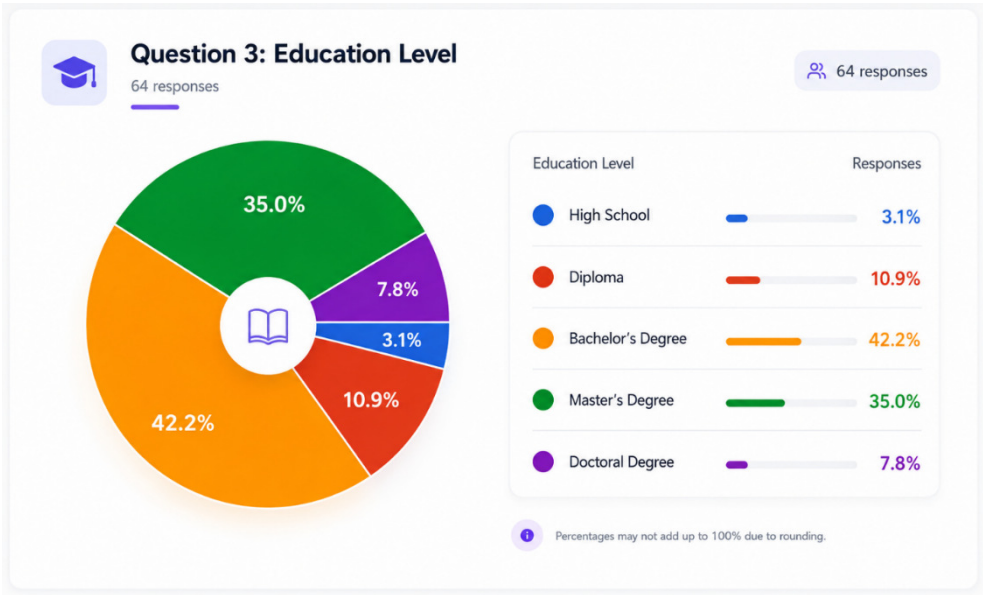
(Fig. 1)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 1.



(Fig. 2)

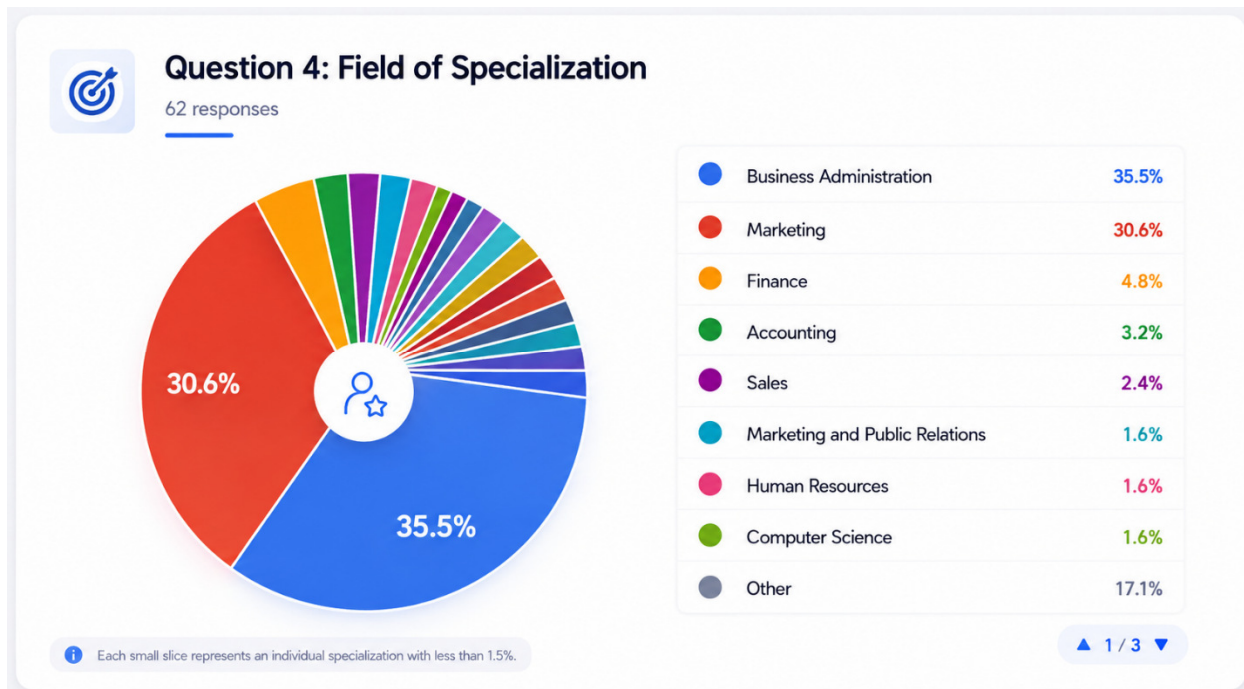
Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 2.



(Fig. 3)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 3.

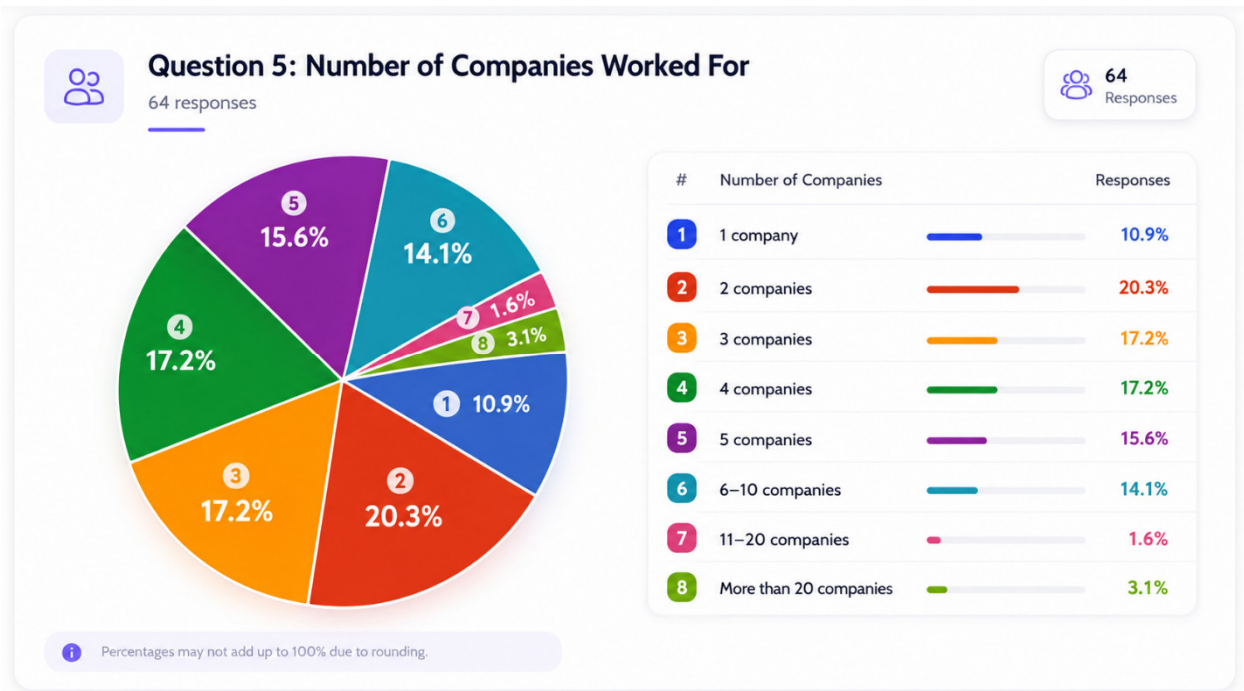
The first three questions were designed to describe the research sample and provide an understanding of the characteristics and profile of the target participants. These questions help identify the demographic and educational characteristics of the respondents and provide a basis for assessing the overall orientation of the research sample.

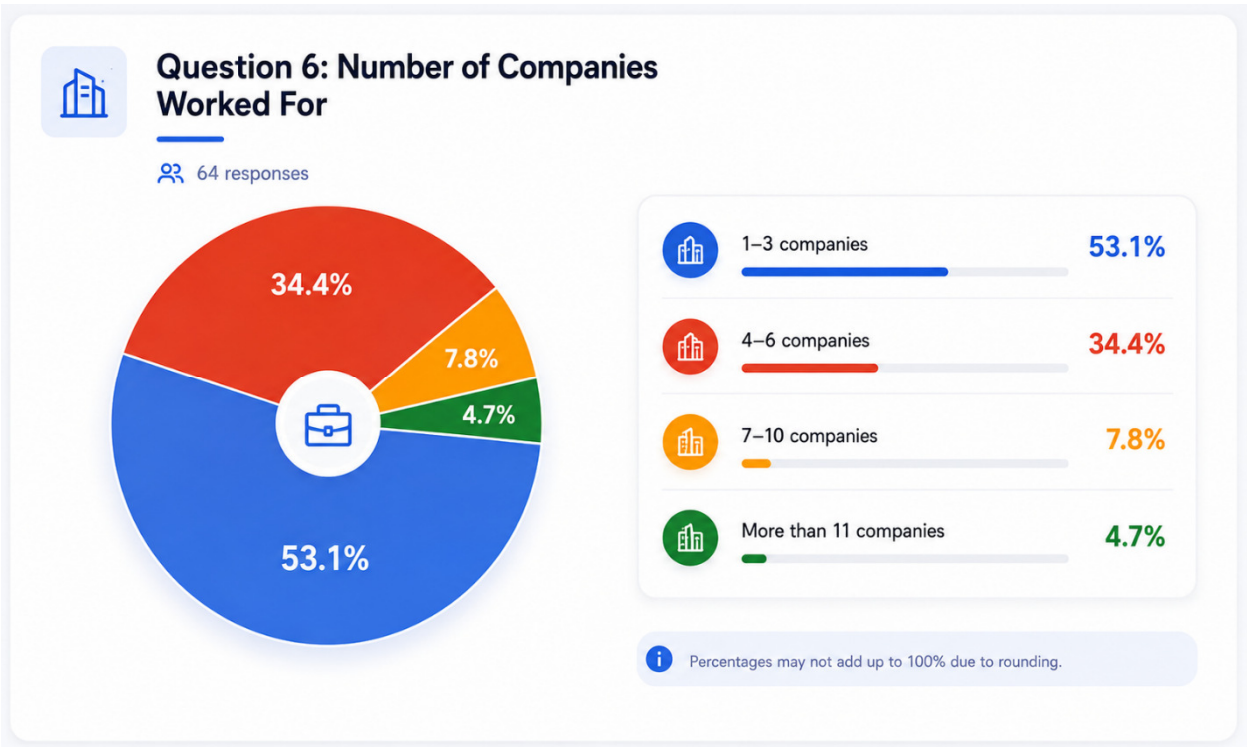


(Fig. 4)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 4.

Identifying the participants' areas of specialization is an important factor in understanding the orientation of the research and ensuring greater accuracy in interpreting the findings. The results indicate that 66.1% of the participants specialized in Business Administration and related fields. This provides substantial support for the credibility of the survey, particularly in relation to its focus on the research objectives.

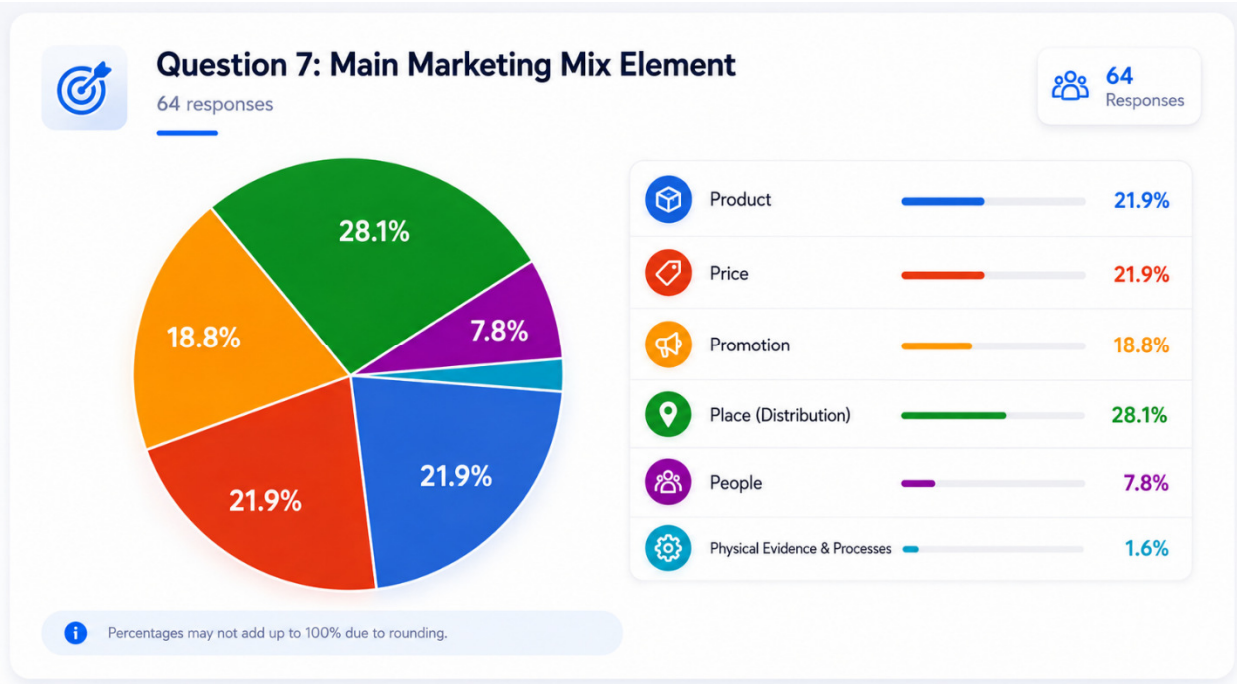




(Fig. 6)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 6.

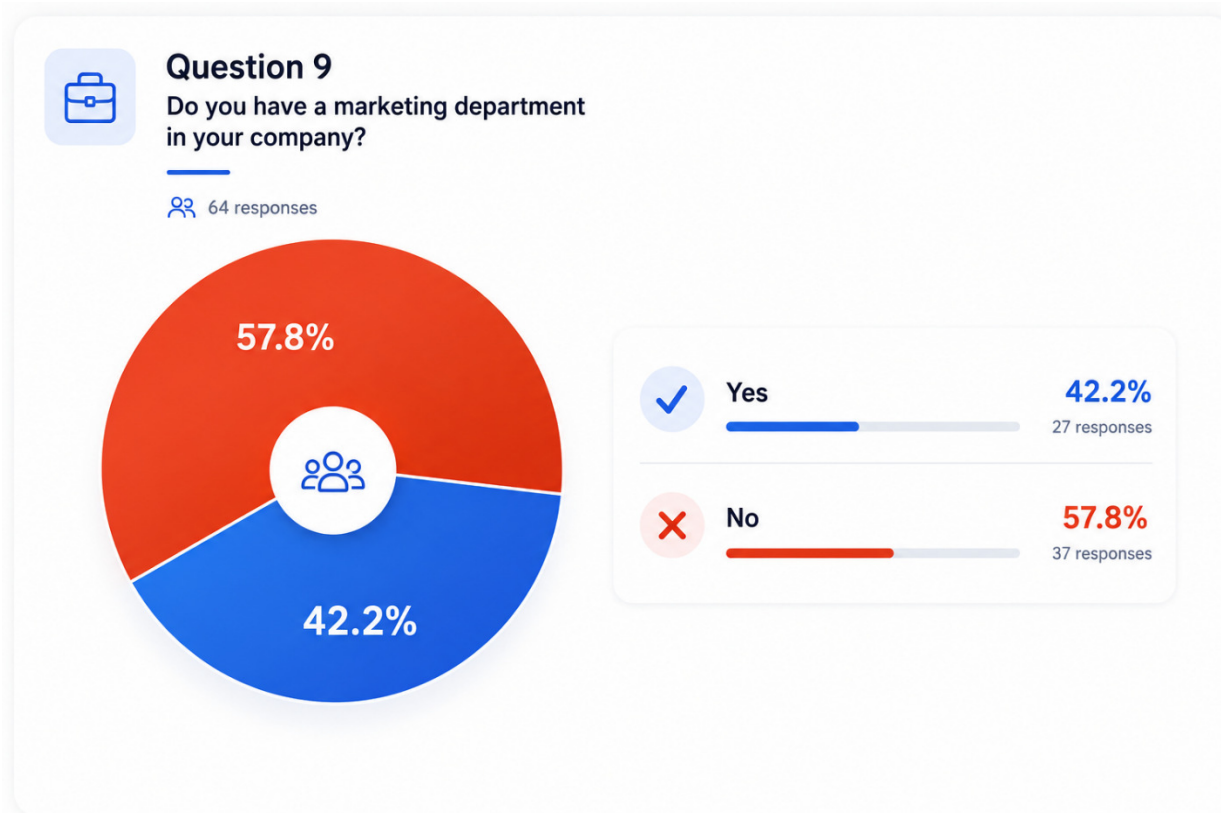
The number of companies in which a participant has worked may provide an indication of employment stability and professional continuity. The results show that 53% of participants had worked in no more than three companies. This contributes to understanding the stability of the respondents and their ability to reflect on their experiences concerning the role of marketing departments in enterprises, particularly during crises and in relation to opportunity identification.



(Fig. 1.6)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 7.

Approximately 40% of the questionnaire participants were working in departmental management positions. This indicates that a substantial proportion of respondents had managerial experience, which is relevant to the study of the role of marketing departments in small enterprises.



(Fig. 8)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 9.

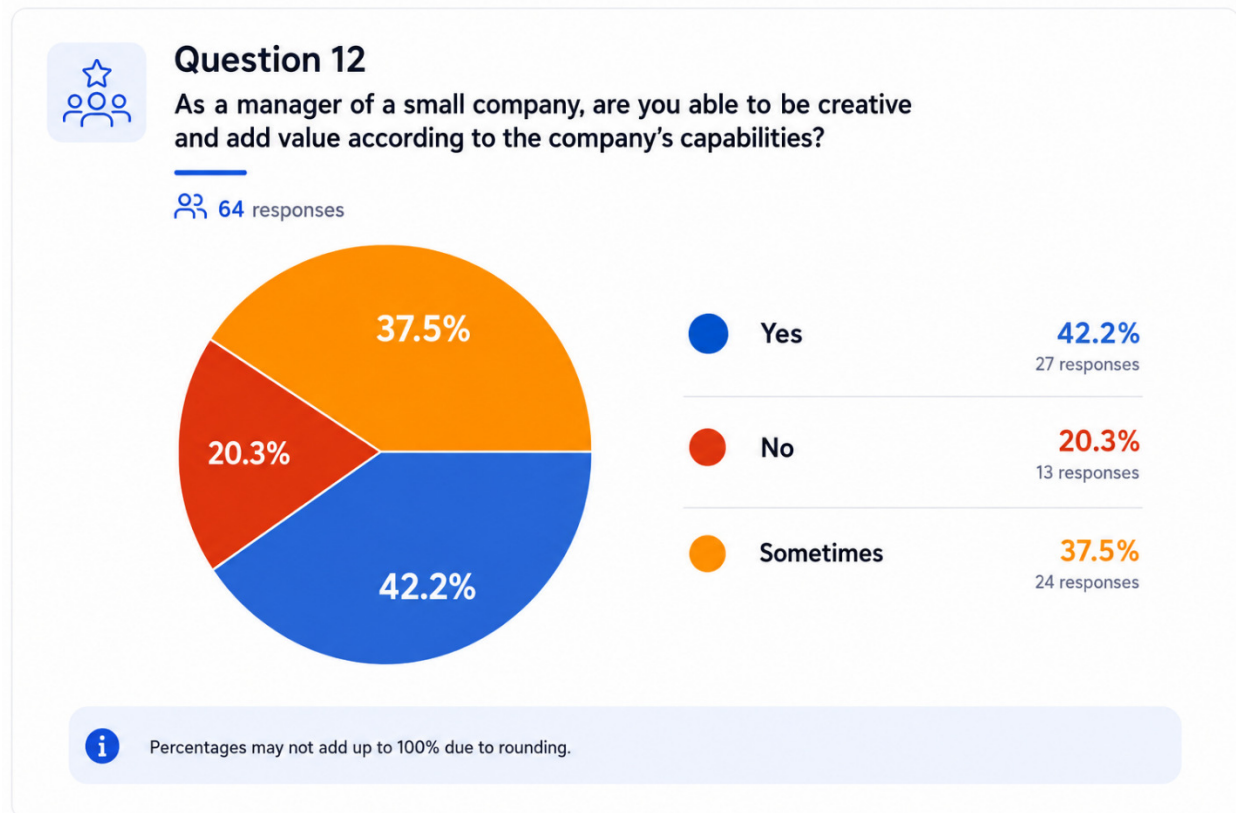
The results indicate that 51.6% of the participants had worked as managers in marketing departments. The subsequent responses therefore provide perspectives from a considerable proportion of participants who had direct experience with marketing functions and who were aware of the role of marketing departments in managing crises, exploiting opportunities, and identifying the functions and roles required within such departments. The results also indicate that approximately 48.4% of the respondents were managers or owners of small enterprises.



(Fig. 9)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 10.

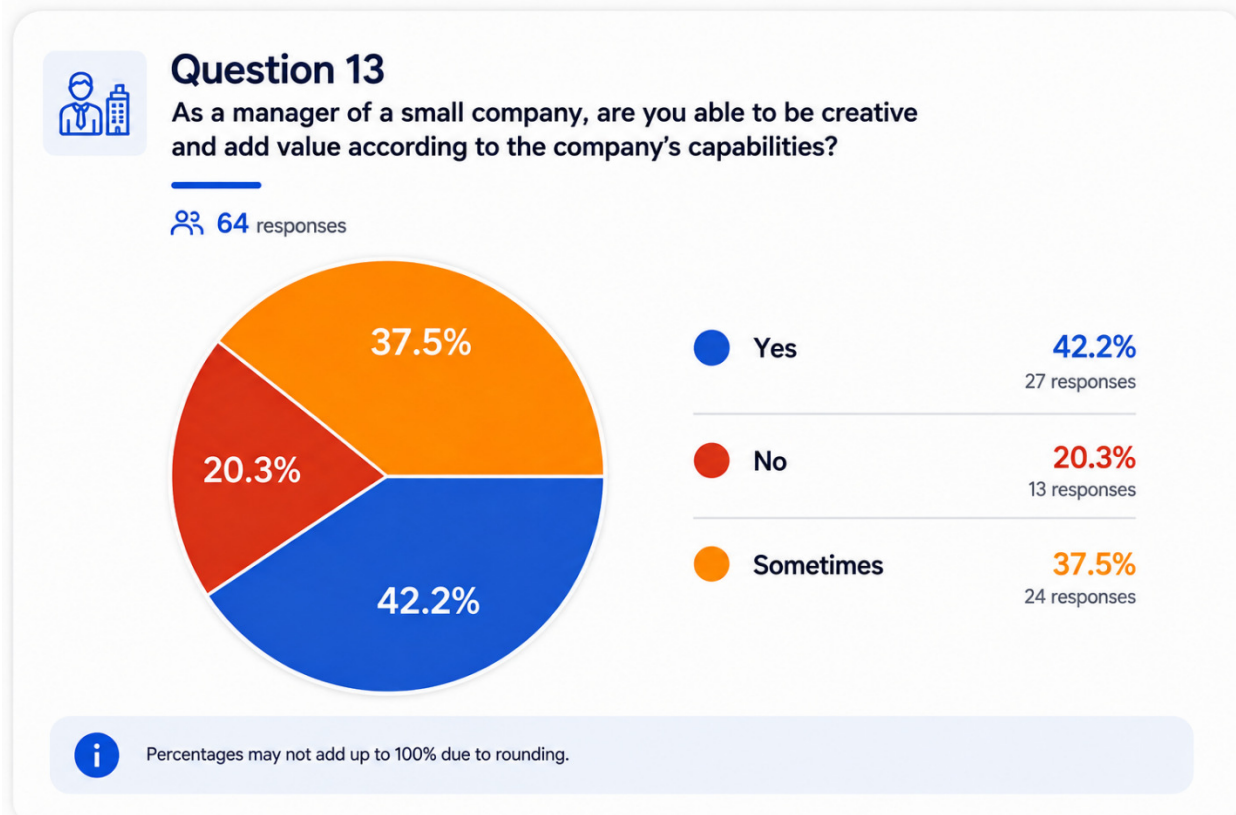
The finding that 57.8% of respondents had not established a marketing department from the beginning is consistent with the expected situation in small enterprises. In contrast, 42.2% of participants had established marketing departments in small enterprises. This finding supports the importance of examining the roles and responsibilities of marketing departments in small enterprises. The proportion of respondents who had not established marketing departments is largely attributable to small-enterprise owners and managers who joined existing organizations rather than establishing the marketing function themselves.



(Fig. 10)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 12.

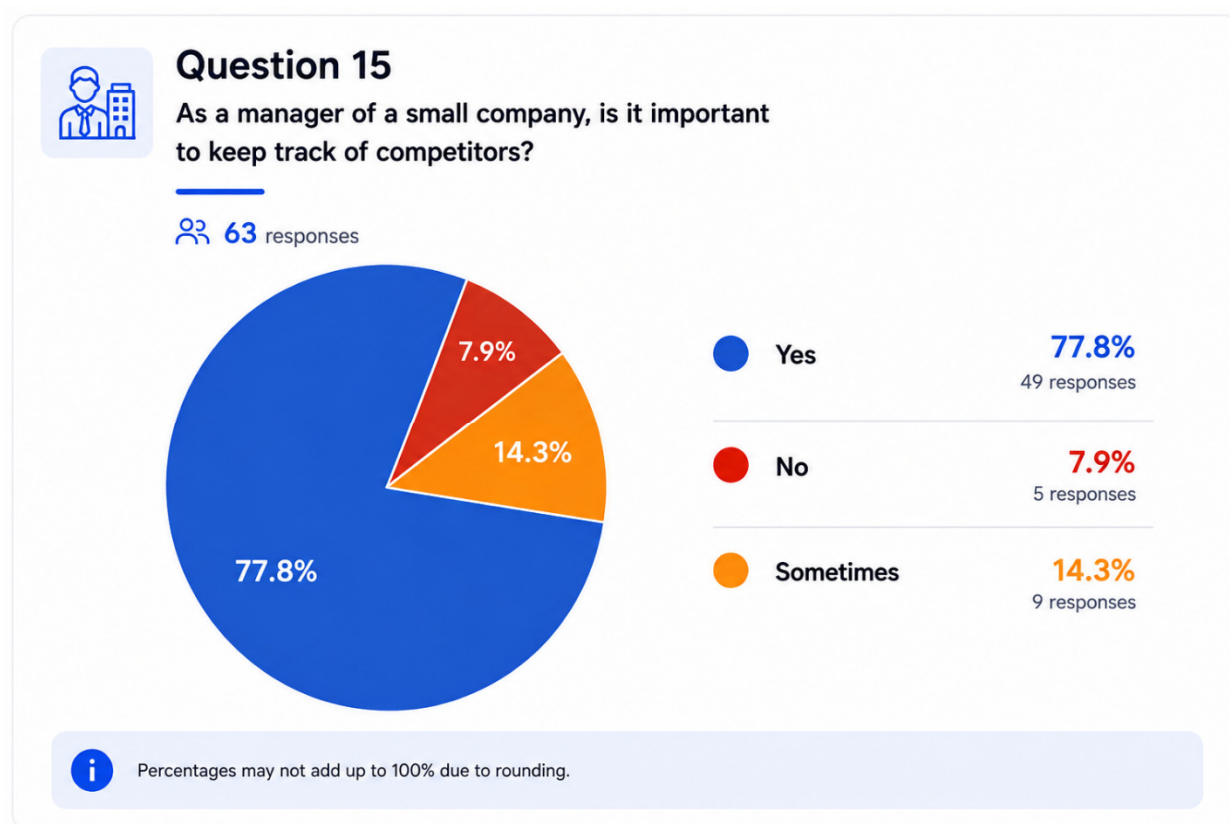
The findings indicate that small enterprises provide considerable employment opportunities within marketing. The survey recorded a positive response of 34.4% regarding the availability of employment opportunities in marketing departments. This finding supports the view that small enterprises can provide opportunities for creativity and professional development within the marketing field.



Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 13.

(Fig. 11)

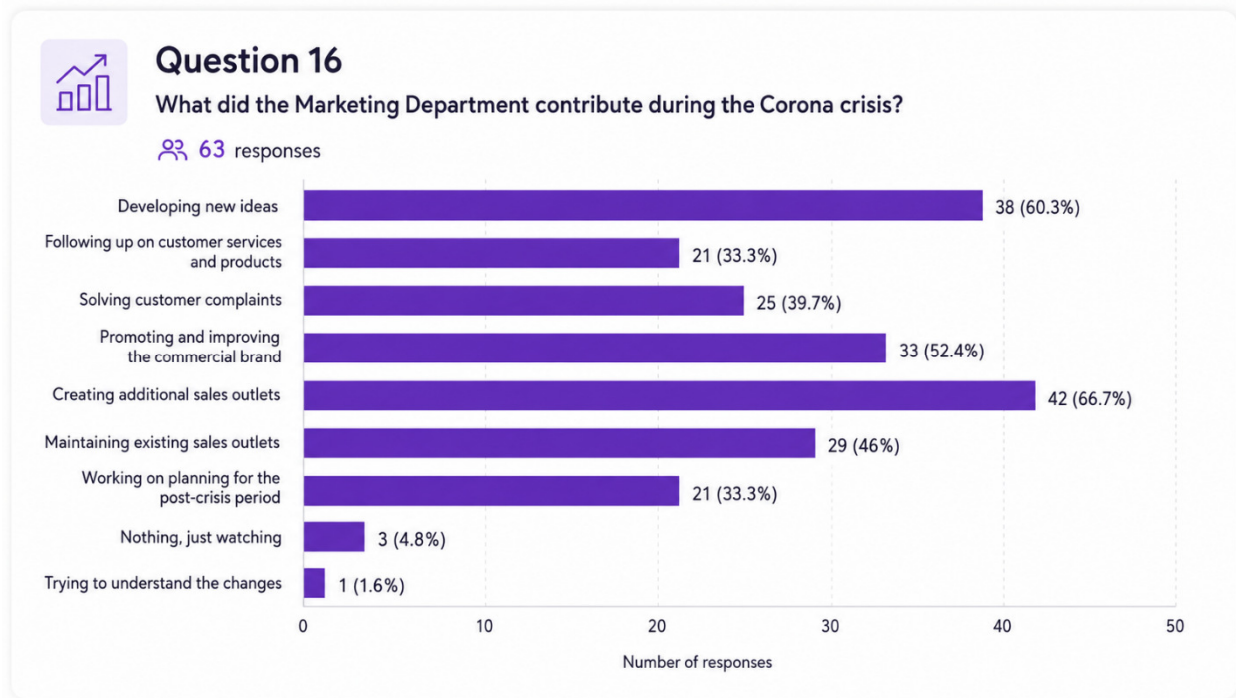
Question 13 highlights the role of marketing managers and employees in identifying and exploiting opportunities, as well as in promoting creativity and innovation. Through this role, the marketing department can add substantial value to the enterprise and capitalize on available opportunities. This perspective was supported by 42.2% of the questionnaire participants.



(Fig. 12)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 15.

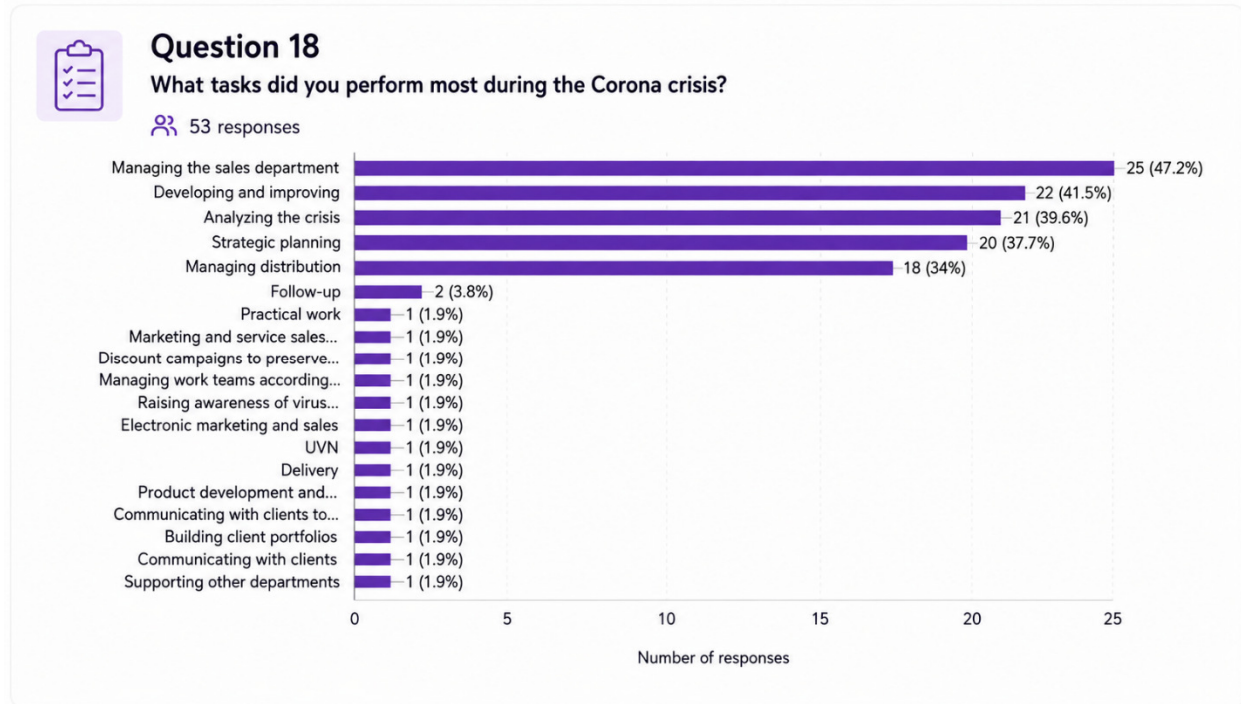
Attention to the marketing department represents an important foundation for successful management and for understanding the role of marketing during crises and opportunities. The COVID-19 crisis provides a clear example of this relationship. During that period, identifying opportunities and strengthening the role of marketing contributed to creativity and innovation. As a result, many small enterprises demonstrated an appropriate level of flexibility in implementing marketing activities and responding to changing market conditions.



(Fig. 13)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 16.

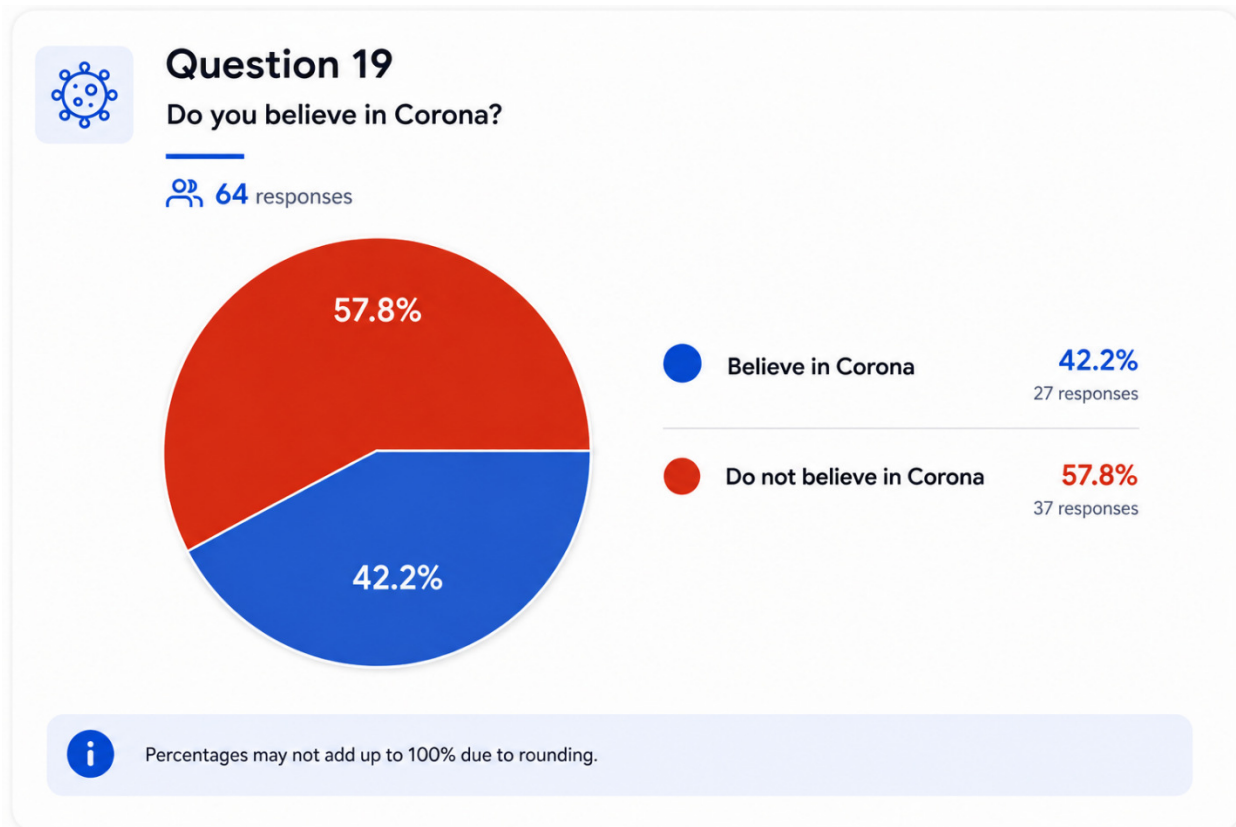
Crises can create opportunities. One of the most important responsibilities of the marketing department during crises is to maintain enterprise sales and generate additional sales. The findings indicate that 63% of respondents recognized the role of marketing departments in maintaining sales and creating additional sales opportunities. This suggests that marketing departments in small enterprises were able, during the crisis, to preserve sales levels, maximize revenue, and support enterprise income. In addition, 38% of respondents emphasized the role of marketing departments in creating opportunities through new and innovative ideas, further demonstrating the importance of marketing functions in small enterprises during crises.



(Fig. 14)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 18.

One of the most important roles of the marketing department and its manager during crises is effective team management and maintaining high productivity in order to achieve results beyond initial expectations. Effective planning is also essential for managing crises and opportunities. Among the key daily marketing activities is the management of promotional and advertising campaigns, including the creative ideas generated by the team and the strategic planning of appropriate promotional channels.



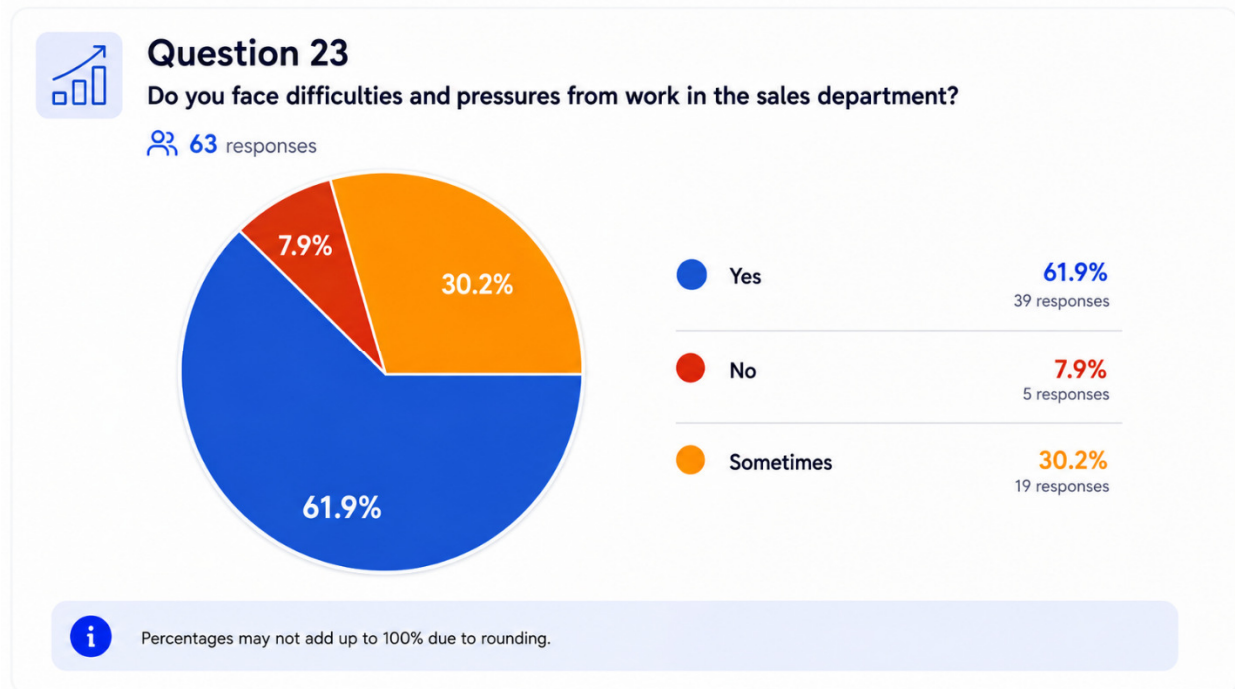
(Fig. 15)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 19.

**(Fig.16)**

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 22.

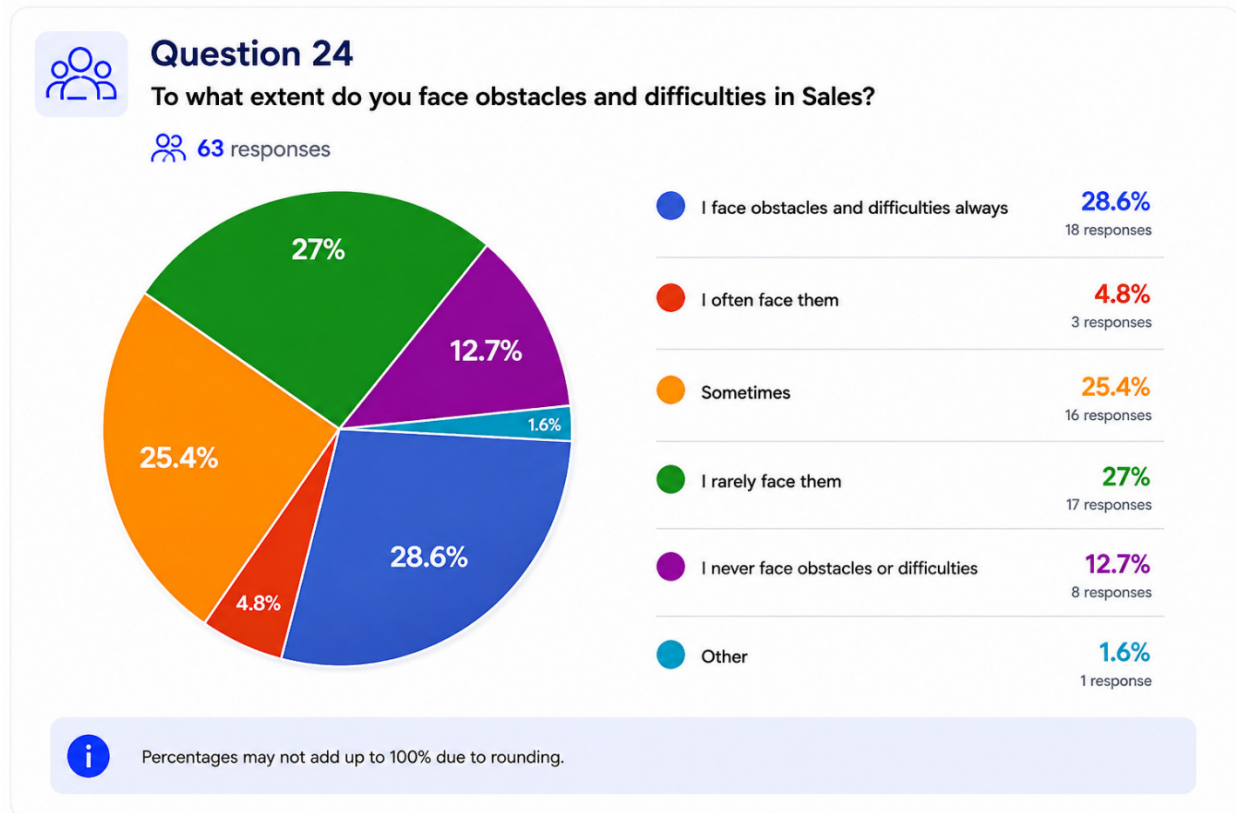
Opportunities and crises can generate significant possibilities for innovation. By focusing on both opportunities and crises, marketing departments can create new experiences for the enterprise and exploit available market opportunities that can contribute to business growth. Approximately 60% of respondents preferred opportunities because crises can create restrictions that may limit ideas or constrain business activities.



(Fig. 17)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 23.

The role of the marketing department in small enterprises includes exploiting opportunities and experimenting with different approaches through which the principles of the marketing mix can be applied in an appropriate and integrated manner. This enables the marketing department to align product, pricing, distribution, and promotional strategies with the opportunities available in the market.



(Fig. 18)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 24.

There are numerous opportunities that can be pursued within marketing departments in small enterprises. One of the most important is the ability of marketing teams to learn from opportunities and crises and acquire new knowledge and skills that support the strategic direction and development of the small enterprise.



(Fig. 19)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 25.

Team size is an important factor in highlighting the role of marketing departments within small enterprises. Although the number of marketing employees may be relatively small, a well-coordinated team can respond effectively to customer demands and market challenges, thereby contributing to the success of the enterprise and the achievement of its desired objectives.

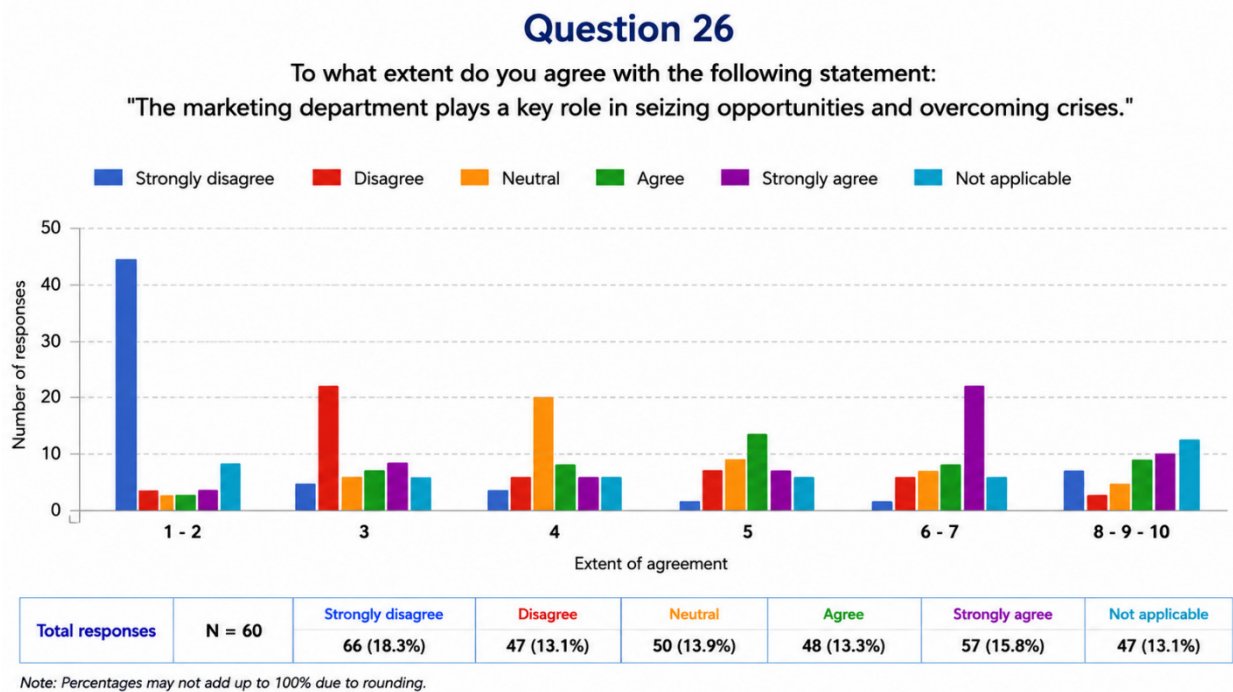


Figure 1.8. The Role of the Marketing Department in Seizing Opportunities and Overcoming Crises

(Fig. 20)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 27.

One of the most important roles within the marketing department is that of the marketing manager. The marketing manager must understand the needs of the enterprise and translate them into appropriate departmental objectives and activities. The manager also plays an important role in strengthening the role of the marketing team by exploiting opportunities and responding to crises, thereby creating a creative work environment aligned with organizational objectives and the changes occurring in the market. Another important role is that of the social media specialist, whose responsibilities have become increasingly significant because social media marketing has emerged as one of the most important channels contributing to the success of small enterprises.

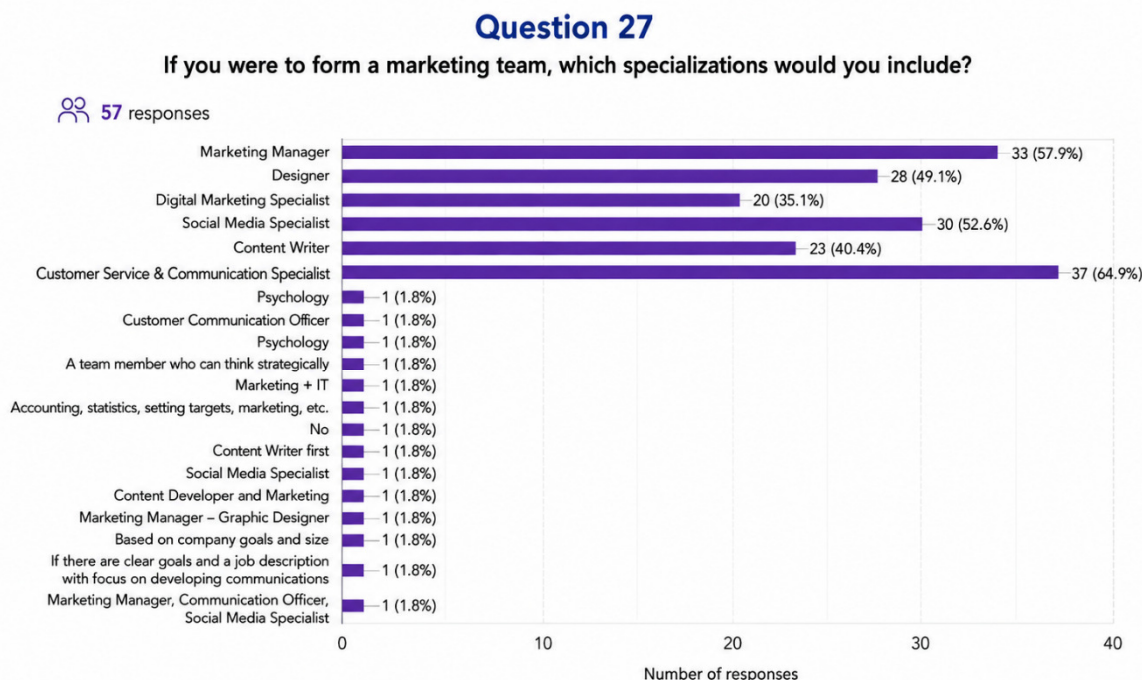


Figure 1.9. Specializations to Include When Forming a Marketing Team

(Fig. 21)

Source: Questionnaire data on *The Role of the Marketing Department in Small Enterprises and Its Impact on Managing Opportunities and Crises for the Enterprise*, Question 28.

Further analysis of the key marketing roles indicates that one of the most important functions of the marketing department in small enterprises during both crises and periods of opportunity is communication with customers. This function brings together many of the roles discussed above and reinforces the principle that the value created and delivered by small enterprises should be customer-oriented. Listening to the customer's voice and understanding customer needs are therefore among the most important responsibilities that the marketing department should prioritize.

Conclusion

The success of the marketing function in managing crises and exploiting opportunities depends largely on building an appropriate and competent marketing team. This requires the presence of a capable marketing manager who possesses strong planning and strategic skills and who is able to understand and manage major challenges, such as those experienced during the COVID-19 crisis. An effective marketing manager should also be capable of empowering and utilizing the marketing team to perform its functions as professionally and efficiently as possible, in a manner that serves the interests of the small enterprise and strengthens its ability to compete despite the numerous challenges it faces.

Small enterprises possess an important added value in the form of flexibility in their operations, procedures, and marketing activities. This flexibility enables them to respond rapidly to changes in the market and to develop innovative marketing practices. Crises and opportunities can also serve as catalysts for innovation and creativity and can encourage small enterprises to apply the principles of the marketing mix more effectively. Understanding challenges and responding to them rapidly is therefore essential, as demonstrated by the experience of the COVID-19 crisis.

The most important findings of the study can be summarized as follows. Small enterprises provide a dynamic marketing environment that supports creativity and opportunity acquisition. Crises contribute to strengthening and institutionalizing the role of the marketing department. The availability of a competent marketing manager plays an important role in activating and utilizing the marketing function. The marketing mix provides substantial support for the role of the marketing department in small enterprises. Working in marketing departments within small enterprises offers numerous opportunities. Marketing approaches adopted by small enterprises can contribute to strengthening and highlighting the role of the marketing department. Viral marketing can be an effective approach for marketing departments in small enterprises. Innovation is an important factor supporting the effectiveness and role of the marketing department.

Research Recommendations

Based on the research process, the review of books related to marketing and small enterprises, the examination of previous studies, the digital interviews, and the analysis of the questionnaire responses, the study highlights the importance of understanding and recognizing the role of the marketing department in small enterprises and its impact on managing opportunities and crises.

The reviewed references and previous studies provide substantial support for the importance of examining the marketing function in small enterprises. The study also addresses a recurring issue in business practice and professional discourse concerning the role and importance of marketing departments in small enterprises, particularly the common confusion between the marketing and sales functions. Questions frequently arise regarding whether the sales department should be considered part of marketing, whether sales representatives are marketing employees, and how the responsibilities and roles of the two functions differ while remaining complementary.

Therefore, this research has focused on clarifying the importance of distinguishing between these functions and understanding their respective roles. The study relies primarily on descriptive and quantitative analysis and highlights the need for broader and more detailed research targeting small enterprises. Future studies should employ larger and more representative samples, use more rigorous statistical analyses, and examine the marketing function from multiple dimensions. Such research can contribute to strengthening the marketing sector and clarifying its role in supporting small enterprises.

Future research should also focus on helping small enterprises establish marketing departments with a clear understanding of marketing functions, responsibilities, and strategic objectives. Such departments can play a more effective role in identifying and exploiting market opportunities, supporting business growth, strengthening customer relationships, and helping enterprises respond effectively to crises.

Declarations

Availability of Data and Materials

The data generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to appropriate privacy and confidentiality considerations.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Authors' Contributions

Abdullah Ahmed Rafiq Sahyun: Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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