

## Article

# Change Management and Innovation Practices during Pandemic in the Middle East E-Commerce Industry

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**Abstract:** This study highlights the appropriateness of innovation management principles to successfully manage radical change in the e-commerce industry during the COVID-19 period. The study focuses on transforming delivery platforms in the context of popular e-commerce organizations in the U.A.E. We conducted the study through interviews, and the results reflect the development of three major themes (shifting consumer behavior, implementation of innovation, and innovation for effective change management) since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the transition stage, critical aspects concerning product delivery have emerged to stabilize logistics performance with sustainability. The study suggests that firms need to be faster and more flexible to address the market uncertainty through innovative practices. Similar organizations can use this study to develop mechanisms to improve their delivery systems. Additionally, the study also argues that collaborative innovation significantly contributes to the enhancement of consumers' well-being and boosts economic growth.

**Keywords:** middle east; COVID-19; pandemic; change management; innovation; consumer behaviour; e-commerce



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## 1. Introduction

The present study highlights the context of the U.A.E.'s e-commerce industry, specifically in one of the largest e-commerce organizations in the U.A.E. An unintended positive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is that the e-commerce industry in the U.A.E. has undergone a rapid, unprecedented boom [1]. Although organic growth in e-commerce sales in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been 15–20 percent per year in recent years (outpacing other regions), priorities and timelines have been wholly rearranged as a result of the pandemic, accelerating already rapid growth across the sector [2]. For instance, at the start of the pandemic, BinDawood Holding—a Saudi retailer—saw 10-day e-commerce sales rise by 200%, while in the U.A.E., Majid Al Futtaim witnessed a year-by-year rise in online sales of 59% in March 2020 [2]. The e-commerce company currently under study has seen unprecedented growth in sales due to the push to purchase goods digitally during the pandemic [3]. With the pandemic in mind, organizations of every sort have been compelled to accelerate their organizational change journeys dramatically in just six months to meet the shift to working remotely, distance learning, and rapidly expanding demand for e-commerce [4]. For instance, the organization launched “Daily”, their grocery service, after recognizing an increase in demand for goods such as daily items and home

category items. Following the success of Daily, the organization also launched a spin-off application called Now Now, which promises faster deliveries.

The impact of COVID-19 on this industry is not transient and will likely continue along the same lines in the future. In other words, the e-commerce trend is expected to continue upwards with consistency to sustain and diversify in the post-COVID environment, whereby, as per a joint Dubai Economy and Visa report [2], e-commerce payments are estimated to be 28.2 percent of the total value of U.A.E. card payments, which is a substantial increase from the pre-COVID environment. Observed data shows that while U.A.E. customers still choose to pay by credit card (35 percent of transactions), debit card use in online shopping has increased by more than seven percent, “pointing to a greater level of confidence in a maturing transaction.” The World Economic Forum forecasted that the e-commerce market for the U.A.E. in 2020 would hit \$27.2 billion with the same region-wide expansion [1]. This expansion is evident in the way that the organization has approached and tackled the increasing demand of a few categories of products by launching an additional platform within the primary one (Daily) as well as launching a new independent platform for only home category products and faster delivery times (Now Now). Now has major supermarket brands and offers same-day, up to 60 min delivery services from its partnered stores. It has focused on reducing the delivery times and integrating the consumer with their order at a much faster rate.

One of the core changes in the e-commerce industry during the COVID-19 pandemic is that consumers rely on e-commerce excessively [5]. Moreover, consumers are now making more responsible purchases due to a reduced disposable income, thereby increasing demand for some products over others [6]. Consumers prefer cashless payment options and contactless deliveries across the U.A.E. due to their perceived safety in preventing infections [1,7]. Because traditional brick-and-mortar retail has been disrupted, the e-commerce industry has had to manage a rapidly increasing demand, ensure fast deliveries, maintain a high standard of hygiene, and protect its team of employees and staff [4].

With a substantial shift and transition in consumer behavior and demand, organizations face disruptive market conditions and radical changes occurring in the external environment. Thus, incumbent e-commerce firms have to effectively manage such rapid, radical change to ensure that they obtain benefits from the uncertain external market conditions [8]. In other words, organizations in the e-commerce industry need to ensure that they leverage radical change to develop a more significant competitive advantage. However, radical change is known to create massive organizational disruptions due to its inherent unpreparedness to manage such change. In other words, incumbent firms have rigid internal structures that limit their acceptance of new transformations [9]. In such a scenario, it is possible that firms can lose market value if they do not engage in appropriate innovation management.

Therefore, the research objectives of the current study are as follows:

- To identify how the current global COVID-19 pandemic influences consumer behavior in the U.A.E.’s e-commerce industry.
- To evaluate the innovations implemented by the e-commerce organization for the management of change during the current global COVID-19 pandemic.
- To understand how radical change can be managed by implementing appropriate innovation management initiatives in the e-commerce organization.

Firms need to balance exploration and exploitation techniques to ensure that they gain maximum added value from external, radical market changes [10,11]. However, given the unprecedented and sudden nature of the current pandemic, there is limited research exploring what strategies incumbent firms need to employ to ensure that they manage radical change effectiveness and generate value for the organization.

Therefore, the research question for this study is as follows: “How can appropriate innovation management principles successfully manage radical change in the e-commerce industry during a global crisis event?”

The rest of the study is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review, Section 3 addresses the methodology, then Section 4 presents the findings of the study, and finally, Section 5 concludes the study with relevant discussions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Change in Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behavior is an essential and continuing decision-making mechanism for the search, purchase, use, appraisal, and disposal of goods and services [12]. Flatters and Willmott [13] argue that consumers seek to increase their usefulness, happiness, or enjoyment by buying consumer products. The economic effect of this pandemic is profound, indicating shifting market conditions in the nation's economies. Furthermore, Geldenhuys [14] observed that when pandemic began and the lockdown was announced, at few places, people looted grocery stores, the events associated with economic activities were canceled, and 'non-essentials' businesses were closed; thus, a market uncertainty affected the businesses in the short run. In part due to the closure of non-essential businesses, the restrictions on travel, and the various lockdowns instituted across the world, there was a sharp economic downturn, and several individuals lost their jobs. Due to this, the general public's disposable income was reduced considerably, and hence, there was a change in the general public's purchasing behavior. Thus, during the pandemic, people have spent less on things they thought were unimportant (such as clothing, shoes, make-up, jewelry, games, and electronics). This was clearly evidenced by the e-commerce organization that observed increased purchases in the home category of products such as daily essentials [3]. In addition, consumers also began favoring cashless payments and opted to pay by card for all purchases.

Moreover, this organization also partnered with The Dubai Mall, the largest mall globally, to make the retail mall available online to consumers in a new initiative called the virtual mall initiative. This initiative was launched for two primary reasons: to allow malls to reach consumers amid lockdowns and restrictions and ensure that malls' retailers generate revenue. Thus, it can be said that the organization has been adapting to the market and consumer changes that are taking place due to the pandemic.

In the Middle Eastern region, some of the most significant transformations in consumer behavior were witnessed in the form of higher demand for e-commerce rather than traditional brick and mortar stores, a larger basket per order with a reduced frequency of ordering, a decline in on-the-go consumption, greater trust in valued brands, and an increase in the extent of discretionary spending [4]. Meyer [6] has also outlined that those individuals have increased their panic buying and stock of goods, leading to store shortages. External market conditions often bring about changes in consumer behavior and cause disruptions to the current status quo. It becomes necessary to evaluate how these radical changes affect an organization and innovation management's role to ensure that successful changes are implemented to leverage the market turbulence in today's uncertain economy.

### 2.2. The Organisation as a Process

In the present research, organizations, instead of stable structures, are constantly conceived as transformative phenomena [15,16]. In this regard, organizations, in response to experience gained in their day-to-day operations, continue to change by constantly revising, reinterpreting, and re-producing their knowledge and competencies [16]. Although organizational reform is conceptualized traditionally by deliberate, coordinated campaigns, it often comes from a process point of view in the flow of organizational life [15–17].

Since organizational agents recognize their day-to-day operations' constraints, disruptions, and improvisations and resolve them, they create emergent improvements through constant adaptation and development processes [17,18]. Therefore, organizational change is unforeseen and unintended because it is part of organizational actors' daily sensational efforts [15,18]. Furthermore, emerging transition mechanisms must appear exciting and

significant to organizational researchers because such practices are ultimately linked to transformational change and creativity in organizations [17,18].

Based on a process-based paradigm, practice science has quickly advanced in organizational change management studies as a promising theoretical paradigm for contemporary organizational phenomena over the past couple of years. The theory of practice has been used to evaluate “strategy-as-practice,” organizational learning processes, knowledge management, organizational structure, and the use of technology, capacity building, and preservation ([19] Miettinen et al., 2009). A practice approach is based on organizational phenomena studies, given that social life constantly emerges from organizational actors’ daily operations [19,20]. Widespread discontent drives the agency’s reliance on the limits of dominant organizational theories based on standard scientific approaches and the effort at managing and organizing research [21].

Therefore, using a practice-based perspective can lend insight into the importance and consequences of the instance of change in an organization due to the organizational actors’ engaging with their internal environment [22]. It is also keen that the practice model emphasizes localization and its relation to the broader social contexts in which organizational actors are involved. Moreover, for exploring innovation processes in organizations, a practice-based approach is helpful. According to Crossan and Apaydin [23], the proposal is that the current disjointed dimensions ubiquitous in recent literature be combined with a practical view. A practical view considers the interaction between micro-and macro-level activities. It considers the procedures that organizational actors perform in regards to their contexts, how their decisions affect the frame of reference, and how this change, in turn, forms the behavior of organizational members [23]. Practical observation of innovative day-to-day activity in organizations would also illustrate innovation management’s complexities over time [24,25]. As such, the practices that need to be implemented to manage the complexities embedded within organizational change during a period of rapid change are not addressed in past research.

### 2.3. Innovation Management

Organizational innovation can be defined as an innovative way of supporting and facilitating competitive advantage between organizations. The process of organizational innovation includes organizations, teams, and stakeholders in managing operational processes in aspects such as knowledge management, productivity, and efficiency enhancement. Organizational innovation is also a range of activities and initiatives, including improvements in the organizational system, administration of human capital, client and supplier interactions, and/or the working climate [10], which can facilitate the extraction of added value from the organizational innovation processes.

Moreover, the Disruptive Innovation paradigm has two forms of innovation: innovations that occur incrementally and work to enhance the current performance of products and services, and radical innovations that are transformative, cost-effective, efficient, and introduce a new set of capabilities [11,26]. Therefore, most researchers prefer to disregard emerging *revolutionary* technologies and changes because they lead to poorer performance outcomes than market-tested products but are accepted by niche consumers searching for cost-effective substitutes [11,26]. It is essentially obtained that radical changes gain traction in the industry by appealing to underserved markets and, in the long run, outperform conventional goods sold by market-leading incumbent companies [11,26]. Developed companies appear to lose out on new technological changes while reinventing their current consumer needs following good management practices and eventually changing their established companies [11,26]. Moreover, large incumbent firms often focus on incremental changes and undermine the potential benefits or losses that radical change can bring to the organization. Although some discussion has been conducted on the fundamentals of the Disruptive Innovation paradigm [27–32], it has gained considerable traction among both academics and practitioners.

Past research has also found that many existing companies have struggled to detect and take advantage of transformative technologies until new business offers are replaced, primarily because of internal factors [33]. The transformative literature on innovation focuses on three critical organizational conflicts related to the promotion of disruptive innovation processes in incumbent organizations: distribution of capital and rewards; cognitive systems; planning structures; and routines [33–35].

According to Ferrari [36], innovation must go through an interactive life cycle, which starts with “exploration” and ends with “exploitation” [37]. Exploration is the stage that contributes to the emergence of new knowledge, while exploitation occurs when a knowledge-generating innovation is eventually developed and marketed. This dichotomy of innovation (exploitation and exploration) as the core theory of innovation management has been outlined by March [38]. Even more, in the seminal research study, March [38] outlines that organizations are processes and systems whose primary objective is the “exploration of new possibilities” and the “exploitation of old certainties” (p. 71). March [38] has outlined that appropriate innovation management means that firms create an equilibrium of exploration and exploitation such that any imbalance between the two processes can lead to organizational self-destruction.

Therefore, in past research, there is no clear indication of what organizational practices in terms of innovation management can lead to developing a paradigm that allows for effective management of radical change in the organization. Past research has also identified that it is often challenging for organizations to develop an appropriate innovation management process, especially in radical change management [39]. Radical change, in this case, means looking at entirely new solutions for companies, while incremental innovations are characterized as developments focused on what already exists.

According to Dewar and Dutton [40], whether leaders are acquainted with the knowledge involved in this growth is central to managing radical change. In this sense, the duality between exploration and exploitation is significant since radical change means that new opportunities are pursued, and progressive development entails exploiting old certainties. This is why such dichotomy-based viewpoints are often used in the field of innovation management. For example, Hernandez-Espallardo, Sánchez-Pérez, and Segovia-López [41] employed the exploration and exploitative approach to classifying multiple innovation forms, while Zacher, Robinson, and Rosing [42] examined how exploration and exploitation have a collective impact on innovation. Therefore, past research has identified that the management of exploration and exploitation is one of the primary factors for effective innovation management.

#### *2.4. Radical Change and the Role of Innovation Management*

When radical changes emerge, leading organizations are advised to seize the initiative and use the resultant chaos to preserve their competitive advantages by rearranging or re-ordering how organizations and their environments function [8,26]. However, efforts to manage innovation that disrupts the organization’s operations are hindered because they usually contradict institutionalized structures and traditional practices [43,44]. Disruptive innovation and radical change studies, to date, have focused on recognizing the tensions stemming from the radical activities of existing organizations, including the allotment of capital and potential rewards, the cognitive structure, the operational structure, and internal procedures [33–35].

Effective innovation management is designed to create unique ways of managing business challenges that can lead organizations to manage revolutionary creativity [45,46]. Besides, building on a practice-based view, as outlined above, to understand the essence of traditional ways of operating in a leading enterprise and how innovative ways of managing radical change can be implemented is critical to understanding [47,48]. Based on this viewpoint, conventional operating models are related to innovation management practices and, consequently, the successful management of radical change in incumbent organizations [49,50]. Therefore, the study focuses on transforming strategies and practices

that allow large, well-established organizations to extract added value from radical change using effective innovation management strategies and practices.

This is also necessary because incumbent institutions attempt to become disruptors and often create conflict in how their corporate structure and routines are coordinated. Therefore, based on their current competencies, institutionalised operational and management strategies are designed to improve existing goods and resources as quickly as possible [51]. Longstanding traditions are improved in both internal and external aspects of existing organizations, including financial and financial infrastructure, political and human resources, and international factors such as public legitimacy of association operations and interactions with other organizations [52]. Such rigid organizational structures and management layers and the near-term performance they produce are an obstacle for large companies to resolve when introducing creativity and transformations even when they accept it as necessary [26,52–55]. These inertial factors are a specific challenge to the need for prominent organizations to transform their business models due to disruptions [9,56]. Past research demonstrates how existing corporate frameworks and routines impede transformative innovation in incumbent organizations.

### 3. Methodology

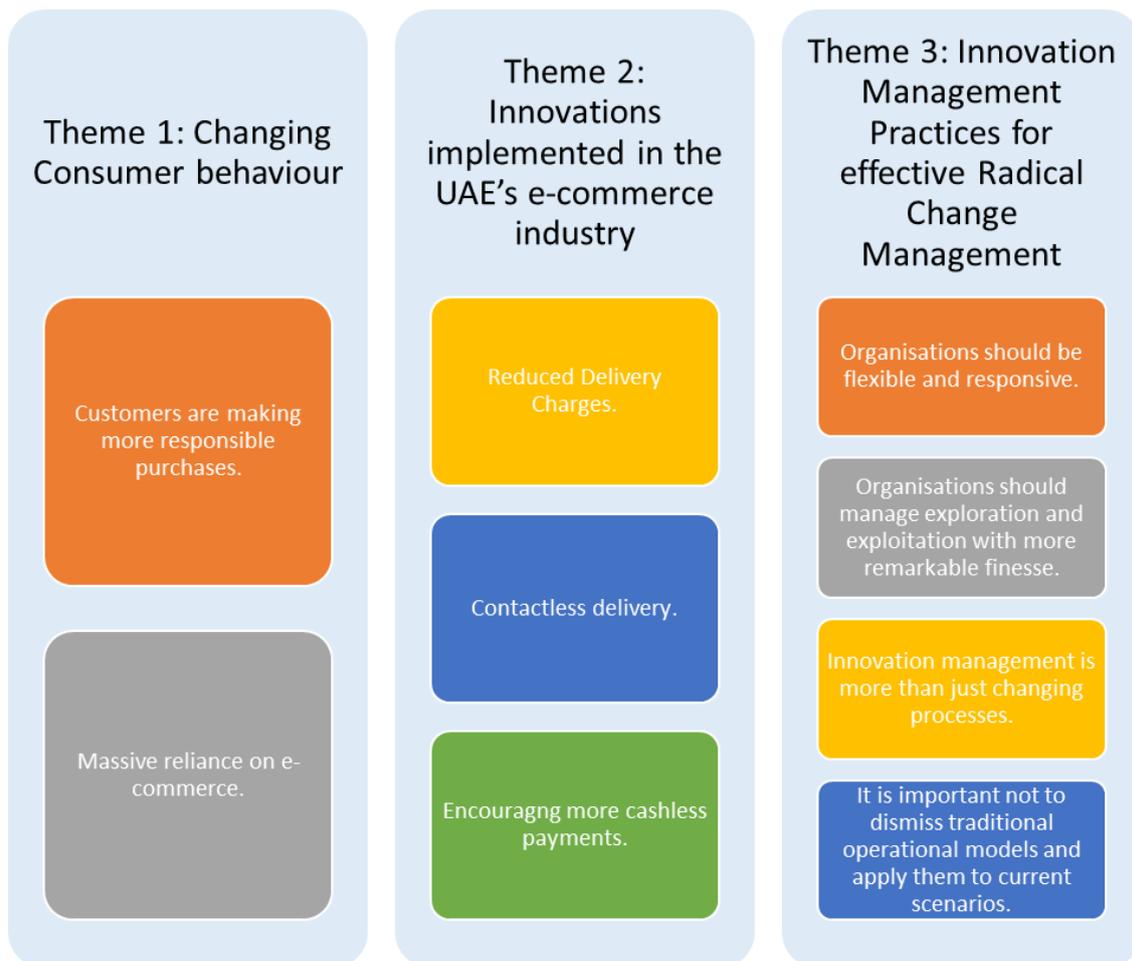
The current study is based on an interpretive paradigm, which allows the authors to assume that reality is a subjective phenomenon that can only be understood through personal insight [57]. Thus, this philosophy is the most appropriate for this study because it aims to understand the innovation management practices that allow organizations to manage radical change more efficiently. Furthermore, following the choice of an interpretive paradigm, an inductive approach is used towards theory generation. This approach has been selected because it allows for the generation of theory based on patterns that emerge from the data, facilitating the study in meeting the research objectives outlined above. Given a choice between interpretivism and induction, the present research uses a qualitative data collection method to conduct interviews. More specifically, using an interview guide, the research conducted semi-structured interviews. The major themes of the interviews were focussed in the following areas: (1) How leaders in the industry have witnessed the consumer transition in the e-commerce industry during the pandemic; (2) How the practices have changed in the context of delivery, charges, and contactless methods; and (3) How the innovative practices have helped in the management of change.

Decision-making managers (such as Senior Managers, Vice President, Associate Vice President, General Manager, Marketing Head, etc.) often referred to as “executive leaders” in U.A.E.’s industry have a significant role in responding to uncertainty. (Executive leaders in the current context refer to employees who are significantly involved in the organization’s decision-making process based on their seniority and relevant experience.) These leaders are highly experienced in the e-commerce field. Along with the Heads of departments, other senior profile employees such as Senior Managers with more than ten years of relevant experience in the e-commerce industry were picked up. Thus, the sample population included executive leaders from one of the leading e-commerce platforms (with around 2500 employees employed as of February 2021) in the U.A.E.’s booming e-commerce industry. Regarding the sample size, using a non-probability sampling technique called purposive sampling, as recommended by Kvale [58], a sample size of 10 was obtained. Given the study’s intention (to broadly understand the innovative management strategy to tackle COVID), a total of 10 participants from senior management were included in the present research. We took the appointments from respondents; each participant was interviewed for approximately 30–40 min through video calls. It is well-recognized that we have conducted the study on a large company; therefore, the results may not generally apply to small companies with significantly fewer employees. Following the data collection, a thematic analysis was employed to analyze the results using the procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke [59]. We independently identified the themes for addressing the study. Later, a joint coding was carried out to recheck the consensus. The findings were reviewed

by an independent consultant with skills in qualitative research. We followed the guidelines of Miles and Huberman [60].

#### 4. Findings and Analysis

As indicated above, ten interviews were carried out with e-commerce leaders in the organization. The interview guide used to conduct the interviews is presented in the appendix below. The thematic map (Figure 1) below outlines the primary themes that emerged from the data.



**Figure 1.** Thematic Map.

##### 4.1. Theme 1: Shifting of Consumer Behaviour

###### 4.1.1. Customers Are Making More Responsible Purchases

One of the primary themes outlined in this study was that consumer behavior had changed drastically, with customers favoring more responsible purchases and ensuring a substantial stock of essential items. For instance, Participant 1 noted that “One of the main changes that I have seen in this time is that customers have not stopped shopping online but are doing so in a different manner. What I mean is that they are getting more essential goods in fear of stocks running out rather than purchasing leisure products”. Similarly, Participant 5 stated that “many people have lost their jobs and so are limiting their purchases to only essentials. However, they are buying more essentials than they would have before. This is the main change I have seen based on our sale trends”. The insights generated above are in line with Mehta et al. [5], who also suggested that these trends will be more permanent than transient. Thus, it can be said that similar to the current organization; other e-commerce firms have also witnessed similar trends.

#### 4.1.2. Massive Reliance on E-Commerce

An emergent theme was an increased reliance on e-commerce in favor of brick-and-mortar stores from the data. Participant 7 stated, “People are now afraid to go out even when there is no lockdown. With online, you have the convenience of purchasing and paying remotely by card, and no physical contact is needed. This is reassuring to many people in such times of crisis when there is so much uncertainty”.

Furthermore, Participant 6 also stated that “What I have seen, based on the trend charts of my company, is that more and more people are becoming worried about the pandemic and the possibility of getting the infection. So, they prefer to buy online rather than go to a store. We did see a sharp increase in the number of customers signing up on our website and buying grocery items”.

Participant 5 outlined, “Yes, there is an increase in the purchasing habits of people as more people use e-commerce. There are two reasons for that. One is the safety factor, and people are scared to go out and face the possibility of infection and quarantine. Moreover second, e-commerce companies have reassured people that they are following safety protocols to the highest degree. Contactless delivery is popular with our organization, and it has worked wonders for relaxing the minds of consumers. We have received feedback from happy customers saying that they are pleased with our services of no contact and cashless payments because, otherwise, they would find it difficult to buy things in this time”. This is also evident because e-commerce demand in the U.A.E. has rapidly increased [1].

### 4.2. Theme 2: Revisions in the U.A.E.’s E-Commerce Industry

#### 4.2.1. Reduced Delivery Charges

Data revealed that delivery charges had been reduced to help the community through the pandemic. For instance, Participant 4 stated, “We immediately started offering essential items like groceries and such at a highly reduced delivery price. We figured that reducing the delivery charge will benefit society because many people are undergoing financial pressures”. A similar response was received by Participants 6 and 9. Moreover, Participant 7 stated that “I think the biggest step we took was enhancing our express delivery because it is the one with the lowest delivery cost.” These changes that have been implemented are in line with theoretical insights, which suggest that firms need to match customer expectations during times of unprecedented change [61].

#### 4.2.2. Contactless Delivery

The organization also launched another initiative to keep its customers and staff safe by establishing a contactless delivery system. One of the participants, Participant 10, outlined, “I think all e-commerce stores across the globe have done this. We make sure that there is no physical contact between the delivery team and the customer. We have developed new software which allows our delivery guy to keep the delivery boxes at the door and send a quick photo to the customer showing them that their package has arrived. By doing this, we are ensuring that there is minimum contact and everyone is safe”. This initiative is in line with the common trend outlined by Al-Serkal [62], which suggests that no contact deliveries are one of the most common innovation initiatives that companies can adopt.

#### 4.2.3. Encouraging More Cashless Payments

In addition to the above initiatives, it is also ensured that more cashless payments are being made. The organization achieved this by applying an additional fee to the cash-on-delivery option, thereby going cashless. Participant 2, for instance, stated that “We have put a payment on the cash on delivery option because we want to avoid any exchange of cash as infections can come from anywhere. This has created a change in our accounting processes, of course, but it is beneficial to everyone in the long term”. This initiative has been outlined as being one of the most significant shifts that have taken place from the pre-COVID scenario, where cash was preferred [4].

### 4.3. Theme 3: Innovation for Effective Radical Change Management

#### 4.3.1. Organizations Should Be Flexible and Responsive

The data suggests that there is a need for organizations to be flexible rather than rigid systems. Participant 4 stated that “What we used to consider before that organizations have to undergo a periodic change routine every four or five years or so has completely changed. Now we need to be more prepared for anything and any new crisis or change to occur. We have to stop thinking so rigidly and start being more flexible in our processes and mindset”. Besides, Participant 8 stated that “organizations are not your predictable systems anymore. Due to the pandemic, we have seen that organizations can be much more complex and flexible. We have staff working remotely, yet they are still part of the organization and help it function. So, when we start to think of organizations as being more flexible, then we can begin to leverage the changing environment”. In addition, Participant 2 stated that “See, we were initially not very keen on the grocery items. That was never our focus. Nevertheless, with the pandemic, we saw an opportunity to engage with groceries and help the people in lockdown and increase our profits and react to the market better. So that is why we launched the Daily application and ensured that we were providing speedy delivery for all the grocery items”. This follows the insights derived from Tsoukas and Chia [16], who stated that organizations need to continually change by constantly revising, reinterpreting, and re-producing their knowledge and competencies [16]. By doing so, incumbent organizations can implement a strategy-as-practice initiative that can allow for more practical knowledge management, organization structure, and capacity building [19], whereby they can quickly adapt to market changes.

#### 4.3.2. Organizations Should Manage Exploration and Exploitation with More Remarkable Finesse

The interview results outlined that organizations need to manage explorations and exploitations with more remarkable finesse. For instance, Participant 1 noted that “See, organizations are constantly trying to see and explore new things and new ways of doing business. One of the core aspects of this is that sometimes organizations only explore and do not use that information to change their internal processes or prepare for radical change. A common example is that brick-and-mortar stores should have immediately increased their online presence at the first sign of the pandemic or when it was still an epidemic. However, they did not react quickly enough, which led to their being shut down. On the other hand, I have also seen organizations that do not wait and explore. They implement too much, go all in, and sometimes result in a massive loss. The Dubai mall made one good move. We have recently partnered with Dubai mall and created virtual stores for them where the retailers of Dubai mall will be able to sell online. It removes the hassle of going to the mall in this pandemic”. Moreover, another participant, Participant 6, added, “See, we saw that there was an increased interest in consumers concerning daily products, so we immediately launched Daily within our existing app. After seeing the success of Daily, we immediately thought of launching a dedicated application that only caters to groceries and home products. So, we immediately launched Now Now. The good thing about Now Now is that there is a maximum 60 min delivery, so we connect the consumer with supermarkets quickly. To be honest, it has been a huge success. So really, it is important to capitalize on such exploitation of opportunities that arise and can arise anytime”. This insight is consistent with the insights outlined in March [38] that proper innovation management means that companies create an equilibrium of exploration and exploitation, leading to organizational stability and success.

#### 4.3.3. Innovation Management Is More Than Just Changing Processes

It was observed that participants believed that innovation is not just a product that can be implemented but rather a process. For instance, Participant 5 noted, “There is a general dialogue that thinks of innovation as a thing that needs to be implemented, and that’s it. It is much more nuanced and complex than that. It is an ongoing process, and until

organizations adopt that thinking, that they need always to be managing innovation, they can never successfully reap the benefits of radical change". On the other hand, Participant 10 stated that "there are many companies that don't engage in continuous change and management of innovation in the form of a process such that they are often replaced by businesses that do. Since these organizations don't consider innovation management as a continuous process, they also have the risk of allocating inappropriate resources to the change process". This is in line with Ferrary (2011), who has stated that innovation management is an interactive life cycle and a continual process. Furthermore, past research has found that many organizations have struggled to perceive and take advantage of transformative technologies until new business offers are replaced, primarily because of internal beliefs and incorrect assumptions about innovation management's dynamic nature [33].

#### 4.3.4. It Is Important Not to Dismiss Traditional Operational Models and Apply Them to Current Scenarios

The data also revealed that some participants believed that it is crucial not to dismiss traditional operational models and apply them to current scenarios. For instance, Participant 3 stated that "large organizations usually have traditional operations models, so it is not feasible to change everything overnight. What can be done instead is that the organization can leverage the present chaos and generate a greater competitive advantage. Their current structures and institutions usually work to hinder the process of innovation. What companies can do is to ensure that their old ways of working are being used to generate new value in the face of rapid change".

In addition, Participant 6 stated, "It is designed to create innovative ways of managing business processes that lead organizations to organize revolutionary creativity within an enterprise. It argues that rigid organizational structures and management layers and the near-term performance are obstacles for large companies trying to introduce creativity and transformation. The study argues that these corporate structures and routines impede the creation of transformative innovation in incumbent organizations". This follows from a practice-based view whereby the use of old systems to generate new value was not clearly understood in past research [47,48].

## 5. Conclusions

In the U.A.E., during the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the most significant transformations in consumer behavior were witnessed in the form of a higher demand for e-commerce rather than traditional brick-and-mortar stores. One of the core changes in the e-commerce industry during the COVID-19 pandemic is that consumers began relying excessively on e-commerce. Consumers are now making more responsible purchases due to a reduced disposable income and are prioritizing more home and daily use products. Furthermore, consumers across the U.A.E. prefer cashless payment options and no-contact deliveries due to their perceived safety in preventing infections, which have been launched by the organization under study.

The pandemic that began in the first trimester of 2020 has resulted in numerous chaotic situations that corporations have to accommodate. Many retailers have responded to the exigency immediately by designing effective interventions. Though many studies have focused on the preference of online shoppers, there were no significant efforts to discuss the efforts put in by retailers, especially in the Middle Eastern kingdom of the United Arab Emirates. Our study is such an attempt. To bridge the gap in this domain, we have carried out a study that explores innovative interventions adopted by retail chains in U.A.E. The initial part of our study presented a detailed review of the existing literature that helped gain multidirectional insights about unique components that have allowed for online retailers and their innovation behavior. The study helped identify the need to develop a holistic approach to digital instability readiness to switch to online shopping and

a higher-quality customer experience. A qualitative approach was followed for this study, and the respondents were senior-level executives of leading retail chains.

The gradual adaptation of technology during the pandemic will likely lead to an acceptance and the development of newly developed systems as it poses higher sustainability in the e-commerce industry. A huge demand has created several new ways to make easy payments, and efficient delivery systems are likely to develop in the long run, including better ways of exploring the sustainability of drone-based delivery development systems. Digital wallet payment systems have attracted several payers to transact through their mobile phones due to time-saving, account security, global payments, creation of transaction records, and contact-free transactions. Additionally, with the picking up of social media transactions, such as WhatsApp pay, WeChat pay, etc., online payments are being made more accessible. Various stakeholders such as payment companies, banks, and fintech companies are collaborating to bring the new technologies into action. Nevertheless, the issue can be easy or complicated based upon how regulators perceive payment through new digital currencies such as Bitcoin.

When such radical changes emerge, leading organizations are advised to seize the initiative and use the resultant chaos to preserve their competitive advantages. Using data obtained from 10 semi-structured interviews, the following themes were identified: customers are making more responsible purchases; massive reliance on e-commerce; reduced delivery charges; no contact delivery; encouraging more cashless payments; organizations should be flexible and responsive; organizations should manage exploration and exploitation with more remarkable finesse; innovation management is more than just changing processes; it is important not to dismiss traditional operational models and apply them to current scenarios.

The present study conveys findings identical to those from earlier works carried out by researchers in this field and helps to reinforce the view that the ongoing COVID situation is marked by an increase in online orders for goods and services. This has resulted in a significant decrease in non-essential spending, thereby reducing their exposure to risk [63,64]. The study also helped to recognise that three key elements that every consumer is conscious of during this pandemic era are price, easy availability, and convenience in making the purchase [65]. The study also provides the cue that online purchase options have reduced impulse purchases and have resulted in improved planned investments, a finding similar to the work carried out by Eger [66].

The most important finding that evolved from the study is that the quantum of hours spent in digital space has considerably increased in self-isolation mode, significantly reducing the cost of gaining new customers. The above findings help us conclude that innovative retailers should utilize this insight and improve the content of their website, invest time opening their social network accounts, regularly updating their profiles, and allocate a fair amount for digital marketing in their annual budget.

Our study bolsters the finding that information-technology-centered tools (I.C.T.) and strategies can help create a positive perception of retail houses as more innovative and sustainable in the consumer mindset. As presented in work carried out, retail chains should leverage I.C.T. to accelerate the creative process further. In addition to the findings from our studies, the existing literature also highlights that companies that have an innovation focus tend to adopt ICT-based applications in their business models.

Our study has demonstrated the constructive relationship between I.C.T. and innovation, which reinforces the need for a greater degree of support from retail industry managers to make a substantial digital marketing investment.

A key implication from our study is that businesses should utilize this isolated period for nurturing online relationships with stakeholders and customizing their digital marketing applications and tools. Such a move will help develop a highly committed customer base and a strong reputation in the marketplace that gives a sustainable edge in the long run. As the uncertainty has also forced more businesses to flourish, together with the e-commerce industry, technological companies also developed and improved delivery apps

(a contactless service model is well adopted). Moreover, software companies can conduct effective trade through business-to-business models. The pandemic has increased the chances of software companies scaling up system sales. Furthermore, the hardware market has taken off with the introduction of new hardware tools. Overall, with the flourishing of innovative business, the new market potential is realized. This has thus given birth to a new digital era that has a higher potential to develop social well-being that further contributes to economic development activities.

One of the study's primary limitations was that there was only one methodology adopted due to the study's limited scope. The current research does not discuss all formats of retail and innovative practices adopted in them; hence it would be worthwhile to carry out studies by considering other forms of retail. Our study considered only the managerial perspective. Future studies can include socio-demographic moderating variables, such as respondents' age, level of education, designation, and experience. This study lacks a customer perspective towards innovative practices followed by a retail chain, which adds more value. The difference in the perception of consumers and managers, which would have occurred due to dissimilarities in their lifestyle, nationality, and objectives, would have also added value to our study. Our future researchers will adopt a mixed-method approach to outline the causality of the research and understand whether there is a statistically significant relationship between successful change and innovation management.

In terms of the practical recommendations, with rapid changes occurring in market and consumer behavior, e-commerce organizations are urged to adopt the mindset that their organizations are not a set of rigid systems but rather a continuously evolving process. Practitioners also need to ensure that, rather than revamping the organization and developing new ways of working, they are leveraging traditional ways of doing business and innovatively applying them to their organization. Finally, practitioners should ensure that innovation management is considered a never-ending and long-term process.

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