



Theoretical Review of the Effect of Covid-19 Pandemic on Global Market of Palestinian Medjool Dates

Khader M.I Zawahreh

Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Kuala Nerus Terengganu, Malaysia

*Corresponding author

Nor Ermawati Hussain

Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Kuala Nerus Terengganu, Malaysia

Noor Haslina Binti Mohamad Akhir

Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Kuala Nerus Terengganu, Malaysia

Abstract

This theoretical investigation addresses the intricate interplay between the Covid-19 pandemic and the global market for Palestinian Medjool dates. By synthesizing health and wellness theory with global trade theory, the study examines the multi-layered effects that reshaped market dynamics and consumer behavior. Health and wellness theory illuminate the paradigm shift in consumer preferences triggered by increased health consciousness and driving Medjool dates as a symbol of nutritional wellness. Global trade theory deciphers the complex trade disruptions and regulatory changes triggered by the pandemic that created new challenges and opportunities for market access. Synthesizing these theories underscores the profound transformation of the Medjool date market—an interplay of health aspirations, trade complexities, and cultural influences. This report offers insights that enable stakeholders to navigate the evolving landscape with strategies that capitalize on growing health-conscious trends while adapting to the ever-changing dynamics of global trade. The findings shed light on the market's post-pandemic resilience and growth trajectory that is shaping the evolution of Medjool dates in the global arena.

Keywords

Covid-19, Global Market, Palestinian, Medjool Dates

1. Introduction

Palestine's economic status is closely intertwined with its political stability, which is often measured by the yardstick of the intifada. In the years following 2000, there have been several negative impacts on the Palestinian economy, including dependency, business closures, lower tax revenues, and disruption of labor flows (Ragab, & Saad, 2023). These challenges are exacerbated by higher transaction costs, market imperfections that exert pressure, and ineffective strategies to combat competition (Mustafa, et al., 2022). An Oslo agreement between Palestine and Israel established a system of offsetting import duties, but this has led to budget deficits in the country. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine has caused significant damage, as evidenced by the occupation of 150,000 Palestinian jobs in Israel, resulting in significant losses of \$800 million, mainly through taxes (Fraihat, 2022). However, in the midst of this complex situation, a significant development occurred in 2020: 90% of raw materials originating from Palestine are processed into finished products in Israel, resulting in export revenues of \$600 million. Israel benefits from this arrangement as an end user, as the value of raw materials is below competitive market prices.

Consequently, entrepreneurs rely on foreign aid and government support and accept the undervaluation of resources. While the initial containment of the Covid 19 outbreak in 2020 was successful, subsequent waves have led to economic collapses in the country (Coccia, 2023). These waves brought political, security, and health risks and exacerbated the economic crisis due to limited fiscal space and the lack of a national currency. The resulting decline in

trade in 2020-2021 not only caused GDP to contract by 3.4%, but also led to an average contraction of 12% (Q1-Q3), highlighting the challenges in attracting private consumption and capital investment. This scenario reflects the economic impact of 2019, when the presence of HAMAS and other factors caused a contraction of 11.5% (Isaac & Abuaita, 2021). In addition, the global impact of the Covid 19 pandemic has affected various industries and businesses that are facing unprecedented disruptions. Among these affected industries is the global market for Palestinian Medjool dates, which is facing significant challenges as a result of the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, the market for Medjool dates faced difficulties, in part because products from the Jordan Valley were labeled as Israeli products, depriving the Palestinian economy of revenue (Ravitz et al., 2022). This situation hampered health care and sustainable production efforts in Palestine, which had been struggling to rebuild its economy after years of instability (Morrar, & Baba, 2022). The Covid 19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges and severely affected Medjool date producers. In Palestine, home to 5.2 million people, the pandemic caused more than 351,809 cases and 3,720 deaths by March 2022 (Baidoun, & Salem, 2023). This figure highlights the devastating regional impact that is significantly affecting the global market for Palestinian Medjool dates. A key challenge for the industry is the disruption of global supply chains due to travel restrictions and border closures, which impede the transportation of products and result in significant lost sales. In addition, there is a problem with labeling: 75% of exports from the Jordan Valley are mislabeled as Israeli products. This results in Israel taking over \$181 million from Medjool date exports that were supposed to benefit the Palestinian economy (Fergusson, 2023). The pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, as demand for Medjool dates has plummeted due to market closures, declining tourism, and weakened consumer purchasing power. As a result, Palestinian farmers have had difficulty selling their produce and have suffered significant income losses. The Covid-19 outbreak also affected the health and safety of workers in the Palestinian medjool date sector, making safety precautions and social distancing in the fields and processing plants a challenge (Haidar & Titi, 2021).

Employees were exposed to health risks that resulted in illness or inability to work due to quarantine regulations. The impact of the pandemic on the Palestinian medjool date market raises critical questions about its long- and short-term impact on farmers and markets (Balatia, et al., 2023). Exploring alternatives, including government initiatives and policies to promote Medjool date production, can shed light on the contrasts between existing markets and the limited export market for Palestinian Medjool dates. Amidst these challenges, Palestine is struggling with closures due to vaccination, with economic revitalization encouraged by financial support and investment from the United States. The division between Gaza and the West Bank puts additional strain on the supply of Medjool dates. Through a theoretical review of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the world market for Palestinian medjool dates, this research aims to unearth insights that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between a region's economic dependencies, geopolitical factors, and external shocks. The study addresses aspects such as supply chain disruptions, changing consumer preferences, export problems, and the overall impact on the Palestinian economy. Through a theoretical inquiry, this study seeks to shed light on the intricate interdependencies shaping the global market for Palestinian medjool dates amidst a rapidly evolving landscape.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Date-Palm in Palestine

Covering an area of approximately 365 square kilometers, the Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated regions in the world and is home to approximately 2.0 million people, representing only 1.35% of Palestine's total land area of 27,009 square kilometers (Alemayehu, 2023). With a length of 41 kilometers and a width of 6 to 12 kilometers, Gaza has a semi-arid Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and cold, wet winters (Yaacobi, et al., 2023). Temperature varies from a daily mean of 25°C in summer to 13°C in winter, with daily highs ranging from 29°C in summer to 17°C in winter and lows ranging from 21°C in summer to 9°C in winter (Ndanduleni, et al., 2023). Humidity, an important climatic factor, shows seasonal variations in Gaza. In summer, daily relative humidity ranges from 65% during the day to 85% at night and drops slightly to 60-80% in winter (Gupta, et al., 2023). These conditions, combined with the high population density in the region, pose special challenges to the inhabitants and the environment, which include water scarcity and its resulting consequences. The percentage of water suitable for consumption is less than 4%, due to over-extraction of coastal groundwater, untreated sewage, and saltwater intrusion (World Bank, 2018). The agricultural sector, a cornerstone of Gaza's economy, faces a number of challenges. Water scarcity, soil degradation, and the effects of climate change hinder agricultural practices (FAO, 2020). Urban planning and housing are also reaching their limits, resulting in overcrowding, insufficient housing, and inadequate infrastructure (UN -Habitat, 2020). Under this strain, Gaza residents are managing to maintain their resilience and adaptive capacity. Initiatives to improve climate resilience, sustainable agriculture, and resource management, such as solar energy systems, rainwater harvesting, and wastewater treatment facilities, demonstrate the community's ability to withstand the challenges (UNDP, 2021).

In the broader context of the Palestinian territories, which cover 602,351 hectares, the West Bank occupies 94% (566,082 ha), while the remaining 6% (36,269 ha) constitute the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2011). In 2005, 63% of the approximately 3.8 million Palestinians lived in the West Bank, with the remainder living in the Gaza Strip (ARIJ, 2007; PCBS, 2006). Agriculture occupies a central role, accounting for 30.5% (97,517 ha) of Palestinian cultivated land and 54.4% of cultivable land. The majority (92.1%) is located in the West Bank, with the remainder (7.9%) in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2010). This cultivable land is primarily used for rainfed agriculture (87.0%), with the remainder (13.0%)

irrigated. Of the total agricultural land, 91,155 hectares are devoted to the cultivation of fruit trees, vegetables, and field crops. While 82,630 hectares are in the West Bank, 8,525 hectares are in the Gaza Strip. This diversity reflects the ability of the Mediterranean climate to support cultivation throughout the year. This sector includes eight different ecological zones, each with unique characteristics and cultivation opportunities. Zones in the West Bank include the south, Jordan Valley, center, northeast and northwest, while zones in the Gaza Strip include the north, center and south. Among crops, vegetables have the highest value, followed by olives and grapes. Although dates have a lower production volume, their higher value shows an increasing shift to date cultivation, especially in the West Bank. Although the Palestinian agricultural sector plays an important socioeconomic role, it faces many obstacles. These include water scarcity, land degradation, political constraints, climate change, and regional instability (World Bank, 2018; FAO, 2020).

However, despite the challenges, the resilience of the sector stands out. Initiatives to promote water efficiency, organic agriculture, and higher value crops underscore the commitment to sustainable practices (FAO, 2018). In essence, the Palestinian agricultural landscape, with its diverse challenges and ongoing resilience, embodies a continuous journey of adaptation and innovation that has shaped not only the local economy but also the broader history of the Palestinian people.

2.2 Obstacles Faced by Date Palm Cultivation in Palestine

Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) cultivation holds profound significance in Palestine, mirroring its importance in the broader Middle East and North Africa. Yet, sustaining this ancient practice confronts a spectrum of hurdles, encompassing environmental factors, pest invasions, socio-economic dynamics, and political instability. Water scarcity is a dominant concern due to erratic rainfall and rapid evaporation, a challenge intensified by date palms' significant water demands. Employing efficient water management methods, including modern irrigation systems and water-saving techniques, proves pivotal for sector viability (Jarrar, et al., 2023). The scourge of pests and diseases, particularly the Red Palm Weevil (RPW), compounds challenges. RPW infestations bear significant costs and complexities, necessitating research into resilient cultivars and effective pest management approaches (Khudair, 2023). High production costs escalate difficulties. Expenses tied to planting, maintenance, harvesting, pest control, irrigation, and labor strain financial viability. Weak marketing infrastructure and limited financial access undermine fair remuneration and hinder technology adoption (Althalathini, & Tlaiss, 2023). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict injects further complexity. Disruptions from military actions, land access restrictions, and water usage curbs hamper Palestinian farmers. This uncertainty discourages long-term investments in the sector (Khan, et al., 2023).

Climate change emerges as a pervasive concern, amplifying water scarcity, modifying pest patterns, and impairing crop output. Addressing these transformations necessitates substantial investment in research, development, and infrastructure, a challenge compounded by economic and political constraints (Sezer, 2023). Concluding, the journey of date palm cultivation in Palestine navigates a labyrinth of obstacles. However, through cohesive actions encompassing sustainable practices, improved financial and marketing services, and conflict resolution, date palms can continue enriching Palestine's agriculture, contributing to its economic and ecological vitality.

2.3 The Markets for Medjool Dates in Palestine

The Medjool date, a highly prized variety of date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*), enjoys a worldwide reputation for its size, delicious taste and health-promoting properties. In Palestine, the Medjool date has assumed a central role within the agricultural spectrum, contributing significantly to the local economy, food security, and cultural identity. However, the Medjool date market in Palestine faces a number of challenges and opportunities that are shaping its path to growth and sustainability. The production of Medjool dates in Palestine has experienced an upsurge in recent years, mainly due to favorable climatic conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In addition, the increasing demand for this high-quality date variety, both domestically and internationally, has played a crucial role in fostering this growth (Elhoumaizi, et al., 2023). Medjool dates are harvested in late summer and early autumn, providing an important source of income for farmers during this period. Domestically, Medjool dates have special significance during Ramadan and other religious and cultural festivals, when they are traditionally served on the table as a means of breaking the fast.

In addition, the health benefits attributed to dates, including their rich nutritional composition and high fiber content, have led to a burgeoning trend toward year-round consumption as part of a healthy diet (Alam, et al., 2023). Beyond the borders, international demand for Palestinian Medjool dates has increased, particularly in Europe, North America, and selected Asian regions. This market expansion has been facilitated by trade agreements and concerted marketing initiatives that highlight the superior quality and authenticity of Palestinian dates. Nevertheless, the export of dates from Palestine faces significant barriers due to trade restrictions and logistical obstacles resulting from the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Peddie, 2023). Another major challenge stems from competition with other date-producing countries, particularly Israel, Tunisia, and the United States, which are world leaders in Medjool date production. These countries have advanced production technologies, robust marketing capabilities, and favorable trade agreements that collectively enable them to dominate the global market for Medjool dates (Fergusson, 2023). In addition, the consistent quality of Medjool dates remains vulnerable to a variety of factors including pest infestation, water scarcity, and climatic vagaries. Date palm cultivation in Palestine is threatened by obvious threats such as the weevil and Bayoud disease, which necessitates the adoption of sustainable and comprehensive pest management strategies to maintain the quality and productivity of Medjool dates (Ghazzawy, et al., 2023).

In terms of marketing, there are unexplored opportunities to increase the intrinsic value of Palestinian Medjool dates through clever branding, innovative packaging, and credible certifications. One opportunity to explore is highlighting the special attributes of Palestinian dates, such as their organic and fair-trade attributes, in conjunction with their close connection to the region's culturally rich history (Khalil, & Bani, 2023). In summary, the market for Medjool dates in Palestine is an area characterized by both challenges and prospects. While the cultivation of Medjool dates is associated with complex trade restrictions, political tensions, and fierce global competition, it also offers a wealth of opportunities for expansion and growth. The strategic fusion of sustainable agricultural practices, strategic marketing initiatives, and supportive policy frameworks holds the potential to ensure the invaluable contribution of Medjool date cultivation to the socioeconomic fabric of Palestinian communities in perpetuity.

2.4 The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Palestine

The first recorded case of COVID -19 in Palestine occurred on March 5, 2020. This prompted the Palestinian Authority Government (PAG) to declare a state of emergency and initiate containment measures. An immediate lockdown was imposed in Bethlehem, followed by similar measures in other West Bank governorates on March 22. These measures were aimed at restricting mobility and closing non-essential facilities in response to the escalating situation (Radwan, et al., 2023). By June 2, 2020, the reported total number of COVID -19 cases reached 630, with 5 fatalities, spanning Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Of note, 527 patients had already fully recovered. However, there were concerns about possible under-reporting of cases in Jerusalem under the Israeli occupation authorities, which could skew the data. Tensions and problems with data sharing between the IOA and the Palestinian Ministry of Health (PMOH) led to these uncertainties. Despite these problems, incidence and mortality rates in Palestine remained relatively low compared with neighboring countries (Alnatsheh, et al., 2023). The PAG, in collaboration with nongovernmental agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), played a central role in organizing the COVID -19 preparedness and response effort in the West Bank. Strict lockdown measures were implemented in urban areas, resulting in the closure of nonessential businesses, educational institutions, and religious sites, including mosques (Mahamid, et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the complex political and humanitarian landscape of Palestine significantly hampered the health system's ability to cope with a pandemic such as COVID-19. The existing humanitarian crisis, characterized by poor living conditions, deteriorating water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and a weakened health system, hindered the country's ability to effectively address COVID-19. The ongoing political unrest in Gaza and the geographic separation between Gaza and the West Bank added to the complexity of the situation and exacerbated the challenges and humanitarian conditions. Given the pre-existing humanitarian problems and high prevalence of non-communicable diseases in Palestine, the risk of spreading COVID -19 and exacerbating the disease burden was compounded. Vulnerable groups, including Palestinian refugees in overcrowded camps, socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals, prisoners, patients requiring immediate medical attention, and pregnant or lactating women, were at increased risk (Baidoun, & Salem, 2023).

The COVID -19 pandemic left deep scars in Palestine and touched various aspects of life. All aspects of health, society, and the economy, as well as politics, were affected, demonstrating the strength and fragility of the Palestinian people and their institutions. The Palestinian Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation responded together after the first instances of COVID -19 emerged in March of 2020. As the number of cases of the virus continued to rise, containment measures were implemented (Alashi, et al., 2023) despite limited resources and continuing political instability. However, the Palestinian health system already faced challenges in managing the rising number of illnesses due to the persistent burden of violence. The system struggled with shortages in hospital resources, medical staff, and protective equipment. In addition, vaccine introduction was challenging, influenced by logistical complexity, economic constraints, and political dynamics. Current data indicate that vaccination coverage remains low compared with many other countries (Al-Arja, 2023).

In addition to health impacts, socioeconomic impacts were also observed. Many Palestinian workers lost their jobs or suffered income losses, especially in sectors that were severely affected by the pandemic. Small businesses struggled in the face of restrictions and reduced demand (Veronese, et al., 2023). Education experienced significant disruption, as schools were often closed and converted to online learning, revealing a digital divide. The psychosocial impact of the pandemic on children and adolescents was also a concern (Agbaria, & Mokh, 2023). Meanwhile, preexisting vulnerabilities such as food insecurity and limited access to clean water and sanitation were exacerbated. Vulnerable groups, including refugees and the elderly, faced increased challenges (Itma, & Hussein, 2023). The pandemic shined a spotlight on the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the response. Restrictions on movement, limited access to resources, and the strain of the longstanding conflict exacerbated the challenges of coping with the pandemic (Abusalama, & Yahya, 2023). In summary, the COVID -19 pandemic profoundly affected Palestine, straining the country's health system, economy, and society and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. The pandemic underscored the need for resilience, international collaboration, and a comprehensive approach to health and well-being, and emphasized the importance of addressing the political and socioeconomic determinants of health.

2.5 Global Market of Palestinian Medjool Dates

The Medjool date has been dubbed the "king of dates" due to its immense size, luxurious texture, and mouthwatering sweetness. In recent years, Palestinian farmers have seen a tremendous increase in production of Medjool dates, making them a significant agricultural export. There is no denying the growing popularity of Palestinian Medjool dates around the

world, and the significance that their cultivation and export plays in the improvement of the Palestinian economy. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), there will be over a million date palms in the West Bank by 2020, with the majority being of the highly sought-after Medjool kind (PCBS, 2020). Thousands of acres are devoted to growing Medjool dates, primarily in the Jordan Valley, which has ideal weather conditions for the crop. The Palestinian agricultural authorities have evidently come to appreciate the monetary value and climate resistance of dates, as seen by the uptick in date farming. The global date market is worth more than \$9 billion at present and is expected to expand rapidly over the next few years (Elhoumaizi et al., 2023). The Medjool date variety stands out among others because of its superior taste and great market value on the global stage. Palestinian date farmers stand to benefit greatly from the rising global demand for their product. Many foreign markets now welcome Palestinian Medjool dates. Statistics from 2018 suggest that they are shipped to over 30 different countries; leading destinations include Jordan, the UAE, Turkey, and various European countries like Germany and the UK. Due to the high quality of Palestinian Medjool dates and the increasing demand for organic and healthful goods among European customers, this industry has been expanding rapidly in recent years. The European market's interest in both conventional and organically farmed dates is notable, as it provides Palestinian growers with new opportunities. The demand for halal and kosher foods is growing over the world, and Palestinian dates have found a place in that market. During Ramadan, when dates are customarily eaten to break the fast, the halal food market alone is predicted to expand to \$1.9 trillion by 2025, indicating a great opportunity for Palestinian dates (Peddie, 2023).

The Palestinian Medjool date sector is facing challenges on the international scene, despite its success and potential. Constant obstacles include the ongoing political strife, scarcity of essential land and water resources, and the issue of conforming to internationally recognised quality and safety standards. Additionally, possibilities for value addition and market diversification are hampered by the absence of processing and packaging facilities. Nonetheless, there are active attempts under way to conquer these challenges. Several projects are currently under way to raise standards for farming, boost output, and improve the taste of Palestinian Medjool dates. In addition, there are significant initiatives under way to ease entry into markets for Palestinian dates, especially in Europe. In conclusion, the global market offers promising prospects for Palestinian Medjool dates and provides significant opportunities for Palestinian farmers and exporters. The unique characteristics of Medjool dates and the increasing global demand for healthy and natural food products underscore the enormous potential for expansion in this sector. To fully realize this potential, concerted efforts are essential to overcome existing challenges and ensure the lasting vitality of this invaluable industry.

2.6 The COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on the Cultivation and Trade of Medjool Dates

The emergence of the global COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 ushered in far-reaching consequences that reverberated across various aspects of life, encompassing international trade and local economies. Within Palestine, a significant sector profoundly impacted by this crisis was the Medjool date industry. As a pivotal agricultural export of the region, the Medjool date market in Palestine encountered a series of formidable challenges as a result of the pandemic, encompassing disruptions in supply chains, scarcities in labor, and fluctuations in market demands. First and foremost, the intricate supply chain of Medjool dates bore the brunt of substantial disruptions due to the imposition of COVID-19 restrictions. The widespread lockdown measures implemented globally disrupted the transportation and export processes of these dates, leading to notable setbacks and impediments in reaching international markets (FAO, 2020). Export limitations and the deceleration of customs proceedings contributed to shipment delays and complexities in goods clearance, consequently elevating storage expenses and even contributing to instances of product spoilage. Simultaneously, the suspension of local markets stemming from containment protocols significantly curtailed the domestic sale of Medjool dates. Concurrently, the Medjool date industry confronted a significant dearth of labor, a pivotal workforce component. A considerable proportion of the labor force involved in Palestine's date sector consists of migrant or seasonal workers, yet the stringent travel limitations accompanying the pandemic substantially curtailed the accessibility of this labor pool. Furthermore, the necessity for adhering to social distancing guidelines translated into a diminished presence of workers in fields and processing facilities. The resultant effects included postponed harvests and escalated production costs, thereby potentially translating into elevated market prices for Medjool dates (World Bank, 2020). The pandemic-induced shifts in consumer behavior and market dynamics equally played a transformative role. The implementation of lockdown measures corresponded with an observable trend towards online shopping and home deliveries. While this paradigm shift presented an avenue for producers and retailers to establish direct connections with consumers, it simultaneously presented challenges for those unprepared to navigate the terrain of digital marketing and sales. Moreover, economic uncertainties cast a shadow on consumer spending patterns, leading to a contraction in demand for non-essential goods, including Medjool dates (OECD, 2020).

In response to these multifaceted challenges, Palestinian date producers embarked upon several adaptive strategies. These encompassed the implementation of health and safety protocols in farming and processing facilities to safeguard workers and mitigate viral transmission risks, investment in online platforms to foster direct consumer engagement, and diversification of market outreach to diminish reliance on export exclusivity. However, the continued viability of the Medjool date industry in Palestine necessitates further support. The government and international entities possess a pivotal role in offering financial assistance to pandemic-affected farmers, facilitating capacity enhancement in digital marketing and sales, and advocating for equitable trade regulations that streamline the export of Palestinian dates. In summation, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic posed formidable challenges to Palestine's Medjool date industry.

Yet, amid these adversities, the sector's resilience and adaptability shone through. The lessons gleaned from this crucible moment are poised to guide future strategies aimed at fortifying the industry's foundations and enhancing its capacity to endure and surmount analogous shocks in the years ahead.

3. Health and Wellness Theory

The landscape of consumer behavior and preferences was profoundly altered by the Covid 19 pandemic, with greater emphasis placed on personal health and wellness. Demand for Medjool dates appears to have increased, maybe as a result of its believed health-promoting effects, as people became more conscious of the significance of their immune system in protecting against infection and disease. Taking a look at this pattern through the lens of health and wellness theory can shed some light on why people are making the decisions they are. The need for a strong immune system has become more apparent in the wake of the epidemic, prompting a quest for vitamin-, mineral-, and antioxidant-rich foods that can help. Because of their high nutrient density, Medjool dates have recently gained attention as a possible "superfood" worthy of inclusion in a balanced, health-focused diet. The fibre, potassium, and antioxidant content of dates, including the popular Medjool variety, has been well-documented (Kalfopoulou, 2023). Vitamin B6, magnesium, and iron, all of which have been linked to improved immune function and general health (Tardy, et al., 2020), can be found in these nutritious fruits as well. Due to their high nutrient content, Medjool dates have become popular among health-conscious consumers in recent years. Medjool dates have been linked in promising research to a variety of health advantages. Vayalil (2012) published a study praising the antioxidant properties of dates, indicating they may have a role in reducing oxidative stress and inflammation. Al-Farsi et al. (2011) noted that dates have been linked to anti-inflammatory characteristics and their consumption may aid in cardiovascular health. Growing interest in Medjool dates parallels expansion in the overall health and wellness industry around the world. In the middle of the pandemic, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has stressed the need of eating well to strengthen the immune system (World Health Organisation, 2020). Consumers are increasingly drawn to natural and nutrient-rich products in the hopes that they would help strengthen their immune systems.

In addition, the rise of social media and health influencers has a major effect on consumers' beliefs and behaviours. Medjool dates have gained popularity among health-conscious shoppers thanks to the regular promotion of their nutritional benefits by politicians and influential people in the health industry. The popularity of dates mirrors the rise in popularity of plant-based and whole-food diets, which promote the eating of foods in their most natural and unaltered forms, such as those found in nature. Data from the marketplace corroborate an uptick in interest in Medjool dates during the pandemic. According to Grand View Research (2020), the worldwide date market will expand significantly as people seek for healthier food options. Increased consumer interest in health and wellbeing in response to the epidemic is responsible for at least some of this expansion. While health and wellness theory can provide light on consumer behaviour, it's crucial to remember that people's tastes and motives differ greatly. Consumers' views on the health advantages of Medjool dates may be influenced by factors such as cultural norms, individual experiences, and the availability of relevant information. In addition, more studies are required to determine whether or not eating Medjool dates has a direct impact on immunological function. In conclusion, the Covid 19 epidemic has caused a marked shift in consumer attention, leading to an increase in demand for natural and nutritious foods. Because of their high fibre content and other nutritious qualities, Medjool dates have gained popularity among health-conscious consumers. This shift in consumer behaviour can be better understood with the help of health and wellness theory. As people continue to prioritize the well-being of their immune systems, the development of the market for Medjool dates and similar nutritious foods will continue to increase.

4. Global Trade Theory

The theory of world trade provides a vantage point through which we can decipher the impact of international trade policy and international trade agreements on the realm of Palestinian medjool dates. Reverberations of disruptions in world trade, fluctuations in important export regulations, and the implementation of protection strategies can have a tangible impact on the availability and competitiveness of Medjool dates in the international market. In the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic, there was significant disruption to world trade. Governments around the world took a range of measures to contain the spread of the virus, including travel bans, border closures, and lockdowns (WTO, 2020). The profound impact of these measures affected international trade, disrupting supply chains, reducing opportunities for export, and leading to changes in import and export regulations. As a result, the dynamics of the Medjool dates market, positioned as an agricultural exporter, were irrevocably impacted by these global trade disruptions. Medjool dates' availability and competitive advantage in foreign markets are sensitive to shifts in import and export rules. In an effort to safeguard home industries and reduce perceived weaknesses, governments may establish new regulations or alter existing ones. Agricultural imports may be subject to higher tariffs, tougher sanitary and phytosanitary regulations, and more detailed labelling mandates in the future (Chishti et al., 2020). These shifts may reduce the competitiveness of exporters of Medjool dates in international markets. The market for Medjool dates might also be significantly affected by the introduction of protection policies. To shield native sectors from foreign competition, protectionism employs trade barriers like tariffs, quotas, and subsidies (Bown & Crowley, 2020). Protectionism is a strategy used by governments to safeguard their domestic industries and citizens' jobs when the economy is unstable. These restrictions may make it more

challenging for Palestinian date farmers to sell their wares in international markets. Additionally, the geopolitical climate and the outlines of trade agreements all play a role in moulding the Medjool date market. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and related political tensions have affected trade dynamics and market access for Palestinian goods, including Medjool dates (Al-Atrash & Hanieh, 2018). The contentious issue of labeling Medjool dates "Made in Israel" has cast a shadow over the visibility and marketability of Palestinian dates (Trottier et al., 2020). These variables have significant implications for the accessibility and competitiveness of Medjool dates in international trade. Recent trade conflicts and the progress of trade negotiations also have implications for global trade and, consequently, the market for Medjool dates. For example, ongoing trade tensions between the United States and China have led to tariffs and retaliation that have sown discord in trade channels (Bown, 2019). Reverberations from these disruptions may impact global trade in agricultural commodities, including Medjool dates, potentially affecting market dynamics and trade patterns. It's important to underscore that the impact of global trade disruptions and fluctuations in important export regulations isn't limited to Medjool dates. The entire fabric of global agricultural trade is indelibly affected by these developments. However, due to the particular geopolitical and economic backdrop surrounding the Palestinian Medjool date domain, the consequences of these disruptions may manifest themselves with greater intensity for Palestinian producers.

In summary, the theory of world trade serves as a compass to decipher the impact of international trade policies and agreements on Palestinian Medjool dates. The cadence of world trade disruptions, the ebb and flow of important export regulations, and the unfolding of protection strategies affect the accessibility and competitiveness of Medjool dates in international markets. This understanding is essential for Palestinian producers and policymakers as it facilitates navigation through the volatile global trade environment, removes trade barriers, and seeks ways to improve market entry for Medjool dates.

5. Conclusion

In the wake of the unprecedented Covid 19 pandemic, a comprehensive theoretical investigation has shed light on the multifaceted implications of this global crisis for the market dynamics of Palestinian medjool dates. Drawing on a range of theoretical frameworks, including health and wellness theory and global trade theory, a nuanced understanding of the pandemic's impact on the Medjool dates market has emerged. The confluence of factors illuminated by health and wellness theory has led to a discernible shift in consumer behavior and preferences. With the increased emphasis on personal health and wellness, the pandemic has led people to seek out natural and nutrient-rich foods that boost the immune system. Medjool dates, known for their high nutritional value, have become a beacon of health-conscious consumption. The global recognition of their role as a superfood rich in essential vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fiber has catapulted them into the spotlight of a diet designed to promote overall well-being.

In addition, the spread of these virtues by social media influencers and health advocates has helped to further increase the appeal of Medjool dates among the health-conscious population. In the context of global trade theory, the turbulent impact of the pandemic on international trade is proving to be a game changer for the Medjool date market. The imposition of travel restrictions, border closures, and lockdowns has set in motion a domino effect that has disrupted supply chains, diminished export prospects, and required changes in important export regulations. This volatile landscape has erected barriers and challenged the accessibility and competitiveness of Medjool dates on the international stage. The ever-changing import and export regulations and the specter of protectionist measures have the power to increase market complexity and potentially hinder the global reach of Medjool dates. The geopolitical entanglements associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its impact on trade dynamics cast another shadow over the Medjool date market. The controversy over labeling and the confluence of political tensions impact the visibility and viability of the market, reflecting the complicated interplay between politics and trade.

The dynamic interplay between theoretical domains suggests an important conclusion: The Covid 19 pandemic has initiated a paradigm shift in the global market for Palestinian Medjool dates. The health-conscious increase in demand catalyzed by health and wellness theory has paved the way for Medjool dates as a potent symbol of natural nutrition and holistic well-being. At the same time, fluctuations and disruptions in international trade under the aegis of global trade theory have created a complex web of challenges and opportunities. The interplay of important export regulations, protectionist tendencies, and geopolitical tensions has created a complex market environment. This theoretical synthesis creates a deep understanding of the multiple facets that have shaped the market development of Palestinian Medjool dates. Far from being simply a health crisis, the pandemic has impacted myriad aspects of human existence, triggering changes in consumer preferences, international trade dynamics, and the geopolitical calculus that underlies it all. The lessons learned on this theoretical journey serve as a compass for Palestinian producers, policymakers, and stakeholders to navigate the ever-changing landscape with resilience, adaptability, and a keen awareness of the intricate interplay of forces shaping the global market for Medjool dates.

References

1. Abusalama, R. B., & Yahya, I. K. (2023). The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Tenant's Obligation to Pay the Rent: A Study under Palestinian and Kuwaiti Laws. *UAEU Law Journal*, 2023(94), 6.

2. Agbaria, Q., & Mokh, A. A. (2023). Coping with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak: the contribution of self-control skills and religiosity in Arab Israeli-Palestinian students in Israel. *Journal of religion and health*, 62(1), 720-738.
3. Alam, M. Z., Al-Hamimi, S., Ayyash, M., Rosa, C. T., Yahia, E. M., Haris, S., ... & Kamal-Eldin, A. (2023). Contributing factors to quality of date (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.) fruit. *Scientia Horticulturae*, 321, 112256.
4. Al-Arja, N. S. (2023). Patience and its relationship to stress tolerance in relation to demographic factors of the medical system in Bethlehem Governorate during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1059589.
5. Alashi, M., Madi, H., Shaeen, N., & Swirki, H. (2023). The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Stock Returns: Evidence from the Palestine Exchange.
6. Alemayehu, M. (2023). Growth Requirements and Propagation of Date Palm. In *Date Palm* (pp. 141-178). GB: CABI.
7. Alnatsheh, A. Y., Karaatmaca, A. G., & Çavuşoğlu, B. (2023). Intellectual Capital and Organizational Innovation: Examining the Mediation Role of Knowledge Sharing on the Palestinian Universities during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Sustainability*, 15(4), 3673.
8. Althalathini, D., & Tlaiss, H. A. (2023). Of resistance to patriarchy and occupation through a virtual bazaar: an institutional theory critique of the emancipatory potential of Palestinian women's digital entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 1-23.
9. Baidoun, S. D., & Salem, M. Z. (2023). Factors affecting consumer post COVID-19 online shopping behavior: the moderating role of commitment—evidence from Palestine. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 1-16.
10. Balatia, H., Wincenciak, J., & Buck, T. (2023). The associations of anger and hope with project retention decisions: A case study. *Plos one*, 18(4), e0283322.
11. Coccia, M. (2023). Effects of strict containment policies on COVID-19 pandemic crisis: lessons to cope with next pandemic impacts. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 30(1), 2020-2028.
12. Elhoumaizi, M. A., Jdaini, K., Alla, F., & Parmar, A. (2023). Variations in physicochemical and microbiological characteristics of 'Mejhoul' dates (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.) from Morocco and new countries of its expansion. *Journal of the Saudi Society of Agricultural Sciences*.
13. Fergusson, J. (2023). *In Search of the River Jordan: A Story of Palestine, Israel and the Struggle for Water*. Yale University Press.
14. Fraihat, I. (2022). The Palestinian Economic Disengagement Plan from Israel: an opportunity for progress or an illusion?. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(7), 1705-1723.
15. Ghazzawy, H. S., Alqahtani, N., Munir, M., Alghanim, N. S., & Mohammed, M. (2023). Combined Impact of Irrigation, Potassium Fertilizer, and Thinning Treatments on Yield, Skin Separation, and Physicochemical Properties of Date Palm Fruits. *Plants*, 12(5), 1003.
16. Gupta, R., Gregg, M., & Antony, A. (2023, June). Wintertime patterns of residential electricity use and indoor temperature in the composite climate of India. In *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (Vol. 1196, No. 1, p. 012018). IOP Publishing.
17. Itma, M., & Hussein, M. (2023). Housing Demands in a Complex Economic Situation: The Case of the Post-Covid-19 Pandemic in Palestine.
18. Jarrar, A., Totti, H., & Nada, H. (2023). The potential of palm waste as a source of renewable energy: a case study of Palestine.
19. Kalfopoulou, A. (2023). *On the Gaze: Dubai and Its New Cosmopolitanisms*. Fulcrum Publishing.
20. Khalil, H. A., & Bani, S. H. S. (2023). Influence of Irrigation Water Type, Dap and Max-Gro On Vegetative Growth and Leaf Nutrient Content Of Plum Trees (*PRUNUS* SPP.) CV. SAMARRA. *Journal of Duhok University*, 26(1), 224-233.
21. Khan, R. R., Haq, I. U., & Naqvi, S. A. (2023). Pest and Disease Management in Date Palm. In *Date Palm* (pp. 297-338). GB: CABI.
22. Khudair, S. M. (2023). A Study of the Effect of Some Natural and Human Factors on Date Palm Cultivation in the Hilla District, Iraq. *European Journal of Theoretical and Applied Sciences*, 1(3), 148-153.
23. Mahamid, F., Chou, P., & Mansour, A. (2023). The Correlation Between Religiosity and Death Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Palestine. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 17(1).
24. Morrar, R., & Baba, S. (2022). Social innovation in extreme institutional contexts: the case of Palestine. *Management Decision*, 60(5), 1387-1412.
25. Mustafa, A. M., Azimli, A., & Sabir Jaf, R. A. (2022). The Role of Resource Consumption Accounting in Achieving Competitive Prices and Sustainable Profitability. *Energies*, 15(11), 4155.
26. Ndanduleni, A. U. C., Radebe, T. B., & Huan, Z. (2023). Reduction of temperature fluctuation in a South African shack house using phase change material insulation. *Building and Environment*, 241, 110376.
27. Peddie, R. J. A. (2023). Investigating sustainable approaches to late maturity and fungal infection of organic 'Medjool' date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.) fruit in the Western Cape, South Africa.

28. Radwan, E., Alattar, E., Radwan, A., Radwan, W., Alajez, M., Pandey, D., & Jebreen, K. (2023). Knowledge, attitudes, and practices of palestinian students toward COVID-19: a cross-sectional study during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Human Arenas*, 1-22.
29. Ragab, A., & Saad, A. F. (2023). The effects of a negative economic shock on male marriage in the West Bank. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 21(3), 789-814.
30. Ravitz Wyngaard, S., & Kissinger, M. (2022). Embracing a footprint assessment approach for analyzing desert-based agricultural systems: the case of Medjool dates. *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*, 42(4), 68.
31. Sezer, J. (2023). *Sustaining Resistance, Cultivating Liberation: The Enduring Bond of Rooted-Resistance-Companionship between Palestinians and Olive Trees* (Master's thesis).
32. Tardy, A. L., Pouteau, E., Marquez, D., Yilmaz, C., & Scholey, A. (2020). Vitamins and minerals for energy, fatigue and cognition: a narrative review of the biochemical and clinical evidence. *Nutrients*, 12(1), 228.
33. Veronese, G., Ismail, A., Mahamid, F., El-Khodary, B., Bdier, D., & Diab, M. (2023). The reluctance to the vaccine, mental health, fear of covid-19 and quality of life among Palestinians: an exploratory comparative study in different geographical areas. *Journal of Public Mental Health*.
34. Yaacobi, G., Salame, L., & Glazer, I. (2023). Persistence of the entomopathogenic nematode *Steinernema carpocapsae* on red palm weevil-infested date palm trees in an arid environment. *Nematology*, 1(aop), 1-7.

