

The Role of Branding in Attracting Customers via Influencers: A Study of Iraqi Tourism Companies

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – According to the difference in the strength of the brand and the extent of its acceptance in the markets on which the company relies on developing its trademark and increasing its impact in the targeted markets. The company's ability to entice customers is determined, and one of the mechanisms that some companies follow is investing in influential people to increase the acceptance and dissemination of the brand. This study aims to measure the direct impact of the brand in attracting customers and indirect influence through the mediation of the use of influencers.

Methodology/approach – an electronic questionnaire was used as main instructions to collect data of Iraqi tourism companies in the capital, Baghdad, and the sample size (396) respondents. and the study approach is the descriptive analytical study

Findings – The brand of banks affect the attraction of customers, and the effect increases with the presence of the intermediate role of influencers.

Novelty/value – This research explores the impact of branding on customer attraction through influencers in Iraq's tourism sector, an underexplored area. It fills a gap by analyzing how brand identity enhances influencer marketing effectiveness, offering practical insights for tourism companies to strengthen market positioning.

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INTRODUCTION

This study concerns one of the organization's most critical assets, which is the intangible and trademark assets, and when talking about its history, it began with the beginning of the first social formations. It is possible to trace the use of trademarks to the Stone Age, when hunters used weapons with specific 'brands' used to indicate success (Almqvist & Roberts, 2000). and in the first civilizations of humanity where the word the mark is derived from the ancient Nordish word (Brandr), which means 'burning' is a sign in which cattle is burned with a hot iron to indicate its owner where the brands were and still is the means used by the owners of livestock To put signs on their animals to determine their identity (MARYA, 2012). the ancient civilization in Mesopotamia and Greece used names and signs to refer to their shows and their distinction from others and most of the signs were wine, livestock, utensils, ointments, or minerals (Sarkar and Singh, 2005). Then, the industrials, carpets and craftsmen used it in

France and Italy, who used to put their names on their products. During the sixteenth century, the brands similar to those we see today began to appear. Some of the oldest known brands were established by the English Ceramor maker (Josiah Wedgwood) and French fashion designer (Rose Bertin) (Burke 1996) (de Paola 1985). It should be noted that the brand at its time indicates three concepts, Ownership, so that the brand or name indicates the ownership of the person for that product. and the second source, so that to determine the source of this product or piece and The third Excellence, Until it is characterized by the good quality of the manufacturers of the people of the manufacturers with poor quality. the brand is not a new phenomenon for the world of companies, academics, researchers and even in the markets. but rather the first uses of the brand were associated with attracting customers to the owner of the product by identifying the ownership and source and the extent of the uniqueness and distinction of the product, and it is worth noting the work role that the brand plays in the commercial and consumer of the company In the case of the company, the brands have become very valuable (Aaker, 1991).

It is the primary strategic resource and the most powerless power (Erdil, 2013), (Kotler and Keller, 2012). As for consumers, the brand is a unique mixture of functional and emotional characteristics that consumers realize as an additional value, unique experience and certain promise (Lynch & De, 2004). It has a different symbolic value from everything that is actually available, and the ability to represent interests that exceed the brand itself (Mcennaly & De, 1999).

The study aims to identify the determination of the role played by the mark in attracting customers by meditating the influencers in the tourism sector for a number of companies in Baghdad due to the major differences in the offers and capabilities that these companies possess and the degree of customer response and their interaction with the influencers. In this paper, a survey of tourism companies that dealt with influencers was made to measure the extent of response. To understand the content of this paper, a set of questions were asked.

- What is the level of brand awareness from the customers of the Iraqi tourism sector?
- What is the role of influencers in attracting customers in tourism companies?
- Have the brands of tourism companies contributed to attracting customers directly?
- Have the brands of tourism companies mediated influencers as one of the marketing tools contributed to attracting customers?

The research was based on testing four hypotheses as shown:

H1: There is a significant impact of branding in attracting customers in the researched tourism companies.

H2: There is a significant brand influence on influencers in the researched tourism companies.

H3: There is a significant impact of influencers in attracting customers in the researched tourism companies.

H4: There is a significant impact of branding on customer attraction through the mediating role Influencers in the researched tourism companies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The need to Attract customers appears from the rule of its use if there are no customers if there is no commercial work, and if there are no competitors if the need for the policies of attracting them decreases and the importance of Attract customers is highlighted by understanding the role of attraction in sustaining the remaining organizations as it is an issue related to the survival or lack of organizations. As the attraction of customers by companies requires meeting their needs in a way that corresponds to their expectations or exceeds it better than competitors (Kura & Shehu, 2021). Some assume that customer satisfaction and keeping them play a pivotal role in the success of companies, however, they assure that every company does not only need to keep its current customers only, but also to expand its base from customers significantly and this requires a good understanding of customers as it is necessary (Raja et .al, 2014). Companies are trying to create value for customers to attract and keep them. The aim of the companies is to provide superior value to the target customers, and to do so, companies seek to better meet customer needs than competition (David, 1995), citing (MatTSOON 2009). The difficulty lies in attracting customers in the amount and quality of the various offers of goods and services available in the markets, and it is necessary to choose from them. It buys the customer from the company

that offers the highest value that the customer realizes by assessing the difference between all the benefits and all the costs of marketing offers and competing offers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Hence the role of the brand appears regarding the determination of the value that you can provide to customers that attract customers.

However, in order to clarify what is the brand management, it is important to note that some studies and experts focus on how the brand influences other brands, while many studies are devoted to the brand's benefits or reasons for preference, switching to the brand, satisfaction, and loyalty.

(Moore and Reid, 2008). As the brands are a direct result of the market retail strategy and the distinction of products and that, the building of the brand is more than giving the name and definition of the markets that this product has been sealed with a mark and a mark (Kapiver, 2004). As there are many categories for the brand and perhaps the most comprehensive classification due to (Chernatony & Riley, 1998). which classified it to (12) category: the brand as a logo, the brand as a legal tool, the brand as a company, the brand as a reducing, and the brand As a way to reduce risk, brand as an identity system, brand as a picture in consumer mind, brand as a valuable system, brand as a character, brand as a relationship, brand as added value and brand as a development entity.

According to (Brown, 1992) 'The brand name is nothing more or less than the sum of all the mental bonds with which people are connected.' Another opinion indicates that brands are more than just a mental association, as strong brands also have an intense emotional connection (Kapiver, 2004). The question that should be raised whether customers always make the decision based on the brand? Are there factors that can support the appearance and presence of the brand in the targeted markets? Based on the theory of consumer behavior (Howard & Seth, 1969) these questions can be clarified in part. As the ability of customers to pay and their willingness to do so, in addition to the social influence, they play a vital role in determining their position on the brand. However, the ability to pay is not the decisive factor of the decision to adopt, buy and attract the brand, as social influence also has a role, which increases the complexity of the concept. It is clear from the above discussion that creating a state of attraction to customers to the brand becomes more complicated whenever it is explained from the viewpoint of customers. Based on the risks of consumers when they buy a commodity or service (Bauer, 1960). Understanding the dimensions of the risks perceived by customers enables marketers to provide their commercial marks to build consumer confidence (Assael, 1995). This topic is related to the concept of the brand as it is a contract between the organization and consumers (Staffley, 1987). Again, to understand this, we have to know the dimensions of the risks. According to (Kapiver, 2004), the perceived risks can be economic in particular those related to the price, the function of performance, and the psychological that is related to the self -concept of consumers, and socially, that is, associated with the social image of the consumer. (Bettman, 1973) presented two types of perceived risks: the basic risks, and the risks that can be dealt with, and the first type indicates those risks that relate to the product in general, regardless of the mark, while the second type indicates those risks that exist in the mind of the consumer. When he compares the group of signs that belong to a specific product, it has been clarified that there are some factors that help to increase the risks that the consumer feels in the purchasing position. Competition brands. There are two types of first customers by attracting new customers, while analysts called 'Land Grab' (Chen & Hitt, 2002). The other direction is to explain the attraction of consumers as a bridge that connects the institution and the customer, and works to attract the attention of customers by meeting their needs to ensure sustainability (Khamitov, 2019). especially in light of the tremendous challenge of acquiring new customers in the very competitive market (Bauerová, 2021), and when used Which of the two methods asks what motivates consumers to interact with the brand? (Bulding, 1956) indicated that people do not interact with reality, but with the imagined reality, and its focus is on the various interpretations of the same incentive. Moreover, the brand (Martineau, 1959) described the brand as a picture or depicted in the mind of the consumer of functional and psychological features. Here it can be said that the use of influencers may make psychological value through the features that the influencer possesses among consumers. Whereas, the discrimination based on functional capabilities is easy to simulate (Lambin, 1993), and it has introduced a great deal of brand research as a symbolic figure estimated by the consumer in order to exceed the job benefit. Alt and

Griggs, 1988) (Arnold, 1992) (Goodyear, 1993). However, there is another way to distinguish by focusing on psychological values, using creative communications and packaging. In the same context, Zinkhan et al the brand personality is primarily as a result of the company's contacts (Plummer, 1985). Here, it can be said that the influencers, after them, is one of the marketing communication tools. The influencers can attract consumers, after them, to provide additional value through their role as marketing communication. In this regard, companies can achieve their marketing goals at a low cost (Putra and Digdowiseiso, 2024).

Thus, companies need to use the latest concepts in marketing, especially influencers, to attract the target audience. The use of influencers is one of the most powerful ways in which companies can reach an interactive audience and promote brand recognition (Vilkaite-Vaitone, 2024). As partnerships with influencers on social media are increasing from the awareness of brands due to the strong ability to communicate with consumers, which greatly exceeds traditional marketing methods (AO et al., 2023) (Hudders, 2022 & De Jans). According to (Nair & Kumar, 2024), the use of influencers on social media has become an indispensable element in brand marketing strategies.

METHOD

An electronic poll was conducted for a sample of travel agencies on social media. They had no desire to answer. The random sample was used to choose the participants. Out of the 570 questionnaires that were delivered, 480 are deemed valid for usage, meaning that the questionnaire has an effective response rate of 84.2%. Table 1 shows the results of the sample description's statistics. Several paragraphs pertaining to the search parameters were introduced and eliminated. Regarding their primary responsibilities at their workplace, over two-thirds of the sample are "service" workers, with roughly half of the remaining employees handling logistics for tourist services and the remaining portion serving as escorts and tourist evidence. implementing SPSS V.26 and the descriptive analytical lessons were based on using a five-point Likert scale.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Multi -lectrt scales have been used with five basic points ranging from 'I agree strongly' to 'I do not agree strongly' to all the study variables. to measure the response to the brand and the extent of their awareness of the brand and reliance on measures derived from the work of (Kapiver, 2004). either the influencers It was adopted as a unilateral variable, and (10) indicators were relied upon and based on the work of (Digdowiseiso * Putra, 2024) and the attraction of customers has been relied on (10) indicators as a unilateral variable and based on the work of (Raja, et.al, 2014). (Alpha Value) was tested in terms of reliability and validity. It was found that it is strong (0.952) for the brand variable. The value of the influencers is (0.981). As for attracting the customer, the value reached (0.923). The study reached the acceptance of the assumptions for the direct influence and the indirect influence. As shown in the results below: Descriptive statistics: The response was measured across the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation of the brand, influencers and customer attraction, as shown in Table (1).

Table (1) Descriptive statistics test.

Se	Section	arithmetic mean	standard deviation	COV
1	overall brand	4.922	0.864	0.175
1A	ass-mental	4.812	0.743	0.154
1B	emotional-con	4.660	0.738	0.158
2	influencers	4.637	0.733	0.158
3	Entice	4.664	0.688	0.165

Table (1) concerning the test of descriptive statistics shows the trademark and the arithmetic average (4.922), the standard deviation is (0.864), and the difference factor (0.175), i.e. the dispersion ratio (17.5). Influencers reached the arithmetic medium (4.637), the standard deviation was (0.733), and the difference factor (0.158), i.e. the dispersion ratio (15.8). The customer attracted the arithmetic average (4.664), the standard deviation was (0.688), and the difference factor (0.165), i.e. the dispersion ratio (16.5).

- 1- Research hypotheses test: The study hypotheses were tested for the direct impact of the brand in attracting the customer. Table (2) was presented via simple linear regression, and indirect to the brand in attracting the customer by mediating the influencers as shown in table (3) to test the extent of the indirect effect. Table (4) does not select the indirect impact level as shown:

Table (2) Testing direct effect hypotheses

hypotheses		Statistics	Value - Statistics	Conclusion
H1	Independent - affiliate	β	0.389	Supported*
		R ²	0.367	
		sig	0.000	
H2	Independent – mediator	β	0.418	Supported*
		R ²	0.401	
		sig	0.000	
H3	Mediator – affiliate	β	0.322	Supported*
		R ²	0.312	
		sig	0.000	
Note: * 0.001 level of significance				

The direct effect between the brand is analyzed in attracting the customer and that the total is morally (SIG) (0.000) to view table (2) to obtain a summary of the results. The results indicate H1 support, that when the organization has a trademark this is an important factor for attracting customers as they deal with a well-known party and this preserves the security of customers and their material, moral and legal rights, as well as the brand resulted in marketing communications for customers and that R-Square reached (0.367) .

Between the brand influencer in the promoted advertising model and the (sig) supporter (0.000), the primary objective was accomplished (2) to obtain outcomes. Its findings corroborate H2, which states that a brand cannot be regarded as a component of success and business project management when it is

seen a crucial component for the influencer to interact with a naturally powerful organization. For the most part, they decline to work with the business and R-square Bulgaria (0.401).

The direct effect between influencers in attracting customers was analyzed and the overall model is significant and (sig) value is (0.000) to see Table (2) for a summary of the results. The results indicate support for H3, that when tourism companies invest in influencers in the community, customers can be attracted because of their acceptability, fame and influence and R-square reached (0.312). To measure the indirect effect, the significance of the relationship must be determined, i.e. the significance of the presence of the mediating variable, as the (Sobel-test) was tested as shown in the table:

Table (3) Test Mediating role

	input	tests	Test statistic	Std. error	p-value
a	0.418	Sobel	6.496	0.020	0.000
b	0.322				
sa	0.032				
sb	0.043				

a = raw (unstandardized) regression coefficient for the association between IV and mediator.

s_a = standard error of a .

b = raw coefficient for the association between the mediator and the DV (when the IV is also a predictor of the DV).

s_b = standard error of b .

Table (3) shows that the mediation role of the influencer variable is sentimental and value (p-value) of 0.000. This indicates that the mediator's influence is moral.

Table (4) Indirect Impact Hypothesis Test.

Table (1) Indirect Impact Hypothesis Test									
Hypotheses		Paths-change		T-effect	β	C.R	p-value	R ²	Conclusion
H4	Brand	influencers	Attracted customers	indirect	0.197	2.66	0.000	0.173	Supported*
Note: * 0.001 level of significance									

Table (4) shows the results of the indirect impact relationship of the independent variable (brand) and dependent variable (customer attraction) by intermediating (influencers) and shows that there is an impact of (0.197) at a morale level (0.01) and (P-VALUE) of (0.000).

It should be noted that the calculated critical ratio value is statistically significant if it falls outside the boundary (± 2.58) at a morale level (0.01) (& Jones, 2021 Abu-Bader) accordingly, the value of the critical ratio (C.R) is (2.66) that is, there is morale at (0.01), and interpretation coefficient. R2 is 0.173. This indicates that approximately 17% of the customer attraction is the result of the trademark mediation of influencers and the rest of other variables or random errors. The direct effect value is 0.389. The indirect effect is 0.197. To extract the total effect, both direct impact and indirect effect are collected to total impact (0.586). (Influencers) led to a higher overall impact level among the independent variable (brand) In the dependent variable (customer attraction) because the effect value in the presence of an intermediary is higher than the effect in the absence of an intermediary, so the hypothesis of indirect effect can be accepted.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we examine the role of branding in attracting customers through influencers, focusing on tourism companies in Iraq. The study highlights the importance of brand acceptance in target markets and how influencers can be used as a means to increase brand influence and attract customers.

We conclude from the study that there is a significant overlap between branding and the content provided by influencers in attracting customers. Branding is a key factor that enhances customers' desire to interact with the products or services offered and plays a crucial role in attracting customers. The more well-known and trusted a brand is, the greater the likelihood of attracting customers. Influencers help enhance brand influence, acting as a bridge between the brand and customers. and The presence of influencers clearly increases brand influence. Using influencers on social media can enhance brand strength, enhance brand recognition, and contribute to increased customer engagement. The practical side of the study concludes that the relationship between branding and customer attraction was significant and strong, reflecting the importance of having a clear strategy for using influencers. These findings underscore the importance of branding and influencer content in marketing strategies and building strong relationships with audiences.

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