



Institutional Analysis of Digital Marketing in Iraq

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Abstract. In the modern era, digital marketing has become an essential tool for promoting and selling products and services. As digital technologies continue to advance and online communication expands, understanding the institutional framework of digital marketing has gained increasing significance, especially in countries like Iraq. This study aims to examine the role of various institutions in the development of digital marketing in Iraq, assessing their effectiveness in fostering its growth while also identifying key challenges and opportunities in this field. To achieve this, the research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with digital marketing experts. The collected data was analyzed using MAXQDA software. The findings reveal that multiple institutions significantly influence the digital marketing landscape in Iraq, with government agencies, educational institutions, and private sector companies playing pivotal roles. However, several barriers impede the growth of digital marketing in the country. These include insufficient technological infrastructure, poor coordination between policymakers and industry stakeholders, and a lack of specialized training programs. Despite these challenges, there are notable opportunities for progress. Strengthening institutional collaboration, investing in technological infrastructure, and expanding professional training initiatives could enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing in Iraq. The study concludes that fostering closer cooperation between policymakers and industry professionals can accelerate the development of digital marketing, ultimately contributing to the sector's growth and broader economic advancement.

Keywords: Consumer culture, Customer relations, Digital advertising, Iraq, Digital marketing, Institutional analysis, Marketing institutions, Marketing strategies, Social networks.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, technological advancements are continuously reshaping society, significantly influencing businesses and their marketing strategies. The rapid evolution of digital marketing has pushed companies to embrace innovative approaches to selling their products and services. One of the most notable shifts has been the transition from traditional outbound marketing methods to modern inbound marketing strategies. By utilizing digital tools and technologies, businesses can enhance their marketing efforts, gain deeper insights into consumer behavior, and ultimately improve customer satisfaction.

As digital marketing becomes an essential component of business operations, platforms such as social media, websites, and data-driven strategies play a crucial role in reaching and engaging audiences (Belostecinic & Jomir, 2023; Hong-Yao, 2023; Nurjanah & Wahyuningsih, 2023). For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating on limited budgets, integrating digital marketing strategies has become vital for brand communication, fostering customer trust, and enhancing loyalty (Nurjanah & Wahyuningsih, 2023). SMEs can leverage various digital platforms for content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), social media engagement, and other techniques to boost their competitiveness and customer interaction (Suvorova & Karpenko, 2023).

Furthermore, institutional analysis plays a key role in understanding the effects of digitalization on communication and consumer interactions (Kuzmina, 2022; Economou et al., 2023; Schildt, 2022). The rapid expansion of the Internet and digital space has revolutionized how businesses connect with their audiences, providing new avenues to refine marketing strategies and improve customer engagement through innovative tools and techniques (Artemenko & Benchabane, 2020; Honcharenko-Zakrevska et al., 2020; Nurjanah & Wahyuningsih, 2023).

The digital marketing landscape is in a state of constant change, driven by advancements in technology and evolving consumer behaviors. With the widespread adoption of the Internet and mobile devices, digital marketing has become a cornerstone of modern business strategies. Companies now utilize diverse digital channels—including search engines, social media, email, and content marketing—to effectively engage with their target audiences. However, this rapidly shifting environment presents both opportunities and challenges, requiring marketers to continuously adapt and innovate their strategies (Mane et al., 2024).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn offer businesses valuable opportunities to connect with their audiences through both organic and paid content. The rise of social media influencers and user-generated content has further strengthened brand credibility and trust, providing authentic and engaging interactions (Wang et al., 2021). Moreover, the incorporation of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) into digital marketing is expanding, offering immersive experiences that captivate consumers in innovative ways—ranging from virtual clothing try-ons to interactive brand experiences. These technological advancements are rapidly shaping the digital marketing landscape, enabling businesses to engage their audiences more effectively and deliver highly personalized experiences (Bagane et al., 2021).

In today's highly competitive digital marketplace, measuring the effectiveness of marketing strategies has

become increasingly challenging. Businesses and brands face intense competition, where even a single advertisement or social media comment can significantly influence sales and profitability (Ghafar, 2017). As a result, relying on a single, long-term marketing strategy is no longer sufficient for achieving sustainable success. Instead, forward-thinking companies are adopting agile, data-driven marketing approaches designed for rapid and profitable growth, commonly referred to as growth and revival strategies (Sean & Morgan, 2017).

Digital platforms have transformed brand communication, allowing businesses to share images and videos while engaging directly with consumers. Advancements in Internet technology and digital tools have enabled businesses to precisely target individual buyers, fostering seamless interactions and mutual benefits between companies and customers (Al-Heali, 2022). However, despite the global progress in digital marketing over the past two decades, uncertainties remain regarding the effectiveness of national policies governing the sector. This study aims to identify the key institutions involved in the diffusion of digital marketing in Iraq and explore policy implications specific to the country.

Although digital transformation is a global phenomenon, much of the existing research focuses on developed economies or broad international trends. In Iraq, comprehensive institutional analysis of digital marketing is still in its early stages. For example, the digital transformation of Iraqi insurance companies remains underdeveloped, reflecting broader challenges businesses face in adopting digital strategies (Abood, 2023).

The effectiveness of digital marketing varies significantly across different countries, largely due to institutional factors such as regulatory frameworks, cultural values, and business norms. Understanding these factors is crucial for businesses looking to enter new markets or expand internationally. Given the existing research gaps, an institutional analysis of digital marketing in Iraq is necessary to evaluate both the challenges and opportunities within this field. Such research can help refine digital strategies, enhance service quality, and provide policymakers with valuable insights for shaping effective regulatory frameworks.

By conducting an institutional analysis of digital marketing in Iraq, this study aims to explore how various sectors utilize digital tools to improve marketing efforts and support economic growth. To achieve sustainable development, Iraq must address key challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, gaps in digital education, and the need for better integration of advanced technologies. The findings of this study can contribute to policies that enhance digital infrastructure, promote digital literacy, and optimize the adoption of emerging technologies. These improvements could drive economic growth, create new job opportunities, and ultimately enhance the quality of life for the Iraqi population.

Despite the political and economic challenges facing the country, Iraq holds significant potential for digital expansion, particularly in the technology sector. This study examines the obstacles and opportunities within Iraq's digital marketing landscape and presents effective solutions for fostering its growth. The central research question guiding this study is:

How do various institutions influence the diffusion of digital marketing in Iraq, and what policies can facilitate its effective development?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing an exploratory mixed-design method. The main goal of this approach is to examine a phenomenon by identifying its essential components and analyzing the relationships between them within a specific context. This method allows for open-ended and broadly framed research questions, enabling an in-depth investigation of the subject. The ultimate aim is to develop a well-rounded explanation of the phenomenon under study (Fetters et al., 2013).

To collect data effectively, this study relies on semi-structured interviews, a widely recognized method for qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The research focuses on experts in the field of digital marketing in Iraq. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, including a relevant university degree in digital marketing and a minimum of five years of experience in information technology. A non-random, snowball sampling technique was used, where each selected participant was asked to recommend three other experts. This sampling process was carried out throughout 2023, using both email correspondence and in-person meetings, ultimately leading to a final sample of 10 participants.

The collected interview data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis, with MAXQDA software assisting in the organization and interpretation of the findings. This approach allowed for a structured and detailed examination of the insights provided by digital marketing experts.

3. RESULTS

Table 1: Sample information under review.

Organization	Education	Occupation
Home appliance distribution companies	Bachelor's or Master's Degree	Sales Management, Marketing, Procurement
Sports instructor and researcher	PhD or Master's Degree	Sports Science Education and Research
Architecture companies	Bachelor's or Master's Degree in Architecture	Architecture, Interior Design
Investment bank	Bachelor's or Master's Degree in Finance	Investment, Financial Consulting
Sports club	Bachelor's Degree in Sports Science	Club Management, Coaching
Digital marketing instructor and researcher	PhD or Master's Degree	Digital Marketing Education and Research
Coach	Bachelor's Degree in Sports Science or Coaching	Sports Training
Sports specialist	Bachelor's or Master's Degree	Sports Physiology, Special Training
Pharmaceutical distribution companies	Bachelor's or Master's Degree in Pharmacy	Sales Management, Pharmaceutical Marketing
Health care distribution companies	Bachelor's or Master's Degree	Sales Management, Health Products Marketing

Table 2: Types of capacity and readiness for implementing digital marketing in Iraqi businesses.

Numbers	Interviews	Repetitions	Variable (Capacity and readiness)
1		5	Digital marketing adaptability to different services
2	First Interview	7	The capacity of the digital space to improve work skills in different services
3		2	Digital marketing capability in management readiness
4		3	Existence of the practical capacity of the digital marketing system
5		7	Capacity of digital marketing in creating readiness innovation
6		3	Capacity to promote entrepreneurship in the digital marketing method
7	Second Interview	5	Marketing research and market analysis
8		4	The market atmosphere and its impact on the tendency to digital marketing
9		3	The role of digital marketing in market competitiveness
10		4	Access to the Internet and digital capacities in the environment and market
11	Third Interview	5	The possibility of providing a platform for digital market activity such as websites and social media
12		4	The existence of facilities for developing technological infrastructure such as electronic equipment
13		6	The existence of working with digital tools and specialized communications of different markets
14		5	The possibility of providing knowledge and information to customers
15		8	Gaining information from the target community of the service market
16		7	The existence of hardware system facilities such as computers, etc.
17		2	The existence of a marketing unit and team
18	Fourth Interview	6	Market information and marketing knowledge
19		5	Marketing plan and plan
20		7	Software facilities such as the Internet, computer programs, automation, etc. are appropriate
21	Fifth Interview	5	Digital coverage in all departments and processes of Iraqi centers
22		4	Quality of use from experts in the field of working with digital tools
23		3	Quality of management supervision over the implementation of digital marketing
24		4	Ability to update and provide the latest versions of hardware and software
25	Sixth Interview	5	Level of technology literacy of trainers
26		6	Level of culture of acceptance and trust in technology among trainers
27		5	Support of trainers from changes resulting from the implementation of digital marketing
28		4	Improvement of trainers' skills, expertise and human capital
29		3	Amount of desire for digital expertise and skills in business
30	Eighth Interview	5	Existence of continuous training for people
31		4	Level of quality of administrative correspondence by customers and any exchange of information via the Internet
32		4	Maintenance of electronic facilities
33	Ninth Interview	3	Definition and determination of communication tools with different types of customers
34		5	Possibility of segmenting different types of customers
35		4	Capacity of discounts and rewards for customers
36	Tenth Interview	6	Desire to encourage consumers and customers to communicate electronically
37		7	Existence of security of user information

This research reveals that Iraqi businesses possess significant potential for implementing digital marketing. One of the most crucial strengths is the adaptability of digital marketing across various services, demonstrating its flexibility and effectiveness in meeting diverse customer needs. Additionally, the ability of the digital space to enhance employees' skills has been identified as a key factor. This finding highlights the importance of strengthening digital literacy and technical expertise among employees, as it positively influences the overall performance of digital marketing efforts. Furthermore, the functional capacity of digital marketing systems has been recognized as another critical component, underscoring businesses' readiness to leverage digital tools effectively.

Table 3: Types of challenges and obstacles for implementing digital marketing in Iraqi businesses.

Numbers	Interviews	Repetitions	Variable (challenges and obstacles)
1	First Interview	6	Complexity of receiving information and feedback from customers
2		6	Difficulty in applying various negotiation and sales techniques depending on the type of customers
3	Second Interview	7	Problems in defining and designing channels for distributing and selling services
4		8	Challenges in determining actions and services in each sales channel
5		2	Issues in selecting customers related to each sales channel
6	Third Interview	3	Problems in describing services to customers
7		5	Marketing is accused of promoting excessive consumerism in society and the market
8		6	Weak position of digital marketing by some clubs and reliance on profit and competition in the market
9		4	Misconceptions of digital marketing as an obstacle to achieving economic goals
10	Fourth Interview	5	Concerns about high-volume marketing activities in society and the market
11		4	Decrease in sales due to loss of trust in the consumer community
12	Fifth Interview	7	People are faced with dual goals (profit and digital complexity)
13		7	Failure to understand the sports market only as a place of business
14		6	Failure to pay serious attention to e-commerce in the sports environment
15	Sixth Interview	5	Failure to consider attention to digital values as an additional cost increase
16		4	Decline in profitability over time due to disregard for digital values
17		4	Profitability with trust in transactions between two parties
18		3	Insufficient network capacity and bandwidth are obstacles to implement digital marketing in this business
19		3	The heavy cost of creating, maintaining and developing information networks and databases.
20	Seventh Interview	5	Lack of support from senior management of businesses causes weak implementation of digital marketing
21		3	The lack of financial resources in public sector businesses for the cost of e-government systems, such as installation, operation, repair and maintenance costs
22	Eighths Interview	5	Information security threats from hackers
23		3	Lack of management's sense of need for digital marketing
24		5	Low level of technology and information literacy of trainers
25	Ninth Interview	4	Trainers' desire to communicate face-to-face with consumers and other business people
26		4	Threat to the future of business in the light of employees' lack of digital behavior
27		6	Lack of expertise in working with digital tools in business human resources
28		5	Technological complexity of working with the digital marketing system
29	Tenth Interview	6	Inability to distinguish between confidential information and information that should be made available to citizens and economic enterprises
30		4	Tendency to avoid technological complexity
31		4	Negative customer views towards performance in many high-consumption services
32		5	Low technology and information literacy of audiences and consumers

This study highlights the challenges and obstacles that Iraqi businesses encounter in implementing digital marketing. One of the primary challenges is the complexity of gathering and analyzing customer information and feedback, underscoring the need for effective tools and methods for data collection and analysis. Additionally, the difficulty of adapting negotiation and sales techniques to different customer types has been identified as a significant obstacle. This finding emphasizes the importance of training and equipping employees with the necessary skills to navigate diverse customer interactions successfully.

Table 4: Types of digital marketing implementation initiatives and solutions in Iraqi businesses.

Numbers	Interviews	Repetitions	Variables (Initiative and Solution)
1		3	Introducing a digital marketing plan (long-term, annual, monthly, etc.)
2		5	Requirement to use appropriate methods in digital marketing planning
3	First Interview	4	Existence of a capacity to predict performance and profit in the digital marketing plan
4		3	Capacity building for consistency in the content of the plan while maintaining its flexibility
5		4	Introducing specialists in each section of the digital marketing unit
6	Second Interview	4	Determining sales approaches depending on the type of customers
7		5	Requirement to adapt the sales channel to the digital marketing strategy and plan
8		5	Introducing the relative price of services based on specific and measurable criteria
9	Third Interview	6	Sustaining the digital marketing system based on intelligence
10		7	Continuous evaluation of internal and external marketing performance
11	Fourth Interview	7	Possibility of modifying and improving the performance of the digital marketing system
12		5	Improving business standards by raising product quality
13		5	Developing a native digital marketing model to evaluate clubs in today's society from a digital perspective
14	Fifth Interview	4	Advertising based on market behavioral patterns and adapting marketing activities to digital concepts
15		6	Building capacity to import digital tools
16		3	Encouraging the customer community to comply with digital codes
17		3	Adapting service trends to consumers' digital values
18	Sixth Interview	4	Building technology capacity in Iraqi service centers leads to better implementation of digital marketing
19		4	Implementing digital marketing leads to reduced human intervention and, as a result, reduced errors
20	Seventh Interview	5	Setting operational goals for trainers that are measurable and quantifiable
21		5	Implementing digital marketing to support services and using an electronic service desk for consumers
22	Eighths Interview	6	Requirement to determine audiences and users is essential for implementing digital marketing
23		6	Creating emotional and sentimental value for the user
24		3	Attracting potential customers
25	Ninth Interview	4	Creating a desirable image to retain and attract customers
26		5	Directly recalling services in the customer's mind by adhering to digital principles
27		5	Improving the quality of customer communication
28	Tenth Interview	6	Creating value for the customer and optimal packaging of services based on respecting customer rights

To overcome the identified challenges and obstacles, this research proposes several strategic initiatives and solutions. One key recommendation is the development of a comprehensive digital marketing plan, structured on long-term, annual, and monthly timelines—to enhance organization and strategic planning. Additionally, adopting appropriate methodologies in digital marketing planning and ensuring the sustainability of a data-driven, intelligent digital marketing system are crucial measures that can significantly improve performance and efficiency.

Table 5: Types of results and consequences for implementing digital marketing in Iraq.

Numbers	Interviews	Repetitions	Variables (Results and Consequences)
1		5	Improving the digital marketing research plan
2	First	4	Updating the marketing plan and system through digital tools and communication
3	Interview	5	Improving the monitoring and control of the digital marketing plan through the digital platform
4		2	Market analysis and market intelligence
5	Second	3	Improving information about competitors in the market
6	Interview	5	Improving information from customers
7		5	Choosing the right strategy for each segment
8	Third	6	Improving the health of the community as a result of encouraging customers to buy with digital values
9	Interview	8	Improving the public attitude towards the quality of services
10		8	Improving the balance of profit and innovation in the digital workplace
11	Fourth	7	Environmental growth in the Iraqi technology services market in the absorption of opportunities
12	Interview	5	Market improvement
13	Fifth	4	Improving the diversity of resources and their supply methods
14	Interview	5	Increasing revenue generation
15		6	Resource consumption Reducing costs
16		6	Economic efficiency in the industry Improving profitability
17	Sixth	6	Improving cost reduction
18	Interview		
19	Seventh	7	Consolidation and elimination of redundant and parallel systems in Iraqi service centers
20	Interview	8	Increased flexibility of government structure and timely adaptation to changes
21		5	Downsizing of business size (resulting in elimination of management levels)
22	Eighths	6	Improved transparency and accountability, thereby reducing administrative violations and corruption
23	Interview	7	Increasing employees' understanding of digital values
24		7	Increasing sales and financial success due to adherence to digital principles
25		7	Diversifying and making advertising types more effective
26	Ninth	6	Determining brand positioning and goals and its long-term position
27	Interview	5	Enhancing the benefits of both parties with digital pricing in the market
28		4	More profitability between both parties by increasing trust in the business
29		4	Improving cost management, resource allocation and consumption in digital marketing
30		3	Improving revenue management in different parts of digital marketing
31		7	Profit growth from appropriate methods to properly understand performance
32		5	The growth of the use of various packaging methods and service menus according to the conditions
33		6	Creating new job opportunities
34		6	Quantitative and qualitative increase in performance and productivity
35	Tenth	4	Digital marketing enhances the level of awareness and knowledge in trainers
36	Interview	7	Reducing the time and place gap in receiving services
37		5	Improving customer interaction and communication
38		4	Implementing digital marketing in greater participation of people in government affairs
39		3	Implementing e-government helps increase the quality of government services
40		4	The possibility of providing direct and immediate services to citizens
41		3	Increasing customer satisfaction and trust
42		5	Understanding the added value of the product by the customer
		6	Returning customers due to compliance with digital principles by the seller

The implementation of digital marketing in Iraqi businesses has led to several positive outcomes. Notably, improvements in digital marketing research design, as well as enhanced monitoring and control of digital marketing programs, have been identified as significant benefits. These findings highlight the positive impact of digital marketing on businesses' internal processes.

Another key outcome is the increase in customer satisfaction and trust, which plays a crucial role in attracting and retaining customers. Additionally, better access to market intelligence—such as competitor analysis and customer insights—has been recognized as a valuable advantage, contributing to more informed strategic decision-making. Other notable benefits include increased revenue generation, improved cost and resource management, and enhanced business productivity and efficiency. Furthermore, the implementation of digital marketing has contributed to higher levels of technological and information literacy among employees, alongside improved customer interaction and engagement.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that digital marketing serves as an effective tool for enhancing the performance of Iraqi businesses. By leveraging existing capacities and adopting appropriate strategies, businesses can maximize the benefits of digital marketing, ultimately leading to improved operational efficiency and increased customer satisfaction. These insights can also aid researchers and business managers in making informed decisions regarding the implementation and optimization of digital marketing strategies in Iraq.

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital marketing plays a crucial role in improving the performance of Iraqi businesses. This research has identified key aspects such as existing capacities and readiness,

challenges and barriers to implementation, proposed initiatives and solutions, and the outcomes of digital marketing adoption. Comparing these results with previous studies allows for an assessment of their alignment and divergence.

The study revealed that Iraqi businesses possess significant potential for implementing digital marketing. The adaptability of digital marketing across various services and its capacity to enhance employees' skills were identified as major strengths. These findings align with the research of Vaziri Gohar and Abdul Hosseini (2010), who explored the role of new technologies and digital marketing in attracting audiences in the education sector. Similarly, Asdanjad et al. (2014) found that value-driven digital marketing contributes to business performance improvement, further supporting the results of this study.

Regarding the challenges of digital marketing implementation, this study identified the complexity of gathering customer information and feedback, along with the high costs associated with establishing and maintaining digital infrastructure, as the primary obstacles. These findings are consistent with the research of Amsia and Janmohammadi (2014), who examined the technical challenges of digital marketing. Additionally, Seifollahi and Ghasemi-Hamedani (2014) emphasized that marketing support and innovation-oriented approaches significantly impact export performance, highlighting the importance of institutional and managerial backing—an aspect also reflected in the present study.

To address these challenges, this study proposes several initiatives, including comprehensive digital marketing planning and the adoption of effective planning methodologies. These findings align with the research of Rozwanowis et al. (2023), who analyzed the role of digital marketing in the growth of startups. Furthermore, the encouragement of customer communities to adhere to digital marketing standards is consistent with the research of Al-Sukainy (2022), who examined the influence of digital marketing on consumer purchasing decisions.

The implementation of digital marketing in Iraqi businesses has resulted in several positive outcomes, including improvements in marketing research design, enhanced monitoring and control of marketing programs, and increased customer satisfaction and trust. These findings align with the research of Inad and Yahya (2023), who investigated the impact of electronic marketing on the performance of the Iraqi Investment Bank. Additionally, the study highlights that institutional and managerial support significantly contributes to the success of digital marketing. This conclusion is supported by the research of Khodadad Hosseini et al. (2018), who examined the role of institutions and intervention policies in the diffusion of ICT innovations.

Digital marketing refers to the promotion of various products and services through digital technologies, primarily over the Internet. Professionals in this field constantly seek innovative ways to increase website traffic and boost product sales. A variety of strategies and techniques are employed to achieve these goals.

While digital marketing is often perceived as a recent development, its origins trace back to the introduction of electronic devices into daily life. Many people associate digital marketing solely with content marketing and social media; however, these are just components of a much broader field that encompasses numerous subcategories.

The connection between people and electronic devices continues to grow rapidly. In some countries, individuals spend more than 11 hours a day interacting with digital devices. As technology becomes further integrated into everyday activities, the role of digital marketing will only expand, making its impact increasingly significant.

To assess the influence of digital marketing, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods has been used, yielding distinct insights from each approach. Overall, findings from various studies highlight the crucial role of digital marketing across industries, as well as the challenges and opportunities that come with it.

Key success factors in implementing digital marketing include institutional support, well-defined strategies, and human resource development. Additionally, understanding consumer needs and behaviors is essential when designing effective digital marketing strategies. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, businesses must adapt to these changes to remain competitive and maximize their marketing potential.

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