

Identifying and Prioritizing the Factors Affecting Online Marketing Strategies Based on Competitive Intelligence in Iraqi Telecommunication Companies

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Abstract

The business climate is changing quickly and continuously these days due to the advancement of technology and the expansion of global trade. Accordingly, businesses have had to modify their marketing plans to fit this new environment in order to stay competitive, and E-marketing has become a popular alternative. In order to accomplish this, the study will look into the variables influencing internet marketing tactics in the Iraqi telecom sector and rank them according to competitive intelligence. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 academic specialists and marketing managers from Iraqi telecommunications companies were also conducted as part of this study to determine the fundamental elements of competitive intelligence and important internal and external factors influencing online marketing strategies. The researchers employed the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) technique to rank the most important variables identified by the quantitative analysis. The strategic standing of competitors is determined to be the most important external component in internet marketing strategies, based on study findings and expert opinions. Perceived product quality is the most significant internal component of online marketing strategy, according to experts. The most significant sub-criterion in the "competitive intelligence" criterion is "technological intelligence," out of the five sub-criteria. However, the research yields significant information that telecommunication firms in Iraq may utilize to improve their decision-making procedures, allocate resources optimally, and create online marketing strategies that are competitive environment-responsive.

Keywords: *Online Marketing Strategies, Iraqi Telecommunication Companies, Competitive Intelligence, Iraq.*

Introduction

The digital revolution has brought about a transformation in marketing tactics across industries due to the quick expansion of digital technology and the growing significance of online presence (Tarabasz, 2024). Kilaba & Manasseh (2020) noted that the telecommunications sector has been at the forefront of this transition. Faster ways of communication between businesses and their clients are necessary due to the information revolution and the rapid improvements in technology, particularly in the service industry (Pencarelli, 2020). However, businesses have had to modify their marketing plans to fit this new environment in order to stay competitive, and E-marketing has become a popular answer. The significance of E-marketing services has grown in prominence due to fierce rivalry. According to Gil et al. (2008), E-marketing enables enterprises to access international markets and connect with new clients who were previously inaccessible through conventional business techniques. This is so that goods and services can be made available to as many customers as possible via the internet. Obeidat (2021) pointed out through better client communication, E-marketing helps businesses become more productive and efficient; that is, it helps to reach business objectives and people's capacities by facilitating the creation of communication channels between the business and its clients. E-marketing also makes it possible to add or change products and sales offers quickly, as well as to track sales transactions, phases, and outcomes more swiftly (Joshi & Joshi, 2020). It is impossible to exaggerate the role that competition intelligence plays in establishing online marketing strategy. Competitive intelligence, according to Calof and Wright (2008), is the process by which

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businesses obtain useful knowledge about rivals and the marketplace and, ideally, incorporate it into their planning and decision-making to perform better. Competitive intelligence can offer useful insights on customer behavior, market trends, rival strategies, and emerging technology to Iraqi telecommunications firms. These insights are essential for creating workable online marketing plans. Additionally, competitive intelligence can offer useful insights on: customer behavior, market trends, rival strategies, and emerging technology to Iraqi telecommunications firms. It is noteworthy that these insights are essential for creating workable online marketing plans.

However, the telecommunications sector in Iraq- a nation undergoing rapid technical advancement and digital adoption- has seen tremendous change recently due to rising internet penetration, smartphone use, and an aging population. Iraq boasts 36.22 million internet users, or 78.7% of the population, and 31.95 million active social media users, according to a 2024 research by go-globe.com. Moreover, telecommunications firms now have more ways to interact with their target customers- thanks to the expansion of internet access, rising smartphone adoption, and rising social media usage among Iraqis. Telecommunications firms have to modify their strategy to take advantage of these new prospects as a result of the digital transformation creating a favorable environment for online marketing campaigns (Imamov & Semenikhina, 2021). Moreover, businesses seeking to increase their market share and obtain a competitive edge now need to implement efficient online marketing strategies (Mathenge, 2017). It is imperative for businesses to be able to consistently modify their internet marketing strategies in order to maintain a competitive edge (Sanbella et al., 2024). However, for these businesses to allocate resources effectively and create customized marketing strategies that are responsive to the competitive landscape, they must comprehend the critical elements that affect the efficacy of their online marketing strategies and prioritize them based on competitive intelligence (Khin et al., 2016).

The research holds significance for having the ability to tackle the deficiency of a thorough comprehension of the elements influencing internet marketing tactics in the telecom sector of Iraq and the ranking of these elements according to competition perceptions. Telecommunications firms in Iraq may boost their digital marketing skills, improve consumer engagement, and eventually raise their market share and profitability in the quickly changing digital world; that is, by determining and prioritizing the important variables. The objective of this research is to examine the variables that impact internet marketing tactics in the telecom sector in Iraq and rank them according to competitive analysis. In this manner, the study topic was formulated in accordance to answering the following questions:

- What are the main outside variables influencing internet marketing tactics used by Iraqi telecom companies?
- What are the main internal variables that influence internet marketing tactics used by Iraqi telecom companies?
- In this industry, what are the fundamental components of competitive intelligence?
- What a framework can be created which Iraqi telecom providers may utilize to organize and enhance their internet marketing tactics?

However, the results of this research will add to the corpus of information already available in the domains of competitive intelligence and internet marketing, especially with regard to the Iraqi telecom sector. The knowledge gained from this study will be useful for Iraqi telecom firms, allowing them to allocate resources more effectively, make better decisions, and create customized online marketing plans that adapt to their competitive environment.

Literature Review

Online Marketing Strategies

The consistent rise in internet users over the last 25 years has been one of the main markers of the expansion and advancement of online marketing. Over this period, the internet has become widely accessible to the general public, resulting in an ongoing process of innovation and progress. Users, therefore, can now use computers for a variety of tasks, such as communication, booking, research, and shopping (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015). In this digital age, online marketing strategies—which include a range of techniques for drawing in and keeping consumers through online channels—have become crucial for firms (Mansur et al., 2022). There are four main digital marketing methods: online marketing, social media, electronic word of mouth (EWOM), and mobile marketing. Each of these methods plays a crucial role in reaching and interacting with potential customers in the digital space (Sawicki, 2016).

Online marketing has a lot of pros: online marketing provides real-time feedback and the ability to quickly adjust campaigns based on customer responses, unlike traditional marketing. Small businesses can compete more effectively online due to lower costs and broader reach. Online marketing strategies are generally more cost-effective than traditional advertising methods. Online marketing campaigns can have significantly greater reach and impact than traditional approaches. Electronic marketing enables direct engagement with customers, allowing for more effective brand development. When compared to traditional marketing, online marketing—especially through social media—has significant promotional impacts that go viral.

Competitive Intelligence

Developments in big data and digital technologies have produced an abundance of information that may be used to make strategic decisions and preserve a competitive edge in today's more volatile and uncertain markets (Trabucchi & Buganza 2020). Organizations need a competitive intelligence (CI) system that can produce knowledge and value to support strategic decision-making and timely plan implementation in order to take advantage of this abundance of data. Put differently, the usage of competitive intelligence is a prerequisite for good strategic and tactical decision-making (Maluleka & Chummun, 2023). In order to establish strategic objectives for the company, competitive intelligence (CI) is defined as an analytical process that gathers, chooses, and interprets information on competitors' skills, performance, and market positioning (Alnoukari & Hanano 2017:9). CI is a morally and legally sound method for gathering and evaluating competitive intelligence in the business world, with the ultimate purpose of helping the firm accomplish its strategic goals (Calof et al. 2018).

Competitive intelligence's (CI) main goal is to use strategic information to foresee market trends and spur innovation (Foley & Guillemette 2017). Hence, compared to conventional business development, market research, and strategic planning operations, CI offers firms more value (Tahmasebifard & Wright 2018). In addition to supporting sales and operations in areas like product development and risk management, competitive intelligence is used to establish and implement business strategy (McGonagle 2016). However, organizations use competitive intelligence as a critical strategic tool, and it is frequently studied from a variety of angles, such as process, context, and dimensions (Amiri et al. 2017; Salguero et al. 2019). According to scholarly study, corporate intelligence (CI) is essential for gathering and sharing data, creating business strategies, and assessing or measuring strategic decisions (Amiri et al. 2017; Calof & Wright 2008). Still, a number of seminal research in the quickly developing fields of competitive intelligence and digital marketing, especially in the telecommunications industry. Such fields have set the foundation for comprehending the intricate interactions between variables that impact online marketing tactics.

Another study was conducted by Johns & Van Doren (2010). This study underscores the significance of competitive intelligence (CI) in the context of service marketing, where success depends on comprehending client demands and rival tactics. CI assists service, additionally, providers in customizing their products and advertising plans to better satisfy client needs and beat rivals. The work lists a number of advantages of adopting CI in service marketing (for instance, increased strategic planning, better consumer understanding,

and increased marketing efficacy). Businesses, also, may predict market trends, find holes in the industry, and improve their marketing strategies with the help of CI.

Additionally, Ahmed et al. (2014) look into the crucial part competitive intelligence (CI) plays in enhancing businesses' marketing efficacy. In the business sector, corporate intelligence (CI), which includes both internal and external data regarding an organization's operating environment, has grown in importance. Business can get a competitive advantage and outperform their competitors by using CI as a tool. The study explores market possibilities, competitive risks, competitive threats, technological intelligence, technical intelligence, and strategic intelligence, among other sub-components of competitive intelligence. The study's objective is to evaluate the degree to which companies in Pakistan are using CI by looking at these sub-variables. This will show how important CI is for improving business marketing tactics.

Another work is entitled "Identification and Prioritization of Marketing Strategies in The Industrial and Manufacturing Companies", by Adel and Saghaei (2017). This study offers a strong methodological framework that offers insightful information on the application of multi-criteria decision-making techniques like Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) and SWOT analysis which provide an organized way to make decisions in a cutthroat market by prioritizing the elements that affect internet marketing plans in Iraqi telecom firms.

A study presented in (2017) by Aligholi and Fatemi supports the core idea that competitive intelligence. Saying that it is essential for creating effective marketing strategies and presents a solid framework for comprehending the influence of various CI aspects on marketing effectiveness. Moreover, the study also offers methodological recommendations. They determine the connection between competitive intelligence dimensions and the success of businesses' marketing plans in Ardabil, an industrial town. They list the following as components of competitive intelligence: market intelligence, or knowledge of market trends and opportunities. Moreover, *competitive intelligence*, can be explained simply as: 'The knowledge of the dangers and opportunities faced by rivals, whereas the knowledge of both upcoming and current technologies is known as *technological intelligence*. And, information that facilitates strategic decision-making is known as *strategic intelligence*.

Mehralian (2022), on the other hand, underlines the significance of digital marketing tactics in shaping consumer behavior and boosting business results while Olazo, D. B. (2022) discovered that SMEs' inability to convert favorable opinions of digital marketing into a strong plan or structure for digital marketing is hampered by their lack of technological know-how. According Olazo (2022), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are not keeping up with the latest developments in internet marketing methods which might have a big impact on SMEs' survival rates, financial performance, and the state of the local economy as a whole.

Moreover, using the Shopee application, Cahyani et al. (2022) examine the impact of three crucial variables on customers' purchasing decisions; that is, perceived quality (PQ), social media marketing (SMM), and marketing communication strategy (MCS). They shed light on how customers using the Shopee app make purchasing decisions in relation to the three factors of MCS, SMM, and PQ. Finally, they indicated that while the direct effects of MCS and SMM are not as important. They also stated that perceived quality is a key factor in affecting the ultimate purchasing choice.

Therefore, it can be said that these studies have shed light on the variables influencing competitive intelligence and online marketing strategy. Still, they do not offer a complete picture of the variables influencing online marketing strategy. Hence, the present research covers the existing research gap by identifying the effective factors in online marketing strategy.

Methodology

The current research is considered to be a mixed method research and applied in terms of purpose. The research was done in two stages. In the first stage, to identify the internal and external factors affecting the online marketing strategy in the telecommunications industry and to identify the basic dimensions of competitive intelligence in this industry, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 managers of this industry and academic experts. The researchers used a targeted non-probability method for selecting managers and academic experts. In the interview sessions that were arranged individually, the researcher first explained the purpose of the research and then asked the participants to express their opinions based on their experiences. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. After transcribing 12 interviews conducted with experts, coding was done using theme analysis. Synonymous codes were merged and duplicate codes were removed (descriptive and interpretive coding) and finally a conceptual model was prepared. In this study, Cohen's kappa test was used to measure the quality and reliability of the research. This coefficient is used to calculate the agreement between two coders. This index has a value between zero and one, where zero indicates complete lack of agreement between the two coders and one indicates the degree of agreement between the two coders. The appropriate value of the reliability coefficient of Cohen's kappa is above 0.6. The value of Cohen's kappa in this study is 0.74, which is confirmed by the reliability of the research. Demographic characteristics are shown in the following table.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Qualitative Interviews

NO	Gender	Age	Education	Years of service
1	Male	43	Master of Computer Technology Engineering	18
2	Male	59	Assistant Professor in Communications Engineering	34
3	Male	59	Master's degree in Computer Science	25
4	Male	40	Bachelor's degree in Computer Science	17
5	Male	52	Master's degree in Communications Engineering	24
6	Male	47	Professor of Marketing Management	23
7	Male	49	Assistant Professor in Communications Engineering	22
8	Male	59	Professor of Business Administration	38
9	Male	55	Professor of Marketing Management	29
10	Male	52	Bachelor's degree in Computer Science/Artificial Intelligence	28
11	Male	43	Bachelor's degree in Computer Science	20
12	Male	44	Professor of Strategic Management	21

In the second stage (the quantitative part), to develop a framework that telecommunication companies in Iraq can use to prioritize and optimize their online marketing strategies, the paired comparison questionnaire from the first stage was completed by 25 people in person and with explanations on how to fill the questionnaire. The sample people had the conditions of having practical and work experience in the desired area and in their work area. The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method was used to prioritize the key factors recognized through the quantitative analysis. In this research, face validity was used to confirm the validity of the questionnaire and inconsistency rate was used to confirm the reliability of the questionnaire, since the inconsistency rate of all questions was less than 0.1, it can be said that the questions are reliable. Demographic characteristics of the respondents to the questionnaire are shown in the following table.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of The Respondent to The Questionnaire (Quantitative Part)

NO	Gender	Age	Education	Years of service
1	Male	More than 30	Master	11-15
2	Female	20-25	Bachelor	1-5
3	Male	More than 30	Bachelor	1-5
4	Female	26-30	Master	1-5

5	Male	More than 30	Bachelor	11-15
6	Male	26-30	Bachelor	6-10
7	Female	26-30	Bachelor	1-5
8	Male	More than 30	Master	11-15
9	Female	20-25	Bachelor	1-5
10	Male	More than 30	Bachelor	16-20
11	Male	26-30	Bachelor	6-10
12	Male	More than 30	Bachelor	16-20
13	Male	More than 30	Bachelor	1-5
14	Male	More than 30	Master	6-10
15	Male	More than 30	Bachelor	11-15
16	Female	More than 30	Ph.D.	11-15
17	Male	More than 30	Ph.D.	11-15
18	Female	More than 30	Ph.D.	16-20
19	Female	26-30	Ph.D.	More than 25
20	Male	More than 30	Ph.D.	6-10
21	Male	More than 30	Ph.D.	1-5
22	Female	More than 30	Ph.D.	21-25
23	Male	More than 30	Ph.D.	More than 25
24	Male	26-30	Ph.D.	16-20
25	Male	More than 30	Ph.D.	More than 25

Findings

Findings of Qualitative Section

In this research, using in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 12 managers of this industry and academic experts, the internal and external factors affecting the online marketing strategy and basic dimensions of competitive intelligence in the telecommunications industry were identified. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 3. Coding The Interviews

Sentences	Open Code	Axial coding	Category
Assessing the relative strengths and weaknesses of competitors compared to one's own organization	Competitors Assessments	Competition-based Intelligence	Competitive Intelligence
Developing contingency plans and strategic responses to anticipated competitive moves	strategic responses to competitors		
Enabling the organization to proactively address or capitalize on competitive developments	Investing on competitive developments		
Gathering and maintaining detailed profiles on key competitors	Gathering profiles of competitors		
Continuously monitoring and interpreting changes, trends, and signals in the overall market environment	monitoring market environment	Market-based Intelligence	
Gathering insights about customer needs, preferences, behaviors, and perceptions	Gathering the customer needs		

Studying the dynamics, structure, and evolution of the broader industry landscape	Studying industry landscape		
Tracking the performance, strategies, and initiatives of industry players	Tracking industry players		
Tracking advancements in products, services, or processes within the industry	Tracking the industry trends	Technological Intelligence	
Identifying emerging technologies that could disrupt the market	Identifying emerging technologies		
Assessing the technological capabilities of competitors	Competitors technologies		
Evaluating the potential impact of new technologies on the business	New technologies impact		
Staying informed on R&D activities and technology roadmaps	technology roadmaps		
Respecting intellectual property rights and avoiding unethical practices	intellectual property rights	Ethics- based Intelligence	
Promoting transparency and reporting on ethical practices	Respecting ethical practices		
Evaluating the legitimacy and fairness of data collection methods	Ethics in data collection		
Assessing the moral consequences of using certain competitive tactics	Ethics in competitive tactics		
Applying sophisticated analytical techniques (e.g., predictive modeling, scenario planning, data mining) to competitive data	analytical techniques	Analytical intelligence and innovation	
Leveraging emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning for enhanced intelligence gathering and analysis	Analyzing by enhanced intelligence		
Developing intuitive dashboards and data visualizations to facilitate interpretation and decision-making	data visualizations		
Uncovering hidden patterns, trends, and opportunities that can inform strategic choices	Uncovering hidden patterns		
The organization's ability to allocate sufficient financial resources towards online marketing activities, such as website development, digital advertising, content creation, etc.	Funding on online marketing activities	Financial Capability	
Ensuring appropriate budgeting and funding for the online marketing function	Funding on the online marketing function		
The organization's access to financing options (e.g., loans, venture capital) to fund larger-scale or long-term online marketing campaigns.	Accessing to financing options		Internal factors

Developing targeted marketing strategies and tailored value propositions for different customer groups	Customer-oriented marketing strategies	Marketing Capabilities
Implementing effective promotional campaigns and sales tactics to attract and retain customers	Customer-oriented campaigns	
Determining optimal pricing structures for telecommunications offerings (e.g., subscriptions, usage-based, bundled packages)	Having optimal pricing structures	
Establishing and managing diverse distribution channels (e.g., direct sales, retail stores, online platforms, indirect partners)	Managing distribution channels	
Foster collaboration and knowledge sharing across the organization	Knowledge sharing	Organizational Structure and Administrative information system
Marketing teams are empowered at the regional/country level to make decisions and adapt strategies based on local market dynamics.	Delegation of authority to the marketing team	
Having specialized teams and roles focused on digital/online marketing channels, analytics, and optimization	Having specialized marketing teams	
Marketing teams work closely with other functions to align on customer insights, technology capabilities, and overall digital strategy.	Inter- functional cooperation	
Loyal employees are more invested in the long-term success of online marketing initiatives, actively participating in the testing, monitoring, and optimization of campaigns to drive better results.	Designing loyalty programs	Organizational loyalty
Organizational loyalty fosters better collaboration between marketing, IT, customer service, and other departments, enabling a more integrated, Omni channel online customer experience.	Cooperation based on organizational loyalty	
Loyal employees can become powerful brand advocates, promoting the company's online presence and offerings through their personal networks and social media channels	Loyal employees as brand advocates	
A flexible, adaptable organizational culture can help the company quickly pivot its online marketing strategies in response to evolving customer needs and market changes.	Flexible organizational culture	Organizational culture

An organizational culture that prioritizes customer experience and satisfaction can shape the development of more customer-centric online marketing campaigns and content.	Customer-oriented organizational culture		
A collaborative, integrated organizational culture can facilitate better coordination between marketing, IT, customer service, and other departments involved in online marketing initiatives.	Collaborative organizational culture		
Assess the overall competitive position of key rivals	Assessing competitive position	Competitors strategic status	External factors
Evaluate the core competencies, resources, and capabilities of competitors that give them a competitive advantage	Evaluating advantage of competitors		
Analyze their market share, brand recognition, customer base, and other indicators of rivals competitive standing.	Analyzing competitors' advantage indicators		
Identify the primary competitive strategies employed by rivals, such as cost leadership, product differentiation, or customer intimacy.	Identifying competitive strategies of rivals		
Laws, regulations, and policies enacted by government bodies at the local, regional, national, or international level can have a direct impact on an organization's ability to operate, its compliance requirements, and its overall business environment.	Government regulations	Political factor	
Collaborations between government entities and private organizations can create opportunities for joint projects, resource sharing, and mutually beneficial arrangements.	Collaborations between government and organizations		
International relations, global conflicts, or trade disputes, can affect an organization's ability to operate across borders, access new markets, or manage supply chain risks.	International relations		
Ensuring proper IP protection and managing the use of third-party intellectual property is essential in the online marketing context to avoid legal disputes	Intellectual Property protection	Legal factor	
Incorporating data privacy and security considerations into the online marketing strategy is crucial to maintain customer trust and avoid legal issues.	Data privacy		

Monitor and adapt to evolving demographic trends to align their products, services, and marketing strategies accordingly.	Monitoring demographic trends	Socio-Economic factor	
Understand and respond to these shifting societal trends to remain relevant and competitive.	Understanding societal trends		
Monitor economic conditions and incorporate them into their strategic planning to navigate periods of economic prosperity or recession.	Monitoring economic conditions		
Understand the income distribution and purchasing power of their target customers to develop appropriate pricing, product, and marketing strategies	Understanding purchasing power of buyers		
Shifts in cultural values, norms, and beliefs can shape consumer preferences, attitudes, and buying behaviors.	Attention to cultural values	Cultural trends	
Incorporate cultural insights into their product and service development processes	Attention to cultural insights		
Fostering a culture of inclusivity and leveraging cultural diversity can enhance an organization's adaptability and innovative potential	Fostering cultural diversity		

After coding the data, the model of the research has been presented in the following sunburst chart:



Figure 1. The Model of the Research

Findings of Quantitative Section

In this section, the factors were prioritized using the hierarchical analysis method. The opinions of 25 experts were used for pairwise comparison between the factors of the research model. In the process of hierarchical analysis, the options of each level are compared in pairs concerning their corresponding element at a higher level. Competing options in level three should be compared pairwise by each level two criteria. Pair-by-pair comparison is done using a scale designed from the same preference to the most preferred and by choosing the numbers 1 to 9. When comparing two by two, at the beginning, the equivalent of the importance of two by two should be specified through a rank. Then, the numerical value corresponding to it should be given in the comparison table.

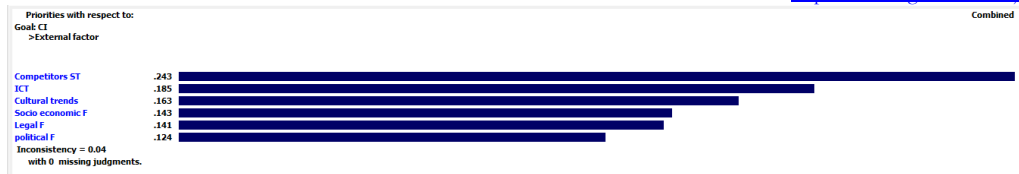


Figure 2. Prioritization Of External Dimensions and Inconsistency Rate

Table 4. Prioritizing Effectiveness of External Factors in Online Marketing Strategies

Row	Criterion	Weight	Priority
1	Competitors strategic status	0.243	1
2	ICT& IT infrastructures	0.185	2
3	Cultural trends	0.163	3
4	Socio-Economic factor	0.143	4
5	Legal factor	0.141	5
6	Political factor	0.124	6

According to the above table and the obtained weights, it can be seen that respectively: Cultural trends, Legal factors, Competitors' strategic status, Socio-Economic factors, Political factors, and ICT& IT infrastructures are from the most to the least important, also considering that the inconsistency rate obtained is 0.04 which is smaller than the standard limit of 0.1; hence the above questionnaire was completed with high accuracy by the respondents.

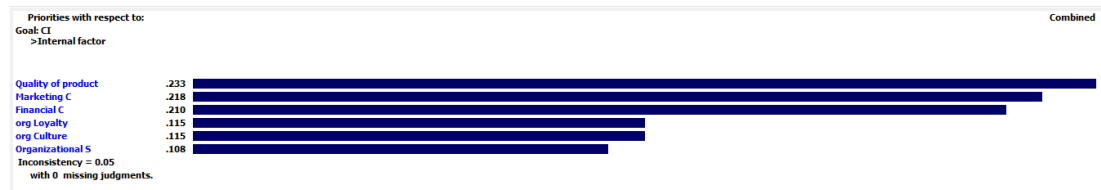


Figure 3. Prioritization Of Internal Dimensions and Inconsistency Rate

Table 5. Prioritizing The Effectiveness of Internal Factors in Online Marketing Strategies

Row	Criterion	Weight	Priority
1	Perceived Quality of Product	0.233	1
2	Marketing Capabilities	0.218	2
3	Financial Capability	0.210	3
4	Organizational Loyalty	0.115	4
5	Organizational Culture	0.115	4
6	Organizational Structure and Administrative Information System	0.108	5

According to the above table and the obtained weights, it can be seen that respectively: Perceived quality of the Product, Marketing Capabilities, and Financial Capability are from the most to the least important. Moreover Organizational loyalty and Organizational culture are equally important. Finally, “Organizational Structure and Administrative information system” has the last priority. Also considering that the inconsistency rate obtained is 0.05 which is smaller than the standard limit of 0.1, hence the above questionnaire was completed with high accuracy by the respondents.

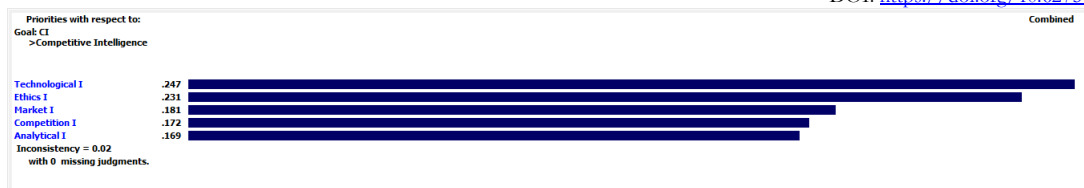


Figure 4. Prioritization Of Competitive Intelligence and Inconsistency Rate

Table 6- Prioritizing The Effectiveness of Competitive Intelligence in Online Marketing Strategies

Row	Criterion	Weight	Priority
1	Technological Intelligence	0.247	1
2	Ethics- based Intelligence	0.231	2
3	Market-based Intelligence	0.181	3
4	Competition-based Intelligence	0.172	4
5	Analytical intelligence and innovation	0.169	5

According to the above table and the obtained weights, it can be seen that respectively: Technological Intelligence, Ethics- based Intelligence, Market-based Intelligence, Competition-based Intelligence, Analytical intelligence and innovation are from the most to the least important, also considering that the inconsistency rate obtained is 0.02 which is smaller than the standard limit of 0.1, hence the above questionnaire was completed with high accuracy by the respondents.



Figure 5. Prioritizing The Three Factors Affects the Online Marketing Strategies of Telecommunication Companies.

Table 7. Prioritizing The Three Factors Affects the Online Marketing Strategies of Telecommunication Companies.

Row	Criterion	Weight	Priority
1	Competitive Intelligence	0.510	1
2	External factors	0.347	2
3	Internal factors	0.143	3

According to the above table and the obtained weights, it can be concluded that respectively: Competitive Intelligence, External factors, and internal factors are from the most to the least important, also considering that the inconsistency rate obtained is 0.09, which is smaller than the standard limit of 0.1, the above questionnaire was completed with high accuracy by the respondents.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to identify and prioritize the key factors influencing the online marketing strategies of telecommunication companies operating in the Iraqi market. To achieve this aim, a mixed-methods research approach was adopted. Building on the insights gained from the literature review, the researchers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with university specialists, and marketing managers from telecommunication companies in Iraq to identify key external and internal factors and the basic dimensions of competitive intelligence affecting online marketing strategies. The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method was utilized to prioritize the key factors identified through the quantitative analysis.

According to the research findings and expert opinions, competitors' strategic status, with a weight of 0.243, is identified as the most crucial external factor in online marketing strategies. Subsequently, ICT & IT infrastructures (0.185), cultural trends (0.163), socio-economic factors (0.143), legal factors (0.141), and political factors (0.124) are also recognized as significant factors. The theory of competition (Hunt, 2015) provides the theoretical foundation for marketing strategy. Marketing strategy is not solely influenced by a firm's actions and the external environmental conditions, but also by the actions and reactions of competitors. The competitive dynamics between a firm and its rivals are a key determinant of the effectiveness of the firm's marketing strategy (Hunt & Morgan, 1995; Ibrahim & Harrison, 2020). The literature on market orientation highlights the significance of rivals, competitive intelligence, and competitor activity monitoring (Jaworski & Kohli, 1996). The importance of rivals as a critical element impacting a company's marketing strategy's efficacy has also been emphasized by a number of recent writers (Kharabsheh et al., 2014; Sahi et al., 2016). However, this emphasizes how crucial it is for businesses to constantly monitor and adapt to the competitive environment while creating and executing their marketing plans. Increasing managerial understanding of competitive dangers and possibilities is another major goal of competitor identification. Conducting a thorough assessment of the competitive landscape is necessary in order to optimize this awareness, particularly at the first phases of analysis. This broad scanning approach can help managers avoid the pitfalls of a myopic focus on competitive strategy and minimize the risk of being caught off guard by unexpected competitive actions (Bergen & Peteraf, 2002).

The telecommunications industry is considered the most competitive and fastest-growing market globally. The competition within the telecom sector is dynamic, driven by an intense battle among companies to produce more reliable or cost-effective products and services (Meena & Geng, 2022). Understanding the strategic positioning and moves of competitors is crucial for formulating effective counterstrategies. On one side, the telecom industry is characterized by fast-paced technological advancements and evolving customer preferences (Fransman, 2001). Tracking competitor strategies allows firms to anticipate market shifts and respond proactively. Furthermore, in such a competitive landscape, firms need to differentiate their offerings. Analyzing competitor strategies helps identify gaps in the market that can be exploited through unique value propositions. Understanding a competitor's strategic status, can be said, enables firms to take preemptive actions, such as launching new products/services or adjusting pricing, to stay ahead of the competition.

It is believed that a lack of acceptance and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) prevents business operations from having equal possibilities. Besides, lack of access to the internet and other digital technologies prevents people and businesses from taking use of E-services. This might lead to their eventual exclusion from international markets. And thus, due to the digital gap, these people and businesses are unable to participate in the digital economy or take advantage of its opportunities. This, in turn, might put them out of business in international marketplaces (Pimenidis et al., 2006; Stiakakis & Georgiadis, 2011).

The significance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in facilitating and molding contemporary communication practices in digital marketing is acknowledged by Chomiak-Orsa and Liszczyk (2020). It has been seen that perceived product quality is the most significant internal component in internet marketing techniques; that is, with a weight of 0.233, according to study findings and expert opinion. Then, other elements that are deemed significant include organizational loyalty (0.115), organizational culture (0.115), marketing capabilities (0.218), financial capability (0.210), organizational structure, and administrative information system (0.108).

The perceived quality of products and services is an important factor in marketing strategy for the telecommunications industry. Customer-perceived service quality, customer value, and customer satisfaction have become the most crucial determinants of business competitiveness and success (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

The dynamic nature of service industries compels companies to prioritize and closely monitor customer satisfaction as a means of staying competitive and viable in the long term (Nguyen, 2014). In the highly competitive telecom market, perceived quality can be a crucial point of differentiation. Customers often

base purchasing decisions on their perceptions of product/service quality, reliability, and performance. Highlighting superior quality can give companies a competitive edge (Mostafayi, 2020). Providing high-quality services that meet or exceed customer expectations is a critical driver of customer satisfaction. When customers perceive the service they receive to be of exceptional quality, they are more likely to be satisfied and loyal to the company. Conversely, poor service quality can lead to customer dissatisfaction and erode the company's competitive position.

Syapsan (2019) also indicated that service quality directly influences marketing mix strategies. Applying service quality based on customer needs fosters greater customer satisfaction. In essence, higher service quality leads to increased customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the study found that service quality directly impacts creating a sustainable local economy. Improving service quality to better understand and meet customer needs can enhance sustainable economic growth and competitive advantage through refined marketing mix strategies. Aboassin and Abood (2013), Dorson et al. (2017), Scapolan et al. (2017), Yuliansyah et al. (2017), Alvinus et al. (2017), Qasrawi et al. (2017), and Koohang et al. (2017) also believe that service quality affects the marketing mix strategy.

Among the 5 sub-criteria in the criterion of "competitive intelligence", the sub-criterion of "Technological Intelligence" (0.247) is the most important, followed by "Ethics-based Intelligence" (0.231), "Market-based Intelligence" (0.181), "Competition-based Intelligence" (0.172), and lastly "Analytical Intelligence and Innovation" (0.169).

The concept of technological intelligence is closely related to the broader practice of competitive intelligence. Competitive intelligence refers to the process of gathering, analyzing, and applying information about products, customers, competitors, and the overall business environment. The goal is to provide actionable insights that can inform an organization's strategic decision-making and improve its competitive positioning (Parker & Nitse, 2011). Technological intelligence is a specific domain within competitive intelligence. It focuses on monitoring, understanding, and leveraging information related to emerging technologies, industry trends, and the technological capabilities of competitors. However, a business can have a more thorough understanding of the competitive landscape through the development of technical intelligence. As for organizations, which use technology intelligence (TI), it can be said that using TI as a strategic tool helps to facilitate decision-making by gathering and disseminating data on emerging technologies, in addition to being useful in spotting new technologies that the company may find advantageous as well as possible risks to its ongoing business operations (Mortara et al., 2009). Such organizations face rising pressure to improve their technical intelligence skills due to increased competitiveness in a worldwide commercial environment though technical intelligence gives an organization the capacity to gather and disseminate data. This enables the company to understand new possibilities and possible hazards associated to technology (Kerr et al., 2006).

Research Limitations and Suggestions

Here, a number of limitations concerning this current study should be noted and taken into consideration when doing further researches:

- The investigation's geographic scope was restricted to the Iraqi telecom sector. This would have limited the results' applicability in other countries. The telecom markets and competitive dynamics can exhibit notable variations among nations. Consequently, the particular socio-economic and regulatory landscape of Iraq may limit the application of the competitive intelligence variables and internet marketing tactics that have been found.
- The study's scope was restricted to the telecommunications industry, which would limit the applicability of the findings to other sectors like manufacturing or financial services. It is necessary to do more study to determine whether the suggested framework is universal since different economic sectors may have very different competitive environments, technical needs, and customer preferences.

- The study's main source of qualitative data was semi-structured interviews, which may have limits and biases due to the self-reported nature of the data even if they provided rich contextual insights.
- One shortcoming of the cross-sectional data gathering method is that it only provides an overview of the competitive intelligence and internet marketing tactics currently used by Iraqi telecom businesses. The development of these practices over time, the identification of new trends, and the analysis of the long-term effects of strategic choices would all need longitudinal study approaches.
- The research was dependent on the opinions and experiences of the managers who were questioned, which might not accurately reflect the viewpoints of other parties, including clients, authorities, or professionals in the field. Using a multi-stakeholder approach might yield a more thorough knowledge of the opportunities and obstacles that Iraqi telecom businesses must overcome in order to pursue competitive intelligence projects and successful internet marketing campaigns.

Here are some useful recommendations for managers in the Iraqi telecommunications business based on the findings presented:

Strengthen Competitive Intelligence Capabilities

- Create strong intelligence systems based on technology, ethics, and the market to keep a close eye on the competitive environment.
- Dedicate resources to R&D and technology road mapping to anticipate industry trends and innovations.
- Encourage a culture of data-driven decision-making, where competitive insights are systematically gathered, analyzed, and translated into strategic actions.
- Conduct regular competitive landscape analyses to map out competitor positioning, product/service offerings, pricing, promotional tactics, and target customer segments.
- Attend industry events, conferences, and trade shows to network with competitors and observe their marketing approaches firsthand.

Enhance Marketing Capabilities

- Focus on improving the perceived quality of products and services, which is a key driver of customer satisfaction and loyalty.
- Allocate resources to develop and refine the company's marketing capabilities, including digital marketing, customer segmentation, and targeted communication strategies.

Embrace Emerging Technologies and Trends

- Monitor and explore the potential applications of industry 4.0 technologies, such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and data-driven marketing, to enhance the company's competitive edge.
- Develop a strategic roadmap to guide the adoption and integration of these emerging trends into the organization's operations and service offerings.

Perceived Service Quality

- Invest in customer satisfaction surveys, focus groups, and other feedback mechanisms to continuously assess perceptions of your service quality.
- Identify and address any service quality gaps through process improvements, staff training, technology upgrades, etc.
- Showcase testimonials, user reviews, and awards/recognition related to your service quality in your marketing materials.
- Implement a customer loyalty program to incentivize repeat business and positive word-of-mouth.
- Empower your customer service team to go above and beyond in resolving customer issues quickly and effectively.

Optimize Organizational Factors

- Foster a solid organizational culture that promotes employee loyalty and aligns with the company's strategic objectives.
- Ensure that the organizational structure and information systems facilitate cross-functional collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and efficient decision-making.

Prioritize Cultural Awareness and Legal Compliance

- Develop a deep understanding of the cultural nuances and evolving societal trends that influence consumer preferences and behaviors in the Iraqi market.
- Ensure strict compliance with the legal and regulatory frameworks governing the telecommunications sector, staying abreast of any changes or updates.

Here are some suggestions for future research building upon the findings from the current study on the role of service failure and employee competence in shaping customer coping behaviors in religious tourism marketing:

- First, conducting a comparative analysis between the Iraqi telecommunication sector and other national or regional markets could provide valuable insights into the similarities and differences in strategic approaches, the role of competitive intelligence, and the influential factors that shape online marketing initiatives. Such a cross-country or cross-regional comparison could highlight best practices, identify areas for improvement, and inform the development of more comprehensive frameworks applicable to diverse telecommunication environments.
- Second, expanding the stakeholder perspectives incorporated in the research design could enrich the understanding of the online marketing and competitive intelligence landscape. Incorporating the viewpoints of telecommunication firm management with those of consumers, regulatory agencies, and industry specialists might yield a more comprehensive understanding of the possibilities, problems, and developing trends in the business. Using a multi-stakeholder approach might provide important insights that would not be apparent when looking at things from just one source.
- Subsequent research endeavors may investigate the ramifications of nascent technologies and sector patterns, like the introduction of 5G, the incorporation of artificial intelligence, and the mounting significance of data-driven marketing, on the developing digital marketing tactics and competitive intelligence methodologies in the Iraqi telecommunications sector. Examining

the effect, acceptance, and preparedness of these technical developments might help with strategic planning and the launch of new projects.

- Investigations into the leadership styles, organizational cultures, and change management procedures of Iraqi telecom firms may offer crucial perspectives on how to successfully execute and maintain competitive intelligence and online marketing campaigns. Managerial interventions and organizational transformation initiatives may be guided by an understanding of the organizational elements that support or obstruct the integration of these strategic competencies.

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