

The Role of Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Countering Rumors in Non-Profit Organizations in Northwest Syria

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Abstract— Non-profit organizations (NPOs) in Northwest Syria operate under exceptionally harsh conditions that frequently restrict their ability to serve all individuals in need. This resource-demand gap often cultivates a sense of perceived injustice among the population, serving as a catalyst for the fabrication and dissemination of rumors. These rumors—circulated through social gatherings and digital platforms—often characterize NPOs as exploitative, politically motivated, or intelligence-affiliated, thereby jeopardizing their credibility with donors and stakeholders. This research investigates the role of Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOMM), or "Praise Marketing," as an innovative mechanism to counter these phenomena. Utilizing a descriptive-analytical approach, the study evaluates a theoretical framework alongside an empirical study of a random sample ($n=429$) of residents in Northwest Syria. The results indicate that WOMM significantly bolsters organizational immunity against rumors. The study concludes that NPOs should systematically adopt seeding strategies and digital crisis communication platforms to safeguard their humanitarian reputation and ensure organizational sustainability.

Keywords— Rumors, Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOMM), Low Degree Seeding Strategy, High Degree Seeding Strategy, Non-profit Organizations.

I. Introduction

The population of Northwest Syria has endured a protracted humanitarian crisis characterized by indiscriminate shelling and profound security instability. Amidst this devastation, local and international NPOs have become the primary lifelines for health, food, and relief services. Despite the high risks faced by humanitarian workers, including loss of life—these organizations are frequently met with public skepticism. Accusations often label NPOs as "political entities in humanitarian clothing" or intelligence fronts, leading to the "weaving" of stories that damage their image regardless of their actual service delivery or stated goals.

This research falls within the framework of attempts to understand the reality of the phenomenon of the spread of rumors, its sources and its impact on the performance of charitable/non-profit organizations in northern Syria, and ways to confront it through a marketing method called praise marketing through the cooperation of beneficiaries with these organizations.

We refer that "The terms 'word-of-mouth marketing' and 'praise marketing' will be used interchangeably."

II. Research Methodology

Research problem

Non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria face very harsh working conditions that make them unable to target all those affected and in need of their services, due to their increasing numbers and increasing needs. Which makes a large number of them feel unfair in benefiting from the services of these organizations. This feeling contributes to weaving rumours about these organizations and spreading them among themselves, whether during their sessions and dialogues or through their interactions using social media, to the point that some consider them exploitative organizations. Which affects its credibility before various stakeholders, especially those who fund it. Which in turn affects its sustainability and continuity, if it is not possible to find innovative mechanisms to confront this phenomenon.

This case sparked in the researcher's mind the following question: Does the use of charitable/non-profit organizations for marketing with praise contribute to confronting the rumours that are hatched against them?

- **Research objectives:**

The researcher aspires for this research to contribute to achieving the following goals:

- Drawing the attention of charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria to the existence of a problem accompanying their humanitarian and charitable work; Represented by weak community confidence (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, local councils...); Which makes them spin rumours around her.
- Monitoring the actual reality of the phenomenon of spreading rumours about charitable/non-profit organizations, analyzing them and their spread, and highlighting their most important causes.
- Testing the importance of using marketing with praise, in protecting charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria from rumours; This preserves its reputation and human image and increases the chances of its sustainability.
- Motivating charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria to search for innovative mechanisms to confront the rumours they face and reduce them as much as possible.

- **Research Importance**

The importance of this research lies in the following:

1) This research is pioneering in addressing the following aspects:

- a. The phenomenon of spreading rumours about charitable/non-profit organizations and their spread in society.
- b. Praise marketing in non-profit organizations.
- c. Charitable/non-profit organizations use praise marketing to protect them from rumours.

2) This research contributes to shedding light on a realistic problem faced by charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria and suggests mechanisms for treating it using one of the modern marketing methods that business organizations use to improve their image in front of their customers.

- **Research hypotheses**

First hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences in the phenomenon of weaving and spreading rumours about charitable/non-profit organizations according to the demographic characteristics of the target community.

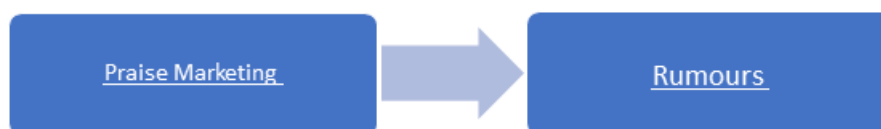
Second hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences in the use of praise marketing by charitable/non-profit organizations and the demographic characteristics of the target community.

Third hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between the use of charitable/non-profit organizations for praise marketing and the increased immunity of these organizations against rumours. Or in other words, charitable/non-profit organizations' use of praise marketing helps protect them from rumours.

- **Research Model**

The relationship will be observed between the independent variable "marketing with praise" and its role with the dependent variable, which is "confronting rumours."

The model can be shown in the following figure:



- **Research limitations**

This research was conducted in 2024 in the regions of northern Syria, which includes Idlib Governorate and the western and northern Aleppo countryside.

- **Difficulties faced by the researchers**

- a. The failure of some sample members to adapt to the culture of the questionnaire. Which made some of them refrain from filling out the questionnaire.
- b. The lack of references that dealt with this type of studies, whether Arabic or foreign.
- c. The lack of official statistics on

charitable/non-profit organizations and their activities in northern Syria.

- d. Difficulty in moving between the areas where the study population resides due to political instability.
- e. The scarcity of previous studies, and if they exist, they were limited to rumours alone on the one hand, or dealt with marketing by praising business organizations on the other hand.

- **Search terms**

Non-profit charitable organizations: Non-governmental legal or social entities established for the purpose of producing goods and services, but their legal status does not allow them to be a source of income, profit, or other forms of financial gain for the units that establish, supervise, or finance them. In practice, the productive activities of these organizations generate either surpluses or deficits, but the surpluses they achieve may not be appropriated by other institutional organizations [1].

Rumours: Information in the form of spontaneous or intentional statements, news, stories, or tweets that members of society pass on among themselves, without verifying its authenticity or veracity, in an effort to explain a mysterious issue that concerns these individuals. This issue may be of a commercial, political, military, or social nature.

Praise marketing in non-profit organizations: A concept related to marketing communications that relies on some stakeholders (beneficiaries, opinion holders...) to transfer information and ideas to the environment in which the non-profit organization operates using traditional and electronic means.

- **Previous studies**

In order to benefit from previous studies and research, the researcher reviews the most important studies related to the research topic, and has classified them into two sections:

A- Studies related to rumours:

1) Study (Kimmel, Allan J., 2008) entitled “Market Rumours and Consumer Behavior”. This study aimed to accurately understand the factors associated with the spread of rumours in the consumer market and their effects on consumer behavior through a survey of American, Spanish, and French consumers. The most important findings of the study are that consumers are more willing to transmit commercial rumours when their doubts about an issue of interest to them increase, and that they transmit rumours as part of their search for information that may contribute to clarifying their cognitive image regarding an issue of interest to them. Which reduces their doubts as much as possible [2].

2) A study (Gee-Woo Bock, 2011, Jong-Hyun Kim) entitled “Factors that affect the behavior of spreading rumours on the Internet”. This study aimed to understand the factors that affect an individual’s position regarding the spread of rumours on the Internet, and how these factors affect his behavior and his contribution to spreading rumours on the Internet. The researchers conducted an exploratory pilot study to investigate online rumours on students in South

Korea. The researchers found that the main factors that influence behavior related to spreading rumours online are based on theories and psychological and social factors. Beliefs affect emotions, whether positive or negative. In turn, emotions influence the attitude and behavior of spreading rumours online. Theory and practice [3].

3) A study (Al-Madani, 2017) entitled “The Role of Social Media Networks in Promoting Rumours among Saudi University Students”. This study aimed to identify the role of the social networking site “Twitter” in spreading rumours among Saudi university students. This study is a descriptive study that relies on the survey method. The field study was conducted on a sample of those exposed to the social networking site “Twitter” from Umm Al-Qura and King Abdulaziz Universities. The study found that there were statistically significant differences between the average scores of the respondents on a scale of their attitudes toward rumours according to the different universities (Umm al-Qura - King Abdul Aziz), as well as the existence of statistically significant differences between the average scores of the respondents on a scale of their attitudes toward rumours according to the different motives for exposure to Twitter[4].

B- Studies that dealt with marketing by praise or spoken word:

1) Study (Baius, 1985) entitled “Indirect Effects of Marketing Efforts Through Word of Mouth”. This study aimed to develop a new model for the indirect effects of spoken word on marketing efforts. One of the most important findings of the study is the integration of the influence of word-of-mouth marketing with the influence of other marketing efforts. The study found that spoken word marketing is part of the overall marketing system and that a large percentage of new customers are attracted using spoken word [5].

2) A study (Miroslav and others, 2010) entitled “Spoken Word Marketing is an Integrated Model”. The study focused on understanding how word-of-mouth marketing works, or informal conversations and recommendations, and how this type of marketing can be stimulated. The study analyzed the characteristics of informal conversations and recommendations (praise marketing) via the Internet and through traditional means, with the aim of arriving at an integrated model used as a tool for planning and motivating this type of marketing. The most important finding of the study is that sparing customers from disappointment and frustration by providing them with distinctive products and services is what enables them

to practice spoken word marketing in a positive way and avoids speaking in a negative way. The company can turn to the media, opinion leaders and online communities. The study also showed that the use of spoken word marketing varies depending on product characteristics and is more effective for electronic products and games [6].

3) Study (Suwaidan, 2005) by Suwaidan System entitled “The impact of the spoken word on purchasing decisions in terms of choice and brand loyalty.” This study aimed to study the effects of the spoken word on the consumer’s purchasing decisions related to his choice of a brand and his loyalty to it. The results of the study showed that there is a strong influence of the spoken word in changing consumers’ attitudes and opinions in most stages of decision-making, even the advanced stages [7].

C- Comment on previous studies and the most important features of the current study.

Despite the importance of the previous studies we reviewed; It is similar to the current study in several aspects, some of which are related to the difference in the environment in which the study is conducted, and some of which are related to the content of the study. However, the current study is distinguished from it in several aspects, the most important of which are:

1. Previous studies focused on one aspect, which is marketing by praise or rumours, while the current study focuses on both aspects.
2. Previous studies focused on companies or business organizations aiming to make a profit, or on society’s opinions regarding a social phenomenon such as exposure to social media. In contrast, the current study focuses on non-profit organizations.
3. Most of the previous studies were conducted in stable places and times, while the researcher is conducting his study in northern Syria during the period of crisis experienced by the residents of this region.

III. Theoretical Framework

1. Word-of-Melody Marketing

A. The Concept of Word-of-Melody Marketing:

Marketing literature contains many terms that encompass word-of-mouth marketing; some call it word-of-mouth marketing, recommendation marketing, or word-of-mouth marketing [19]. Below are some definitions of word-of-melody marketing provided by researchers:

- According to Arndt, 1967 the Word-of-Melody Marketing is a Personal communication between

a caller and a receiver, where the caller understands that they are not promoting the brand, product, or service [20].

- Also Lindberg-Repo; Gronroos, c, 1999, it's a type of unpaid promotion, written or verbal, where satisfied customers tell others about their satisfaction with a company or service [19].
- Others as Kotler, 2006 said that it's Personal communication about a specific product between buyers and groups such as friends, family members, and partners... [21]. But EAST & AI, 2008 said that Word-of-Melody Marketing is informal word-of-mouth advice passed among consumers about a brand, product, or service, usually quick, interactive, and lacking commercial motivation [22]. Then according to Chu, S.-C., and Kim, Y. , 2011 it was The exchange of marketing information among consumers [23]. Goyette & et al., 2010 , An action that a customer conveys to other customers through personal statements [24].
- WOMMA, website, Any action taken by an organization that causes a customer to praise it to others (offering advice and recommending it to others) [25]. Watts and Peretti, 2007, The dissemination of an idea or product...through a number of people so that they spread it among millions of people [26]. Totolji, 2007, The instigation of spontaneous conversation about a brand, leading to word-of-mouth communication [27].
- Swan J. E. and Oliver R. L, 1989, A state of customer satisfaction that leads them to talk about the services or features offered by organizations to others, creating a sense of enthusiasm for the product or service provided [28].

From the definitions in the table above, we can conclude that word-of-mouth marketing encompasses the activities or actions undertaken by an organization to encourage others (customers, beneficiaries, etc.) to recommend and praise its products, services, or brand. In the case of charitable/non-profit organizations, the researcher believes that word-of-mouth marketing includes activities undertaken by the non-profit organization to encourage others (beneficiaries, opinion leaders, etc.) to advocate for it and its humanitarian role.

B- The Importance of Word-of-Morning Marketing for Non-Profit Organizations:

Word-of-mercy marketing, or marketing through friends, stands out as one of the most powerful, influential, and widespread forms of marketing, and one of the least expensive compared to other methods. It is not just about advertising, promotion, and sales, but primarily about creating a mindset of trust and satisfaction among potential beneficiaries. This helps

to reduce and counter the spread of negative rumors about the organization. The importance of word-of-mercy marketing for non-profit organizations can be summarized in the following points:

- Word-of-mercy marketing is an effective way for non-profit organizations to advocate for themselves. It is based on a methodology of turning beneficiaries into advocates for the organization through their conversations and discussions, and disseminating accurate information about it within their family, social, and workplace circles. This increases trust between beneficiaries and organizations. One researcher considered that the principle of trust contributes to making the time a customer spends making a purchase decision much shorter than with other traditional advertising methods, because they are persuaded to buy the product or service based on their trust in the person who encouraged them to buy [29].
- Recommendation marketing influences consumer attitudes [30]. Individuals seek others' opinions before purchasing similar products because it can alleviate the anxiety often associated with buying.
- Recommendation marketing is one of the factors that helps non-profit organizations implement their work and projects more easily by increasing beneficiary acceptance and cooperation. This is because it contributes to establishing common ground through recommendations made by beneficiaries, opinion leaders, and others.
- Recommendation marketing helps counter rumors spread about non-profit organizations by increasing trust between the organization and the public through recommendations and advice from relatives and friends. This strengthens the organization's relationship with the public and fosters mutual understanding between the organization and beneficiaries.
- Recommendation marketing is particularly important because recommendations are shared among friends and relatives within the individual's social circle. Furthermore, the person conveying the recommendation is independent, as individuals believe it is difficult for the organization to control or manipulate them. Recommendation marketing helps create individuals who advocate for the organization in their conversations and discussions.
- Word-of-mouth marketing is a credible form of personal communication that involves offering advice and praise about an organization and its services. This influences the behavior of its audiences, whether the organization is for-profit or non-profit, because beneficiaries share the information they gained about the organization through their experience with others they trust [31]. In the case of charitable/non-profit

organizations, beneficiaries share their experiences with members of the community, shaping public opinion about the organization and influencing the decisions of its donors. Therefore, charitable/non-profit organizations should strive to ensure that the shared experiences are as positive as possible.

C. Word-of-mouth marketing in charitable/non-profit organizations in the internet age:

With the unprecedented development of the internet and social media, many organizations now rely on these platforms for word-of-mouth marketing due to their ease of use. Some of the most popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, among others. These platforms allow participants to discuss, debate, and comment on an organization, action, product, or service, or even showcase the non-profit organization's success stories and achievements, simply by typing and clicking. This comment can be viewed and commented on by millions of people from around the world. Today's consumer is eager to share their opinions, experiences, feelings, and expertise with the organizations, products, and services they like, and their opinions are considered more credible—and therefore more valuable—than traditional marketing communications such as advertising and direct mail. Word-of-mouth marketing has become a powerful and useful resource for both consumers and marketers, whether online or through face-to-face interaction. Businesses are increasingly aware that using electronic communication channels gives them a competitive edge because it changes consumer behavior and habits, such as information seeking and purchasing patterns. It can also be used to encourage others through corporate word-of-mouth marketing activities [32].

Compared to traditional communication channels, online word-of-mouth marketing is more trustworthy, credible, and cost-effective. This form of marketing is criticized for potentially contributing to chaos and spreading a negative image of the organization, especially among dissatisfied, hostile, or personally biased customers. Pareto argues that consumers have found the internet to be an easy and quick tool for obtaining information and comparing it with information from others [32]. Furthermore, consumers are no longer limited to obtaining information from friends and family; they can now access it from previously unknown individuals through online reviews and recommendations, thus adding a new dimension to online word-of-mouth marketing.

Despite the increasing importance of the internet in marketing, its use remains weak compared to face-to-face conversations. According to the Journal of Advertising Research, 75% of all consumer conversations about brands occur face-to-face, 15% by phone, and only 10% online. With the high daily usage of social media, marketers still cannot rely solely on online word-of-mouth marketing. Word-of-mouth marketing in the virtual environment is an extension of word-of-mouth marketing in the real world [33].

D. Reasons for the Increase in Praise Marketing: [34]

- Addressing the negative effects generated by other promotional tools such as advertising.
- When the advertising message reaches the target audience with some ambiguity and confusion.
- Traditional promotional tools are implemented by the organization itself, which leads some target audiences to question their credibility. Therefore, they try to assess the credibility of what they see and hear, resorting to seeking information from other sources, such as "friends' recommendations."
- Those who promote the organization through word-of-mouth marketing are external parties, not salespeople or distribution channels. In this case, they are relatives, work colleagues, or beneficiaries. Consequently, everything presented about the organization through them is believed.
- Those who promote the organization are external parties, not part of the organization's structure, who perform this task without salary or financial support, which positively impacts the organization.

E. Principles of praise marketing in non-profit organizations:

The foundations of word-of-word marketing in charitable/non-profit organizations are as follows:

- Creating a chain reaction that easily spreads among beneficiaries by establishing credibility in information about the non-profit organization's activities and relying on recommendations and praise, both traditionally face-to-face through social gatherings and virtually through various social media platforms and web services.
- Asking beneficiaries to write their comments and provide their opinions about the organization's services, noting that the main reason people don't write comments is that the organizations don't request them. For example, Air France sends an email to all its passengers after a flight to ask for their opinions, feelings,

and comments [35].

- Speed of dissemination and the ability to pass accurate information from person to person.
- Leveraging social media platforms as the largest gathering of people who are present and interact there [36].
- Word-of-word marketing plans should include an incentive, such as offering a gift or reward.

F. Praise marketing strategies in non-profit organizations:

Organizations are somewhat like living organisms, they must adapt to life, and some organizations have been able to adapt by focusing on current operations and adapting to the future, by improving their operational activities. Organizations realize that effective operational activities are those led by a clearly defined strategy [37]. Praise marketing involves seeding products to target groups of consumers with the aim of encouraging them to spread praise of the organization; Which increases brand perception and sales [38]. In this context, charitable/non-profit organizations that wish to benefit from praise marketing must take into account the development of special praise marketing strategies within the framework of the non-profit organization's general and marketing strategies. Praise marketing strategies can be classified into two main categories:

- **Low Degree Seeding Strategy:** This strategy means that the company identifies a specific group of customers, and motivates them through a group of offers, such as offering a product for free, or giving them discounts upon purchase. Then the company spreads, or as some call it, seeds these customers within a group of their friends or their own circle, to encourage the adoption of its product. Then these people encourage and motivate others to buy the product after they got it with discounted or even free offers, as seeing or hearing the word "free" greatly motivates customers to pay attention to the company's offers and advertisements. [39]. According to Sujanto, social media can be used to speed up marketing with praise, as the company can ask some of its satisfied customers to write their comments that serve as a testimonial or recommendation via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn [35]. For non-profit organizations, this strategy consists of identifying a specific group of beneficiaries and providing them with actual information about the organization's humanitarian activity, or introducing them to the organization's success stories. Or motivate them through specific offers, such as providing free services to them (information about the organization's activity...), then the organization

seeds these beneficiaries within a group of their friends or their private circle, to encourage them to spread the true image of the non-profit organization and its activity; Which enables them to have the tools to defend it. Some successful experiences may be selected and the beneficiary encouraged to narrate them through the organization's website or other communication sites, which serve as testimony from the actual executive reality of the non-profit organization or one of its projects. Seeing a testimonial on an organization's website provided by a real person represents a highly reliable advertisement [35].

- **High Degree Seeding Strategy:** This strategy is called high seeding because it requires greater participation and a high degree of participation from customers. The idea of this type depends on the company informing its customers of the presence of their friends on mailing lists in order to communicate with them, and then distributing advertising links from old customers to their new friends via the Internet and e-mail, so that discussions and conversations arise related to the company's product or service. For example, the number of subscribers to the "Skype" program reached 45 million subscribers after many downloaded the program due to recommendations from their friends; Which gained the company many potential customers [40]. This strategy for non-profit organizations consists of providing beneficiaries with actual information about the organization's activity and providing them with its success stories, and asking them to share this information and stories with their acquaintances and friends, whether during their meetings and dialogues, to encourage them to spread the true picture of the non-profit organization face to face or through various electronic social media.

2. The concept of rumors, their sources, and the motives for spreading them:

A- Rumors in general terms: Many expressions or definitions have been given regarding rumors.

According to (Alharithy,2001), it's Sayings, hadiths, news, and stories... that people pass around among themselves without verifying their truth or accuracy [8]. (Dayani. R & Others, 2016) , News that people pass around without the possibility of verifying its accuracy. The source of the rumor builds, shapes, and spreads it. There is also a recipient of the rumor and a publisher of it. The spread of rumors requires the recipient's desire to know and the existence of a motive and benefit for the owner of the rumor to spread it [10]. (Alsayed, 1997)A story that is passed on through personal contact, without a source confirming its authenticity, as it is a fabrication of an issue or news that has no basis in reality. This news

may be expressed by word, caricature, or joke. Rumors appear and spread at times when the desires and interests of the masses increase [12]. (Alfar, 2010), Information or news, whether oral or written, of uncertain origin, that appears to explain a situation shrouded in ambiguity as a result of the absence of accurate, objective and comprehensive news about a person, idea or thing such as an organization or company... [13]. (Alkiliani,2017), A vague or inaccurate report, story, or description passed on by members of the community through the spoken word, often rumors tend to spread during times of crisis in the community and always revolve around people or events that are of importance to the community in light of the availability of vague information about these people or events [14]. From the previous definitions we conclude the following:

- The rumor in general revolves around a conversation that people pass on among themselves about an issue that concerns them, about which they do not have complete and reliable information.
- Rumors spread about a specific event or issue; Which contributes to distorting and distorting this issue, and it may be woven around an incorrect hypothesis.
- Rumors are often irregular.
- Rumors may be transmitted intentionally or spontaneously.
- Rumors revolve around issues of concern to society and the public.
- Lack of information and ambiguity about an issue is the most important cause of rumours
- The spread of rumors increases, especially in times of crisis.

By reviewing the previous definitions, the researcher sees the common: "information in the form of spontaneous or intentional sayings, news, stories, or tweets that members of society transmit among themselves, without verifying its authenticity or veracity, in an effort to explain an interesting and mysterious issue that concerns these individuals. This issue may be of a commercial, political, military, or social nature...

B. Sources of Rumor Spread in Charitable/Non-Profit Organizations, Their Life Cycle, and Motives for Spreading Them

- **Sources of Rumor Spread in Non-Profit Organizations:** Various rumors about organizations spread through diverse sources, both internal and external. Internal sources are a primary source of rumors, as they are fabricated and disseminated by individuals working within the organization itself. These rumors are transmitted through official communication channels, if they exist, and unofficial channels,

which are the foundation. Rumors may arise from a new or undesirable behavior within the organizational community, or from personal animosity with individuals outside the organization, internal competition among members of the organization, or from individuals seeking power, even at the expense of the organization and its objectives. External sources include competing organizations, those who work with or for them, and anyone harboring resentment towards the organization or even its employees. These individuals not only spread negative information about the organization but also fabricate stories and false information about the organization and its products [15]. Rumors may also arise from negative experiences of some individuals or communities in specific areas with non-profit organizations. Dissatisfaction among beneficiaries often manifests as rumors and stories detailing their experiences with charitable/non-profit organizations [15].

- **The Lifecycle of Rumor Spread:** Researchers distinguish three stages of a rumor. The first stage involves constructing or weaving the central story. The second stage involves dissemination through various communication channels, some direct, transmitted through conversations, and others indirect, using media, communication platforms, and the internet. In the third stage, the story is circulated, transforming into entirely different versions and narratives, often embellished to increase interest [16].
- **Motives for Spreading Rumors:** The motives for creating and spreading rumors are numerous and varied. Some are intentional, while others are spontaneous. The person spreading the rumor may or may not be aware of the harm they are causing. Hence, the true Islamic faith has been keen to address this issue by emphasizing the impermissibility of transmitting information before verifying its truth. God Almighty says in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:6): “O you who have believed, if a disobedient person comes to you with a report, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.” According to researchers Fathi Akasha and Tawfiq Zaki, the motives of individuals to spread rumors, especially negative ones, are aggressive and directed against an individual or organization, with the aim of causing harm or extortion to obtain certain benefits. Some may seek a prestigious position among others by spreading a story or rumor that attracts attention. Some people's anticipation of something may lead them to fabricate and spread a rumor to share their expectations and gather information about it. Finally, the fabricator and spreader of a rumor may aim to encourage others

to share the burden by gaining their sympathy, which instills confidence and reassurance in them [16]. It is worth noting that recent studies have revealed that the internet and other emerging communication technologies are suitable channels for disseminating unverified information to the global public [17]. Finally, some point out that negative information attracts or draws more attention than positive information and has a greater impact on consumer decision-making [18].

C- Reactions of Rumor Recipients

People's reactions to rumors vary from person to person and from time to time. A person may receive a rumor while under emotional influence, leading them to believe it, even if it is illogical, in order to satisfy their emotions, especially if they lack information about the subject of the rumor. If the recipient possesses sufficient information about the rumor, they use this information analytically and realistically, enabling them to distinguish between facts and distortions that are incorporated into the rumor. This approach is used by people whose interests conflict with the rumor because they try to interpret it objectively, free from emotions and hasty reactions. Therefore, using this approach requires people with logical thinking, an open mind, realism, and high analytical skills. Finally, there are people who receive rumors without possessing a critical analytical mind, and at the same time, they are not emotionally affected by the rumors, especially when they are of no importance to them. Therefore, they receive and spread rumors carelessly, with no regard for accuracy. They may even forget some information or words and add them themselves, even if this leads to some distortion [16].

3. The Marketing Framework for Rumors, Recommendations, or Praise in Non-Profit Organizations:

As mentioned previously, some define a rumor within a commercial or marketing framework as a message, speech, or spoken words containing exaggerated information—often negative or rarely positive—about a particular product or matter of public interest. This leads people to share it among themselves during their conversations and interactions on their usual (in their everyday lives) and virtual social networks, without knowing or confirming the accuracy of this information [42].

Recent studies have revealed that the internet and other emerging communication technologies are suitable channels for disseminating unverified information to the global public [17]. Therefore, charitable/non-profit organizations must strive to

avoid, as much as possible, negative or ambiguous information regarding their humanitarian and charitable activities.

This is because such information can lead to the creation of narratives to explain the ambiguity and counter the misinformation spread by individuals. Studies have shown that an individual can pass on negative information to ten to fifteen people in their circle, who in turn pass it on to roughly the same number. This creates a snowball effect, turning the information into a social issue for the non-profit organization and impacting its sustainability [31].

Recommendation marketing involves an organization's efforts to motivate others (beneficiaries, opinion leaders, etc.) to advocate for it and its humanitarian role, thereby presenting its true image to the public. Researchers have found that positive experiences or information can be shared by an individual with an average of five acquaintances or friends.

Therefore, charitable and non-profit organizations must strive to provide honest and accurate information about their activities to the public and those they influence. Beneficiaries, opinion leaders, and other stakeholders are best positioned to convey information accurately to the public, thus mitigating the impact of misinformation.

IV. Methodological procedures of the study

A. Research Methodology and Data Collection Methods and Tools:

To address the research problem and achieve the research objectives, the researcher employed a descriptive-analytical approach. This approach involves examining phenomena and practices that are readily available for study and measurement, without the researcher's direct intervention. Instead, the researcher interacts with these phenomena through description and analysis [43].

Since the research is based on real-world experiences, the researcher described and analyzed the studied phenomenon using data obtained from secondary sources. These secondary sources, including books, journals, Arabic and foreign research and studies, and websites that addressed the topic directly or indirectly, served to construct the theoretical framework of the research. The primary sources relied on a questionnaire as the research tool.

The researcher designed the questionnaire according to the research objectives, using a five-point scale. The questionnaire encompassed all aspects of the research

problem and its hypotheses, particularly those related to dependent and independent variables such as rumors and praise marketing. The researcher reviewed the questionnaire with eight expert reviewers and revised it based on their feedback. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: the first dealt with demographic variables, the second with rumors, and the third and final section focused on marketing through praise. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the research sample to study the research topics and gather the necessary information. This information was then compiled and analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) statistical software. Statistical tests were used to obtain valuable insights and indicators that support the research findings.

B- Description of the Research Population and Sample:

The study population consists of Syrians living in villages, towns, and displacement camps throughout northern Syria. It includes both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of services provided by charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria, such as (but not limited to): Goal, Mercy Corps, Islamic Relief, Syria Relief, Adam Smith, Monitor, SRD, International Relief, Al-Ihsan Charity, Syria Charity, Takaful Al-Sham Charity, Al-Manahil, Al-Manal, etc. The researcher estimated their number at approximately 3,500,000.

C- Methodology and Data Collection Efficiency

As a full census was unfeasible due to high costs, time constraints, and logistical difficulties, a random sample was selected to represent the target population. A scientifically designed questionnaire was distributed to 450 residents and IDPs across rural and urban areas of Aleppo and Idlib (covering Atarib, Azaz, Afrin, Hazano, Sarmada, Al-Dana, Maarat Misrin, Harem, and Atme camps).

Of the 432 surveys retrieved (96% response rate), three were excluded during data cleaning, resulting in 429 questionnaires (95.3%) valid for final analysis. The study strictly maintained scientific standards, ethical protocols, and complete data confidentiality.

D- Validity and reliability of the study instrument:

The validity of the questionnaire refers to the extent to which it measures what it was designed to measure [45]. In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher relied on the validity of the reviewers, who are specialists in management, statistics, marketing, sociology, and scientific research methods, and who work in different universities.

The researcher modified the questionnaire based on their opinions. Questionnaire reliability refers to the degree of consistency, coherence, and continuity of the questionnaire in yielding the same results when used repeatedly and at different times. The reliability of the research instrument can be confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which ranges from 0 to 1.

It should be noted that confidence in the research instrument increases with increasing reliability [46]. The analysis showed that the values of Cronbach's alpha coefficients for verifying the reliability of the study questionnaire. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha for the Marketing by praise was according to demographic and personal variables:

0.68, the number of items 13 items, and for Immunity from rumors was 0.72, the number of items 8 items, this means that the Cronbach's alpha values range between 0.68 and 0.72, which is greater than 0.60.

E- Descriptive statistics for research variables

The following table presents descriptive statistical findings related to the independent variable— Praise Marketing —and the dependent variable—Rumors.

Distribution of the sample according to personal variables

The following table shows the distribution of the sample

Table 1. Distribution of the sample according to demographic and personal variables

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent%
Gender	Male	296	69%
	Female	133	31%
Age	30-22	193	45%
	31 and older	235	55%
Educational Level	Elementary	110	25.6%
	Secondary	300	70%
	University	19	4.4%
Marital Status	Married with children	254	59%
	Married	150	35%
	Single	25	6%
Current Employment	Employed	60	16%
	Worker	260	65%
	Farmer	60	16%
	Unemployed	5	3%

The table above reveals the following: The sample was distributed in varying proportions between males and females, with males comprising 69% and females 31%. This is understandable, as some women may be hesitant to answer questionnaires or speak with researchers.

Regarding age distribution, 45% of the sample were aged 22–30, while 55% were aged 31 and above, indicating relatively close proportions between the two age groups. In terms of educational level, 4.4% of the sample held a university degree, 70% held a secondary school diploma, and 25.6% had only a primary school education. Regarding occupation, employed

individuals represented 16% of the research sample, individuals working in ordinary jobs accounted for 60.6%, farmers represented 12.1%, and unemployed individuals constituted 15.2%.

Finally, with regard to marital status, 59% of the participants were married with children, 35% were married without children, and 6% were unmarried.

A. Mean and Standard Deviation of Questionnaire Items

The following table shows the mean and standard deviation for each item included in the study questionnaire

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Research Variables

The phrase	Mean	St.dev
First - Word of mouth Marketing		
1. Praise helps me better understand the work of the nonprofit organization.	4.060	0.658
2. Recommendations help me differentiate between various nonprofit organizations.	4.090	1.128
3. The advice provided offered different perspectives on nonprofits than those presented by other sources.	4.151	1.227
4. The advice and recommendations help reduce my criticism of the nonprofit organization.	4.636	0.783
5. I share positive experiences of nonprofits with others.	4.303	1.045
6. When I understand the work of the nonprofit organization, I don't believe everything said about it.	3.730	0.658
7. When I understand the work of the nonprofit organization, I defend it against others.	4.240	0.902
8. Explaining information about the work of the nonprofit organization helps change some people's views of it.	4.065	1.106
9. Explaining information about the work of the nonprofit organization helps reduce criticism of it.	4.079	1.117
10. Negative attitudes can be changed to positive ones through dialogue. 11. I sometimes use my time with friends to explain the positive role of the non-profit organization.	4.005	0.650
12. I use the internet and social media platforms to learn more about the work of the non-profit organization.	4.040	0.905
13. I use the internet and social media platforms to express a positive opinion about the work of the non-profit organization.	4.223	1.015
Scale as a Whole	4.090	1.128
Second – Rumors		
1. I seek information about the activities of the non-profit organization by sharing stories and news.	2.282	0.574
2. I spontaneously spread negative stories and news about the non-profit organization.	2.121	0.696
3. I make a point of spreading negative stories and news about the non-profit organization.	2.001	0.785
4. If I hear negative news about a non-profit organization, I pass it on to others without verifying it with the organization itself.	2.000	1.118
5. If I hear negative news about a non-profit organization, I pass it on to others without verifying it through friends.	1.727	0.839
6. If I hear negative news about a non-profit organization, I pass it on to others after verifying it online and through the media.	2.030	0.683
7. If I hear negative news about a non-profit organization, I pass it on exactly as I heard it.	2.262	0.574
8. I don't verify the accuracy of news about the nonprofit organization.	1.965	0.512
9. If I hear someone talking about the organization in a group, I tend to agree with that person.	2.090	1.155
10. I don't care what others say about the organization; it doesn't concern me.	2.255	0.695
11. My negative attitude toward the organization leads me to believe everything I hear about it without verifying it.	1.510	0.929
The overall scale	2.073	0.552

B. The following is evident from the preceding table:

- **Rumors and their Spread:** The respondents' attitudes towards the Rumor Phenomenon Scale did not reach a satisfactory level, with the overall mean of the scale items being (2.073) and a standard deviation of (0.552). The most understood and recognized statement by the respondents was: "I am looking for information about the activities of the non-profit organization by presenting some stories and news," with a mean of (2.282) and a standard deviation of (0.574). The statement that received the least attention from the study sample was: "My negative attitude towards the non-profit organization leads me to believe everything said about it without verifying it," with a mean of

(1.510) and a standard deviation of (0.939). The researcher found, through the set of questions directed to the research sample, that negative attitudes towards the organization do not necessarily lead an individual to believe everything that is detrimental to it. This means that an organization that employs praise marketing to some extent can protect itself from rumors or at least mitigate their impact.

- **Praise Marketing and its Effects:** The research sample's attitudes toward praise marketing for non-profit organizations were largely positive, with an overall mean score of 4.136 and a standard deviation of 0.672. The most recognized statement among the sample was: "Advice and recommendations help reduce my criticism of the non-profit organization," with a mean score of 4.363 and a standard deviation of

0.783.

The least recognized statement was: "When I understand the work of the non-profit organization, I don't believe what is said about it," with a mean score of 3.370 and a standard deviation of 0.658. Through questions posed to beneficiaries of charitable/non-profit organizations, it became clear that cooperation between them and the organization is possible. This cooperation involves conveying positive messages through recommendations or advice, thereby protecting the organization from rumors or mitigating their negative effects. This leads the researcher to conclude that this marketing approach can be particularly beneficial for organizations, especially during crises.

C. Testing the Research Hypotheses:

The researcher used a one-way ANOVA test to test the first two hypotheses, which relate to protecting non-profit organizations from rumors, based on Table 3. Rumor-making and its spread about charitable/non-profit organizations and demographic characteristics

Variable	Source	Average Square	F	P.value	Sig.
Gender	B. Groups	0.668	3.364	0.001	Significant
	W.Groups	0.050			
	Total				
Age	B. Groups	0.497	2.795	0.024	Significant
	W.Groups	0.178			
	Total				
Education	B. Groups	0.206	1.843	0.035	Significant
	W.Groups	0.244			
	Total				
Current Employment	B. Groups	1.067	1.558	0.190	Not Significant
	W.Groups	0.685			
	Total				
Marital Status	B. Groups	0.859	2.800	0.024	Significant
	W.Groups	0.307			
	Total				

The table above shows that there are statistically significant differences among respondents regarding the phenomenon of spreading rumors about charitable/non-profit organizations attributable to several demographic and personal variables. With respect to gender, the P-value was 0.001, which is statistically significant at the 5% significance level. Similarly, statistically significant differences were found according to age, with a P-value of 0.024, and according to educational level, with a P-value of 0.035. Marital status also showed statistically significant differences, with a P-value of 0.024. In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found according to the nature of respondents' work, as the P-value was 0.190, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. Based on the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA), the first hypothesis is therefore accepted, indicating that statistically significant

demographic and personal variables. Pearson's scale was used to measure the third hypothesis, which concerns the correlation between a non-profit organization's use of praise marketing and its protection from rumors.

Testing the first hypothesis

There are statistically significant differences in the phenomenon of rumor-making and its spread about charitable/non-profit organizations according to the demographic characteristics of the target community." In other words, "There are statistically significant differences between the phenomenon of rumor-making and its spread about charitable/non-profit organizations and the demographic characteristics of the sample." The following table shows the spread of rumors about charitable/non-profit organizations according to the demographic characteristics of the sample.

differences exist in the phenomenon of spreading rumors among the studied sample and, consequently, among members of the community regarding non-profit organizations. These differences can be attributed particularly to gender, age, marital status, and educational level, whereas the nature of respondents' work does not appear to produce statistically significant differences.

Testing the second hypothesis

"There are statistically significant differences in the use of praise marketing by charitable/non-profit organizations and the demographic characteristics of the target community." As shown in Table (7), praise marketing in charitable/non-profit organizations is categorized according to the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 4. Praise Marketing in Charitable/Non-Profit Organizations According to Demographic and Personal Characteristics

Variable	Source	Average Square	F	P.value	Sig.
Gender	B. Groups	0.221	1.104	0.391	Significant
	W.Groups	0.200			
	Total				
Age	B. Groups	0.208	0.765	0.622	Significant
	W.Groups	0.272			
	Total				
Education	B. Groups	0.585	4.271	0.003	Significant
	W.Groups	0.137			
	Total				
Current Employment	B. Groups	0.895	1.196	0.341	Not Significant
	W.Groups	0.748			
	Total				
Marital Status	B. Groups	0.277	0.562	0.779	Significant
	W.Groups	0.492			
	Total				

The table above reveals that there are generally no statistically significant differences among respondents regarding the impact of praise marketing in charitable/non-profit organizations attributable to most demographic and personal variables. Regarding gender, the P-value was 0.391, indicating no statistically significant differences at the 5% significance level. Similarly, no statistically significant differences were found according to age, with a P-value of 0.622, or according to the nature of respondents' work, with a P-value of 0.341. Marital status also showed no statistically significant differences, as the P-value was 0.779, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. In contrast, statistically significant differences were found according to educational level, with a P-value of 0.003, indicating that respondents' perceptions of the impact of praise marketing vary significantly according to their level of education. Based on the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA), the second hypothesis is therefore generally rejected. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences among the studied sample regarding the use and impact of praise marketing by charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria attributable to gender, age, nature of work, or marital status. However, statistically significant differences exist among respondents based on their educational level.

Testing the third hypothesis

There is a statistically significant relationship between the use of praise marketing by charitable/non-profit organizations and an increase in their immunity to rumors. In other words, the effective use of praise marketing can contribute to strengthening the ability of charitable/non-profit organizations to resist or mitigate the negative effects of rumors. To examine this relationship, Spearman's correlation coefficient was used, as it is one of the most common statistical methods for measuring the strength and direction of the relationship between two ordinal or categorical variables. The coefficient ranges numerically from 0 to 1 in terms of the strength of the relationship, where a value of 0 indicates the absence of a relationship and a value of 1 indicates a perfect correlation. The sign of the coefficient indicates the direction of the relationship, with a positive value representing a positive correlation and a negative value representing a negative correlation. In general, the greater the absolute value of the coefficient, the stronger the degree of association between the variables. The following table presents the results of the test examining the relationship between the use of praise marketing and the protection of non-profit organizations from rumors.

Table 5. Correlation Analysis between Praise Marketing and Protecting the Non-Profit Organization from Rumors

Variable:	Praise marketing (independent)
Protecting the organization from rumors (dependent)	0.782
Probability value (2-tailed)	0.000
Number of items in the sample	429

The table above shows that Spearman's correlation coefficient is 0.782, indicating a strong positive relationship between the use of praise marketing by for-profit organizations and their protection against rumors. This supports the third research hypothesis.

Result (3) Based on the correlation test results, we accept the third hypothesis: that there is a statistically significant relationship between the use of praise marketing by charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria and their protection against the fabrication and spread of rumors.

V. Discussion of the Study Results and Recommendations:

A- Discussion of Results:

Result (1):

There are statistically significant differences regarding the phenomenon of rumor fabrication and spread among the studied sample, attributable to demographic and personal characteristics, particularly gender, age, education level, and marital status. Conversely, there are no statistically significant differences according to the nature of the work.

The researcher attributes this result to the following reasons:

1. Suffered Women are more inclined to spread rumors than men, especially in our societies; Because they tend to think emotionally, they are more likely to spread rumors than men. This aligns with the study by Jong-Hyun and Gee-Woo, which highlighted the role of emotions in individuals' behavior and their dissemination of rumors online [3]. Furthermore, women in our societies spend less time outside the home, making them less likely to access information about non-profit organizations. Their knowledge of these organizations is often insufficient and vague, increasing their skepticism and speculation, which in turn contributes to the creation and spread of rumors about charitable/non-profit organizations, particularly relief organizations, as they search for information. This is consistent with Kimmel's study, which indicates that consumers are more willing to spread commercial rumors when their doubts about an issue of interest increase, all while seeking information [2].
2. The social status of older, unemployed individuals, especially those with high levels of education, makes them more susceptible to social and economic pressures from family and children, as well as psychological pressures, compared to others. Therefore, they are fertile ground for the creation and spread of rumors about charitable/non-profit organizations. This

aligns with the study by Jong-Hyun and Gee-Woo, which indicated that the spread of rumors online is based on psychological and social theories [3].

Result (2):

There are no statistically significant differences among the studied sample regarding the use of word-of-mouth marketing by charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria attributable to the variables of gender, age, nature of work, and marital status. However, there are differences among the sample members attributable to their level of education.

The researcher believes that word-of-mouth marketing helps the sample members obtain additional information through recommendations and advice, which helps them form a clearer vision of the organization and its activities. This is especially true since those who carry out word-of-mouth marketing efforts appear to be independent of the non-profit organization on the one hand, and friends or relatives of those they are advising on the other. This partially agrees with the study by Sweidan, which indicated that consumers can change their attitudes based on the influence of recommendations, praise, or word of mouth [7]. Conversely, there are differences among the sample members attributable to their level of education. The researcher attributes this difference to the fact that educated groups are often more able and fortunate to access information about non-profit organizations and compare them to other organizations, relying on various sources, especially official ones. Therefore, those with higher levels of education are less influenced by praise marketing and recommendations. Conversely, this group may be better able to communicate recommendations to other groups in a way that conveys the optimal and understandable message, in addition to being more persuasive.

Result (3):

There is a statistically significant relationship between the use of praise marketing by charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria and their ability to protect themselves from rumors, both in their creation and spread.

This result indicates the possibility of charitable/non-profit organizations using praise marketing to protect themselves, whether they use traditional or electronic methods. It provides them with accurate information, which reduces ambiguity and, consequently, complaints. This study aligns with Kimmel's study, as

reducing doubts and anxieties experienced by clients (consumers or beneficiaries) contributes to a clearer understanding of the organization for them [2]. This also aligns with Sweidan's study, which demonstrated that word-of-mouth marketing changes consumer attitudes and opinions regarding the purchasing process [7]. However, this change must be accompanied by fulfilling the promises made by the organization to its target audience and preventing disappointment. This requires that word-of-mouth marketing efforts be integrated with other marketing efforts, as indicated by Miroslav et al.'s study [6]. The researcher believes that word-of-mouth marketing and recommendations in charitable/non-profit organizations, particularly through beneficiaries sharing their experiences, contributes to forming a positive public opinion about the non-profit organization among members of the community. This opinion, in turn, influences the decisions of those funding these organizations.

B- Recommendations and Suggestions:

Based on the aforementioned findings, the researcher offers the following recommendations and suggestions to non-profit organizations:

- The study suggests that the administrations of charitable/non-profit organizations operating in northern Syria utilize word-of-mouth marketing to strengthen their reputation and protect themselves from rumors. This can be achieved by adopting low- and high-seeding strategies and relying on highly educated individuals or opinion leaders to convince community members of the importance of their cooperation with charitable/non-profit organizations and that these organizations aim to serve them.
- Building online groups that are supportive of and advocate for the non-profit organization through dedicated online platforms. These groups can defend the organization against rumors. These online platforms are used to evaluate the organization's work and to facilitate dialogue with clients [35].
- Giving greater prominence to success stories and achievements of the non-profit organization in word-of-mouth marketing.
- The study recommends giving women more attention in marketing activities and providing them with information about the nature of their work to ensure a positive attitude towards their services.
- The study suggests that charitable/non-profit organizations focus on word-of-mouth marketing using both traditional and electronic methods.
- Achieving positive results through word-of-mouth marketing depends on charitable/non-

profit organizations matching their words with actions. People tend to believe things initially, and if words are not matched by actions, their perception becomes negative, leading to the emergence and spread of rumors.

- Organizations should conduct more marketing research to determine the best way to address the negative impact of rumors on their performance and image.
- Establishing an official website to combat rumors by providing definitive information and facts that are not open to interpretation, debate, or exaggeration. This website should include a WhatsApp number, Messenger, or similar contact information for promptly responding to inquiries and complaints.

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