



NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS PROGRAM

**THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN  
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS GROWTH: PERCEPTIONS  
OF MARKETING PROFESSIONALS IN NORTHERN IRAQ**

KANI RIZGAR ALI SALAYI

MASTER'S THESIS

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2020

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MASTER'S THESIS

THESIS SUPERVISOR  
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## **ACCEPTANCE**

We as the jury members certify the The Role of Digital Marketing in International Business Growth: Perceptions of Marketing Professionals in Northern Iraq prepared by the Kani Rizgar Ali Salayi defended on 29/01/2021 has been found satisfactory for the award of degree of Master

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## DECLARATION

I Kani Rizgar Ali Salayi, hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "The Role of Digital Marketing in International Business Growth: Perceptions of Marketing Professionals in Northern Iraq " has been prepared myself under the guidance and supervision of 'Asst. Prof. Dr. Kemal Çek' in partial fulfilment of the Near East University, Graduate School of Social Sciences regulations and does not to the best of my knowledge breach and Law of Copyrights and has been tested for plagiarism and a copy of the result can be found in the Thesis.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS GROWTH: PERCEPTIONS OF MARKETING PROFESSIONALS IN NORTHERN IRAQ

The study examines the roles of digital marketing in international business. 249 questionnaire responses collected from multinational companies based in Erbil, North Iraq were analysed using SPSS version 24. The obtained regression analysis results depicted that using digital marketing for accessing different opportunities, reducing promotion costs, trust building and guaranteeing better revenues purposes has positive effects on the growth of international businesses. Three hypotheses asserting that the use of digital marketing for accessing different opportunities purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth, the use of digital marketing for reducing promotion costs purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth, and the use of digital marketing for trust building purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth were accepted at 5%. The hypothesis asserting that the use of digital marketing for guaranteeing better revenues purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth was rejected at 5%. The study findings theoretically imply that international business must invest in digital marketing for them to achieve sound growth results. The study contributes towards improving understanding about the significance of digital marketing in international business in the wake of rising globalisation trends.

**Keywords:** Accessing different opportunities, focusing on mobile customers, guaranteeing better revenues, digital marketing, international business growth, reducing promotion costs.

## ÖZ

### THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS GROWTH: PERCEPTIONS OF MARKETING PROFESSIONALS IN NORTHERN IRAQ

Çalışma, dijital pazarlamanın uluslararası iş dünyasındaki rollerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kuzey Irak'ın Erbil kentinde bulunan çok uluslu şirketlerden toplanan 249 anket yanıtı SPSS sürüm 24 kullanılarak analiz edildi. Elde edilen regresyon analizi sonuçları, farklı fırsatlara erişmek için dijital pazarlama kullanımı, promosyon maliyetlerini azaltmak, güven oluşturma ve daha iyi gelir amaçları garanti uluslararası işletmelerin büyüme üzerinde olumlu etkileri olduğunu gösterdi. Dijital pazarlamanın farklı fırsatlara erişim amacıyla kullanımının uluslararası iş büyümesi üzerinde önemli bir olumlu etkisi olmadığını, promosyon maliyetlerini azaltmak için dijital pazarlamanın kullanımının uluslararası iş büyümesi üzerinde önemli bir olumlu etkisi olmadığını ve dijital pazarlamanın güven oluşturma amacıyla kullanılmasının uluslararası iş büyümesi üzerinde önemli bir olumlu etkisi olmadığını ileri süren üç hipotez %5 olarak kabul edilmiştir. Dijital pazarlamanın daha iyi gelir sağlamak amacıyla kullanılmasının uluslararası iş büyümesi üzerinde önemli bir olumlu etkisi olmadığı hipotezi %5 oranında reddedilmiştir. Çalışma bulguları teorik olarak uluslararası iş onlar için sağlam büyüme sonuçları elde etmek için dijital pazarlama yatırım gerektigini ima eder. Çalışma, artan küreselleşme eğilimlerinin ardından dijital pazarlamanın uluslararası iş dünyasındaki önemi hakkında anlayışın geliştirilmesine katkıda bulunuyor.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Farklı fırsatlara erişmek, mobil müşterilere odaklanmak, daha iyi gelirleri garanti etmek, dijital pazarlama, uluslararası iş büyümesi, promosyon maliyetlerini düşürmek.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ADO:</b>	Accessing Different Opportunities
<b>FMC:</b>	Focusing On Mobile Customers
<b>GBR:</b>	Guaranteeing Better Revenues
<b>IGB:</b>	International Business Growth
<b>OLS:</b>	Ordinary Least Squares
<b>RPC:</b>	Reducing Promotion Costs
<b>SPSS:</b>	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
<b>TCP:</b>	Targeting and Conversion Purposes

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the study**

Digital marketing is the use of technologies to help marketing activities in order to improve customer knowledge by matching their needs (Chaffey, 2013). Marketing has been around for a long time. Business owners felt the need to spread the word about their products or services through newspapers and word of mouth. Digital marketing on the other end is becoming popular because it utilizes mass media devices like television, radio and the Internet. The most common digital marketing tool used today is Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Its role is to maximize the way search engines like Google find your website.

Digital marketing concept originated from the Internet and search engines ranking of websites. The first search engine was started in 1991 with a network protocol called Gopher for query and search. After the launch of Yahoo in 1994 companies started to maximize their ranking on the website (Smyth, 2007).

When the Internet bubble burst in 2001, market was dominated by Google and Yahoo for search optimization. Internet search traffic grew in 2006; the rise of search engine optimization grew for major companies like Google (Smyth, 2007). In 2007, the usage of mobile devices increased the Internet usage on the move drastically and people all over the world started connecting with each other more conveniently through social media.

In the developed world, companies have realized the importance of digital marketing. In order for businesses to be successful they will have to merge online with traditional methods for meeting the needs of customers more precisely (Parsons, Zeisser & Waitman, 1996). Introduction of new technologies has creating new business opportunities for marketers to manage their websites and achieve their business objectives (Kiani, 1998). With the availability of so

many choices for customers, it is very difficult for marketers to create brands and increase traffic for their products and services. Online advertising is a powerful marketing vehicle for building brands and increasing traffic for companies to achieve success (Song, 2001). Expectations in terms of producing results and measuring success for advertisement money spent, digital marketing is more cost-efficient for measuring ROI on advertisement (Pepelnjak, 2008).

Today, monotonous advertising and marketing techniques have given way to digital marketing. In addition, it is so powerful that it can help revive the economy and can create tremendous opportunities for governments to function in a more efficient manner (Munshi, 2012). In order for digital marketing to deliver result for businesses, digital content such as accessibility, navigation and speed are defined as the key characteristics for marketing (Kanttila, 2004). Other tried and tested tool for achieving success through digital marketing is the use of word-of-mouth WOM on social media and for making the site popular (Trusov, 2009).

### **Problem Statement**

The Internet is the most powerful tool for businesses (Yannopoulos, 2011). Marketing managers who fail to utilize the importance of the Internet in their business marketing strategy will be at disadvantage because the Internet is changing the brand, pricing, distribution and promotion strategy. Northern Iraq has seen a steady growth in media with 20 million people have access to the Internet but still marketers insist on doing things the traditional way (Mohsin, 2010). Management and structure in Northern Iraq are still based on ancient paradigm where customers are moving ahead with their demands and expectations. This gap is widening day by day with limited skills and mindset available in Northern Iraq to solve the problem for the demanding customers. Companies in Northern Iraq including the MNC's are going the traditional way

and keeping the digital aspect just to show off in tune with the modern trends. Thus, the research will answer the following question:

- What is the role of digital marketing in international business growth?
- What are the perspectives of marketing professionals towards digital marketing in Northern Iraq?

### **Aim of Study**

The aim of this study is:

- To describe the role of digital marketing in international business growth.
- To explore the perceptions of marketing professionals towards digital marketing for international business growth.

### **Significance of Study**

This study appeals to the existing literature because it adds new knowledge to the existing body of literature on digital marketing for international business growth. To the researcher's knowledge, there is no study conducted on the role of digital marketing among marketing professionals in Northern Iraq. This study is very valuable for marketing professional as it highlights the importance of digital marketing.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides insights of the theoretical foundations shaping digital marketing and how they influence international business which is widely driven by globalisation trends. Such will be supported by related empirical examinations on the roles of digital marketing on international business growth.

#### **1.2 Digital marketing**

Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi (2020) consider digital marketing to be a marketing platform that uses applications, e-mail, websites, electronic media like game consoles, tablets, cell phones, smart phones, and personal computers to engage customers. In another study by Adam, Ibrahim, Ikramuddin and Syahputra (2020) 'internet marketing' or 'online marketing' are considered as synonymous to digital marketing. However, these forms of marketing are distinct and online marketing is a form of digital marketing. Besides, email marketing, display advertising, and other search engine optimization platforms (digital marketing services) are part of internet marketing.

Regardless, of the definition one can opt to use, the concept of digital marketing is inclined to internet devices both mobile and fixed devices and tools to transmit information. It is on this base that this study considers digital marketing as important for international businesses. The reasons are herein outlined in this study' section.

Sajeena (2020) digital marketing related digital marketing activities to promotion. That is, digital marketing services is considered to be a marketing aspect that is used by businesses to enhance consumers' awareness about the nature of services and products they are offering using mobile devices, computers and other internet connected devices. Digital marketing platforms are thus, a combination of social media marketing and internet marketing. They are essential for integrating services and integrating channels and thus, resulting in what is known as a digital ecosystem comprising of channels for communication (Key, 2017; Makrides, Vrontis & Christofi, 2020).

### **1.3 The influence of globalisation on international business**

Globalisation is a prominent business activity whose influences extends beyond several geographical boundaries. The inception of globalisation theoretical insights commenced from an aspect of having to deal with barriers restricting the free flow of information and knowledge, technology, finance, investment, and trade (Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010). As a result, innovative information and communication technologies (ICTs) developments between countries are presumed to have been the spearheading factor that led to the prevalence and widespread increase in globalisation (Cavusgil, Knight, Riesenberger, Rammal & Rose, 2014). Such has been accompanied by transformations in the nature and structure of manufacturing activities worldwide. This subsequently, resulted in the prevalence of international competition which is more distinct and severe than what traditional and domestic companies were much accustomed to. However, a lot of developed countries were well positioned to take advantage of globalisation while undeveloped countries struggled to take advantage of it. Nevertheless, technology acquisition, adoption and innovation were ushered by globalisation and this facilitated the growth of international businesses (Cavusgil et al., 2014).

Kolk and Van Tulder (2010) states that global institutions and markets started consolidating mainly because of the disassembling of international trade barriers and global economic transformation of knowledge and information, technology, services, finance, and free flow of products. As a result, there was a widespread change in production methods as innovative technology and knowledge started flowing through and getting exchanged beyond borders on a higher dimension. Kolk and Van Tulder (2010) assert that production methods started assuming different processes and phases and could now be carried out in different locations. These activities and changes in production methods were vital to the proliferation, growth and development of international businesses. As a result, this led to an increase in industrial clusters and several types of agglomeration with downstream boundaries and downstream boundaries (Kimura, 2004). That is, decisions were being made as to which place to sell the products (downstream boundaries) while others were being made about what to purchase and from whom to purchase materials from (upstream boundaries). These developments were essential and facilitated the emergence and growth of both small and large businesses who expansion drive started extending beyond international borders (Kimura, 2004).

There were also shift in paradigms regarding the nature of technology available for use in production activities (Buckley & Ghauri, 2004). Well developed countries were much positioned to sell advanced technology to developing countries who were in much need of it to innovative their domestic production facilities. This contributed a lot to the structural changes in marketing and production activities. Thus, the rate at which technological innovations were diffusing, acquired, adopted and transferred rose significantly. As such, the global market for both goods and services expanded and diversified intensively. Such changes in global markets were linked to both opportunities and risks and only firms with superior competitive abilities and strategies were much poised to benefits from these globalisation changes and traits (Buckley & Ghauri, 2004). Nevertheless, continuous process assessments and product development were

vital for the development, growth and survival of international businesses. With a surge in international competition, competitive strategies were needed by business to sustain forces responsible for a decline in market share, profitability and dominance. This causes a widespread increase in globalisation challenges to loom and much of these challenges were related to the problem of 'globalisation of technology' (Thakur, 2009). Three forms of 'globalisation of technology' were noted to exist and these are global technological collaborations, global generation of innovations by Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) and international exploitation of nationally produced technology (Archibugi & Michie, 1995).

Thakur (2009) outlined that MNEs took advantage of their technological competences and made significant efforts to exploit them at the expense of those countries in need of them. This is because it created a platform for them to leverage better trade and business set-up terms in other countries. Such was vital for controlling costs associated with the transportation and distribution of goods and services between countries. Hence, moving production facilities to a country where goods and services were severely needed to reduce production and distribution costs. Secondly, MNEs started engaging in production of strategic production technology on an international scale. Thus, innovation became the centre of production and led to mass production both regionally and globally. For these reasons, MNEs became so famous and largely linked to technological innovation and diffusion (Borg & Rao, 2016; Czaika & Neumayer, 2017; Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010). Furthermore, with the importance of reaping the benefits of economies of scale, firms were unavoidably attracted by the importance of innovating operations.

Product and process innovation are a key element that is obtained when businesses engage in globalisation related activities (Pearce, 2006). This is because globalised markets require competitive products and services that are competitively priced (Cavusgil et al., 2014; Li, 2019). Hence, expensive products

and services can find it difficult to sell in markets that are dominated by technologically efficient businesses. Moreover, the prevalence of globalisation exposes businesses to new methods of production which render old production methods ineffective and inefficient.

In as much one can attest to the benefits of globalisation to international businesses, it also vital to consider the related costs or drawbacks businesses will encounter. For instance, Dahlman (2007) asserts that there are huge environmental costs that are incurred in the verge of keeping up with globalisation trends. Such costs are imposed on businesses by the government through taxes and unnecessary environmental protection measures which can be costly to implement and sustain. This can also be in the form of increased corporate social responsibility burdens which forces businesses to engage and adhere to ethical practices and good environmental protection measures (Czaika & Neumayer, 2017).

More benefits are obtainable from globalisation when existing and new businesses are well positioned to take advantage of globalisation activities and trends. Such benefits relate to economies of scale (Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010), lower prices (Kimura, 2004), increased global investment (Cavusgil et al., 2014) and free movement of labour (Buckley & Ghauri, 2004).

It was noted that international businesses can suffer from problems of tax competition and avoidance through which the government will be attempting to avoid but rather end up affecting other businesses (Buckley & Ghauri, 2004). Thus, new laws, rules and regulations are constantly needed to ensuring that international businesses are operating within the desired ethical conduct guidelines. But this can disturbance the natural function of the business environment and end up having spillover effects on other businesses (Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010).

Employees are likely to leave countries in search of other high rewarding countries where they can put their skills to effective use (Cavusgil et al., 2014; Dahlman, 2007). This renders domestic companies incapable of securing skilled labour resources and cause them to lose an edge in the market. This is because competitiveness is on the verge of the a high prevalence of skilled and qualified employees (Kimura, 2004). The availability of such caliber of employees ensures that businesses are well versed and positioned to maximise production, output and performance.

#### **1.4 Influences of technology on globalisation and international businesses**

Technology has been a huge pillar in globalisation and its influences are attached to a number of aspects. For instance, Czaika and Neumayer (2017) contends that technology possesses innovative features that are desirable and necessary for facilitating production and service delivery. These are the key elements that shape or influence international business activities (Borg & Rao, 2016). Hence, we can consider that international business activities are linked to technological developments that stir a surge in globalisation.

Technology has and is widely famous for its role its plays towards enhancing effectiveness. In digital market, technology has facilitated the fast and effective distribution of information (Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010). Such is vital in modern competitive business environments where effective decisions have to be made on a timeous basis. Competitors capitalise on what their opponents do not know and have not access to. In this way, they are able to make rational decisions that enhance their competitive edge over other competitors. Besides, the successful market entry, especially in international markets relies on the swift availability and easy of information (Cavusgil, Knight, Riesenberger, Rammal & Rose, 2014). This allows international businesses to gain an insight of what products and services they are going to offer, understand which location they

are going to offer the products and services, when they are going to offer the products and services, and the time they are going to offer those products and services.

Technological diffusion between countries comes along with the transfer of skills and knowledge. Therefore, international business growth coupled with globalisation have a tendency to cause a huge transfer of tacit knowledge between countries (Buckley & Ghauri, 2004; Czaika & Neumayer, 2017). International business can grow and expand their operations when they have access to tacit knowledge. Thus, technology related innovations are positively linked to globalisation and international business growth and development.

The connection between technology, globalisation and international business can be analysed in terms of information supply and access (Borg & Rao, 2016). This is because globalisation itself is based on the prevalence of information of what individuals located in one country can gain by engaging in globalisation activities (Czaika & Neumayer, 2017; Kimura, 2004). Hence, the widespread of such information fosters individuals to globalise. On the other, globalizing attracts international business as they position themselves to reap from the benefits of globalisation (Borg & Rao, 2016).

Technological developments have made it easy and less costly for business to access information about market and industry conditions in other countries (Borg & Rao, 2016). Kolk and Van Tulder (2010) assert that firms can use social media and other online platforms to determine which products and services are in huge demand and which markets to service. Such is different from traditional channels which have proved to be costly and time ineffective. The benefits are that a huge number of customers can easily and cheaply reached leading a high potential increase in market share (Czaika & Neumayer, 2017).

Borg and Rao (2016) presumes that the existed of trade barrier undermining both globalisation and international business were overcome by the high

prevalence of advanced technology. Such barrier relates to delay in exchanging information, transportation cost and access of information. Digital marketing allows business to send and access information easily at affordable rates.

Developments in global markets significantly rely on technological developments to support production activities, product and service distributions, customer relations management, and other internal activities. These benefits are evidenced through a massive increase in production (mass production) and economies of scale (Cavusgil et al., 2014). Such is important because it allows businesses to offer products to customers at low prices. This eventually leads to a reduce in operational costs and an increase in profitability.

Technological benefits can positively have related to globalisation and international business growth research and development which is carried out to enhance both aspects. This stems from insights showing that technological developments, globalisation and international business growth are positively linked together (Buckley & Ghauri, 2004; Kimura, 2004; Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010).

Though technological developments are essential for facilitating globalisation and international business growth, it has its own limitations. For instance, Borg and Rao (2016) asserts that innovative technology requires huge investments and this implies that businesses without the necessary financial resources are incapable of acquiring it. Hence, they may lose their competitiveness to those businesses which have the necessary financial backing to acquire innovative technology. There are other costs that are also attached to the acquisition and use of new and advanced technology. Czaika and Neumayer (2017) contends that costs that training and servicing costs are a major challenge that hinders the acquisition of new and advanced technology. These drawbacks can hinder both the prevalence of globalisation and, the growth and development of international businesses.



### **1.5 Digital marketing vs traditional marketing**

Digital marketing has or offer various features which make it a notable innovative strategy and tool for international business development. As such, possesses a huge advantage over traditional marketing (Ngochi & Kihara, 2019). Such advantages have extended to consumers benefiting from the prevalence of digital marketing platforms mainly by getting information which they use to make rational decisions (Sajeena, 2020). That is, digital marketing allows customers to access to information at the comfort at their homes or anywhere either inside the place where the products are being sold.

Traditional marketing channels are mostly limited to place and devices. That is, can mostly be accessed at certain places such as at home through televisions or radio stations and this implies that without these devices, one cannot get access to information provided. Furthermore, the benefit of revisiting information again is limited with some traditional marketing channels and compared to digital marketing where information leaves trails and can be accessed several months or years after its intended day of use.

Modern digital marketing platforms are vital as they encouraging two-way communication between customers and suppliers (Sajeena, 2020). This results in both parties getting mutual benefits from using digital marketing platforms. Customers can get information about the products they want including the prices while supplies can get the exact details about customers' preferences (Makrides, Vrontis & Christofi, 2020).

Modern digital marketing now makes it feasible for customers to connect with other customers located in various parts of the world (Key, 2017). In this way, customers can obtain information about product reviews, features and other customers' reactions. Consumers have also taken advantage of such platforms and use them to socialise with other individuals (Key, 2017). This has not been the case with traditional marketing channels. Now consumers can search for

information on the internet, post on social media groups like Facebook and WhatsApp.

Cost effectiveness is another aspect upon which differences between traditional and digital marketing platforms can be compared. The former is not cost effective and the latter has proved to be reliable in terms of costs (Makrides, Vrontis & Christofi, 2020). This is because firms have a wide range of platforms which they can use to market their products. There is also an aspect of convenience which can separate the two aspects. That is, digital marketing platforms have proved to be more convenient as opposed to traditional marketing. Firms and customers can gain access to digital marketing tools and platforms anywhere and at the comfort of their homes and places of relaxation.

Other than that, digital marketing has proved to be instrumental in international business as firms can now market their products to several customers worldwide. Existing digital marketing platforms like internet platforms such as using Facebook and Instagram, allows firms to reach multiple numbers of customers within an instance. This eliminates the need to develop several different tools and platforms to reach each and specific individual customer (Ngochi & Kihara, 2019).

## **1.6 Types of Digital Marketing**

Digital marketing exists in two different forms and a study by Sajeena (2020) contends that digital marketing can either assume a push marketing or pull marketing form. The distinct feature about these forms of marketing is linked with the recipient of the message being aware and in need of such information passed by the marketer. For instance, Sajeena outlines that information recipients access from news blogs, text messaging and display advertisements without actively seeking for its content is known as push digital marketing. This is important for promoting products to customers whom the firm believes that

they are interested and are capable of purchasing them. Hence, push marketing strategies have a superior advantage of other forms of digital marketing strategies as they personalise their marketing strategies to target specific demographics (Key, 2017). However, the major challenges relate to the huge costs that are involved and push marketing come with huge upfront costs, which can prove to be expensive to sustain (Melović et al., 2020). As a result, business must be certain that their marketing strategies are effective and will provide the desired results. That is, the chances of the marketing strategies succeeding must be high. If not, then businesses can incur huge losses which erode their profitability. Nevertheless, push digital marketing can assume various forms and one notable example is behavior targeting. Behavior targeting involves businesses using certain marketing strategies to target consumers with certain behaviour which causes them to use more of certain products and services (Sajeena, 2020).

The other form of digital marketing form is pull digital marketing which uses search engine optimization (SEO), visual messaging channels, info graphics, social media, email marketing, and blogging channels (Sajeena, 2020). Pull marketing is not only inclined to reaching customers like push marketing but rather aims to establish good relations with customers (Key, 2017). Pull marketing is developed on the basis of essential customer relations ideas with the aim of luring new customers and retaining existing customers. Sajeena (2020) highlighted that it is less expensive compared to push marketing but it inherently causes firms to incur certain types of costs. This is because digital marketing platforms like social media channel require a person to manage the sites and respond to comments. The other draw back relates to the amount of time that is required and pull marketing consumes a huge chunk of time to be invested in marketing activities (Ngochi & Kihara, 2019). This is because the business has to spend considerable time informing and educating customers about its products and services. This also requires educating customers about the business' operations. Other than that, the marketer has to develop

customized banners or content that will be marketed to certain individuals or types of customers and this is the main attribute of push marketing (Melović et al., 2020). Again, pull marketing will involve sending similar emails to different customers (Sajeena, 2020).

It is essential to note that a majority of digital marketing models that are being used in marketing were developed based on ideas put forward through the AIDMA model (Key, 2017). That is, the model contends that customers go through a process before taking corrective action as to buy or not to buy a product. As a result, the process is presumed to commence with the customer paying **Attention** to the product, then taking an **Interest** to look at the produce which causes the customer to develop a **Desire** to buy the product. The ideas are stored in customers' **Memory** which leads to **Action** being presently and future taken (Makrides, Vrontis & Christofi, 2020). That is, Interest, Desire, Memory, and Action which have famously become known as the AIDMA model and has proved to be essential for marketing and advertising purposes (Key, 2017; Makrides, Vrontis & Christofi, 2020). Subsequent models like the AISAS model were later developed to integrate innovative internet developments (Dentsu, 2004). According to Dentsu (2004), the model considers that internet use severally influences consumers' buying behaviour and decisions making processes. This is based on the notion that the internet has facilitated a widespread availability, dissemination and access of information between consumers, and between consumers and businesses (Melović et al., 2020). Such information is vitally used to make decisions and product ratings and reviews are notable aspects that relate to such internet activities and influences on consumers.

It is imperative to establish that digital marketing platforms have been instrumental in consumer behaviour as they provide consumers with the much needed information pivotal for their decision making and buying behaviour processes. Hence, the success of international business relies on the extent to

which they are able to positively influences the nature and volume of information made available to customers. Thus, a study by Ngochi and Kihara (2019) recommends that international businesses must spend significantly on innovating and improving the effectiveness of their digital marketing platforms. Key (2017) emphasised on controlling both negative and positive information about the business that is made available by other customers, and business opponents. This is because customers have a tendency to use any information available to their disposal to make decisions (Makrides, Vrontis & Christofi, 2020). Hence, making available positive information causes more customers to be drawn towards buying the business' products. Furthermore, digital marketing tools need to shift towards getting information from customers regarding the products and services they want, were the business has missed, what it needs to improve and how it can accommodate customers' interests when delivering products and services needed to satisfy customers' needs and wants. This is because effective products and services that generate more revenue to the business are those that are tailor made to meet customers' needs and wants ((Key, 2017; Melović et al., 2020; Sajeena, 2020). Such is vital in contemporary business situations where businesses are increasingly and competitively competition for customers (Sajeena, 2020). Thus, care must be taken to consider these aspects so that a business does not lose its competitive edge to its competitors (Sajeena, 2020).

### **1.7 Advantages of digital marketing**

Digital advertising is of profound importance to business organisations and its importance is attached to various roles it plays regarding informativeness and, sales units and revenue. A study by Adam, Ibrahim, Ikramuddin and Syahputra (2020) established that digital marketing is crucial for businesses for promoting their products and services. Such is vital for international businesses that want to venture into operations in other countries. With the presence of geographical

boundaries, breaking into new territories through the introduction of new products and services can prove to be difficult, time consuming and costly. This is because a huge number of customers need to be reached if the company is to make an impact and gain a huge portion of the market share. Digital market can be used to deal with these issues and allow businesses international access into foreign markets (Adam et al., 2020)

Melović et al. (2020) outlined that digital marketing mediums offers numerous advertising benefits. However, they outlined that these benefits can be exploited when firms are well positioned to invest and stand to put into effective practice digital marketing platforms. One of the notable benefit was presumed to be reach as digital marketing allows business to reach both current and potential customers. Melović and others' study contend that digital marketing platforms are highly beneficial compared to traditional marketing channels. Such benefits were analysed in terms of geographical reach and their findings showed that digital marketing has a wider reach compared to traditional marketing channels. Apart from that, digital marketing continuously proves to progressively contribute towards reducing advertising costs. Traditional marketing tools are limited by distance, geographical area, target consumers (Ngochi & Kihara, 2019). More consumers can be reached within a shorter time span when digital media is used as opposed to traditional channels. Ngochi and Kihara reiterated the importance and benefits of digital media citing that it can be customized to target specific customers. Such is important in international business were firms devise plans to target different customers located in various countries. Further insights provided by Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi (2020) highlights that different digital marketing services can be designed to suit specific products and services. This is crucial when dealing with a market with a huge pool of consumers with various needs, tastes and preferences.

Studies in support of digital marketing highlight that it is essential for measurement purposes (Makrides, Vrontis & Christofi, 2020; Key, 2017;

Sajeena, 2020). Digital media possess various tools which businesses can use to track ad campaigns effectiveness. Hence, tracking both the effectiveness of the ad and possible returns emanating from therefore becomes easy to do when using contemporary digital media tools. Online media tools can be used to provide details of possible returns that can be made from investing in digital media tool and advertising campaigns. In most cases, they can used to make decisions on how much to spend on digital marketing, which digital market tool to use?, which consumers to target and at what frequency should digital media tools be used to reach consumers? If these questions are now answerable and this is attributed to having sound and innovative digital media platforms.

Digital media is essential for engagement and interactive purposes. The innovative and diverse nature of digital media digital media platforms have enhanced the extent to which firms engage and interact with customers (Key, 2017). The engagement and interactive process has also widened to include communication and socialisation activities between customers themselves. Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi (2020) assert that digital media tools have created a platform upon which consumers can interact with one another. This includes accessing product reviews and ratings. This is important for consumers to decide whether they should proceed to buy the products or not. In other words, digital media tools are essential for consumers for making rational decisions. Such decisions influence their buying behaviour and firms can use engagement and interactive digital media platforms to influence consumers' buying behaviour.

Time is of huge essence in to both consumers and business corporations. Ngochi and Kihara (2019) mentioned that digital media platforms are time effective aid consumers and business corporations in saving time. International businesses can benefit a lot of from digital media marketing when they can save time disseminating information to consumers. It is in this aspect that digital media is considered as advantageous over traditional marketing channels

(Ngochi & Kihara, 2019). This is because of the speed at which information is passed down between consumers and, between consumers and firms.

Cost is another important attribute and benefit of digital media which international businesses can benefit from. Ngochi and Kihara (2019) assert that digital media platforms are innovative to an extent that they can lower advertising and marketing costs. As a result, several consumers can be reached at once within a short period as compared to traditional channels which may require individual if not, group be reached distinctively.

The above mentioned benefits indicate that digital media is vital for international businesses. These benefits are pivotal for providing them with access to international markets. They are also essential for their growth and maintaining contact with customers. One paramount aspect established is that digital media tools can be used to access information which can be used to influence consumers' buying behaviour.

### **1.8 Digital Advertising: Ad avenues**

Digital marketing offers a series of diverse advertising platforms which are essential for business development and growth. The importance of each channel or advertising platforms creates ways through which business can reach a certain target audience. Such has implications on international business growth. Notable advertising avenues that are linked to digital marketing are;

- Search advertisements: These exist in the form of advertisements containing a link that takes consumers to a particular site when clicked (Ngochi & Kihara, 2019). Search advertisements are essential for enhancing flexibility in digital marketing as they allow businesses to place advertisements in other markets' sites which may be overridden which a huge user presence and volume. They do not need monitoring and will continue to exist so long as the host site remains available. Due to the



presence of high user presence and traffic volumes, search advertisements can be tailor made to target specific customers with specific needs, tastes and preferences.

- **Email Advertisements:** Advertisements involving sending a commercial message to a group of people using emails. These are vital for engaging with current clients and potential clients (Ngochi & Kihara, 2019).
- **Social Media Advertisements:** These are stamp pads, display, text, and advertisements of any type that are advertised on several social websites like Orkut, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook.
- **Mobile Advertisements:** These are advertisements that are specifically used to target consumers on their mobile tablets and devices. Notable examples include In-App, Mobile Video & TV ads, MMS, SMS, and other Mobile Web ads.
- **Display advertisements:** These are advertisements located at various positions on a network page that typically comprise of logos, photographs, other images, or even text. Technologically, these comprise of video ads, Rich media, Simple flash, and image, (Ngochi & Kihara, 2019).

## 1.9 Hypothesis development

Digital marketing plays vital roles in international business and this is attached to the vast benefits it offers to corporations. As identified in this chapter, digital marketing profoundly plays 6 vital roles. That is, it is used for accessing different opportunities, reducing promotion costs, targeting and conversion, trust building, focusing on mobile customers and, guaranteeing better revenues purposes.

### **1.9.1 Accessing different opportunities**

With a surge in globalisation trends worldwide, it has become profoundly essential for businesses to participate and engage in globalised practices. Such is taking a toll on the basis of acknowledging that businesses operations have to expand beyond international borders if substantial profits are to be made (Ngochi & Kihara, 2019). This is because various business opportunities exist in both domestic and local markets and restricting operations to local markets limits the potential profits a business can access (Key, 2017). Thus, for businesses to access more opportunities they have to go global and digital marketing is instrumental for firms going global to access international opportunities. Related studies indicated that international markets can easily be accessed by digital platforms and gain access to available opportunities. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be formulated;

- **H<sub>1</sub>**: The use of digital marketing for accessing different opportunities purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.

### **1.9.2 Reducing promotion costs**

The emergence of digital marketing proved to be crucial and emerged at a time where traditional marketing channels were proving to be costly (Key, 2017). This is because traditional marketing strategies relied on the use of certain devices and tools which were limited in supply. This caused marketing costs related to traditional marketing strategies to sky rocket. However, the emergence of digital marketing allows firms to market their products to various consumers at once (Makrides, Vrontis & Christofi, 2020). Also, various customers located in various countries could be reached at a single time frame. As a result, we can propose to test the following hypothesis;

- **H<sub>2</sub>**: The use of digital marketing for reducing promotion costs purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.

### **1.9.3 Guaranteeing better revenues**

By getting an accessing to international opportunities, firms can gain huge revenue sources. In addition, this can stem from gaining control of new markets which other firms have not yet exploited. Furthermore, it serves as a platform of geographical diversification which allows international or regional products to counter losses suffered by selling domestic products or servicing domestic markets (Sajeena, 2020). Therefore, this study proposes to test the following hypothesis;

- **H<sub>6</sub>**: The use of digital marketing for guaranteeing better revenues purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.

### **1.9.4 Trust building**

Since digital marketing allows firms to provide various information to customers, consumers gain trust of the firm (Ngochi & Kihara, 2019). This is also because additional information needed by customers becomes widely and easily available for customers to access at any point in time. In this way, customers have access to information needed to verify how reliable the firm is and legit its services and products are. Therefore, we can propose a hypothesis on trust building as follows;

- **H<sub>3</sub>**: The use of digital marketing for trust building purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.

### 1.9.5 Focusing on mobile customers

The idea of accessing information on the internet at any point in time has made it easy for customers to get access to product and service information at any point in time (Makrides, Vrontis & Christofi, 2020; Sajeena, 2020). Such convenience implies that digital marketing is associated with a high level of mobility which firms can benefit from when they take advantage of it. Therefore, digital marketing can be said to be linked to mobile customer's activities and this study proposes the following hypothesis;

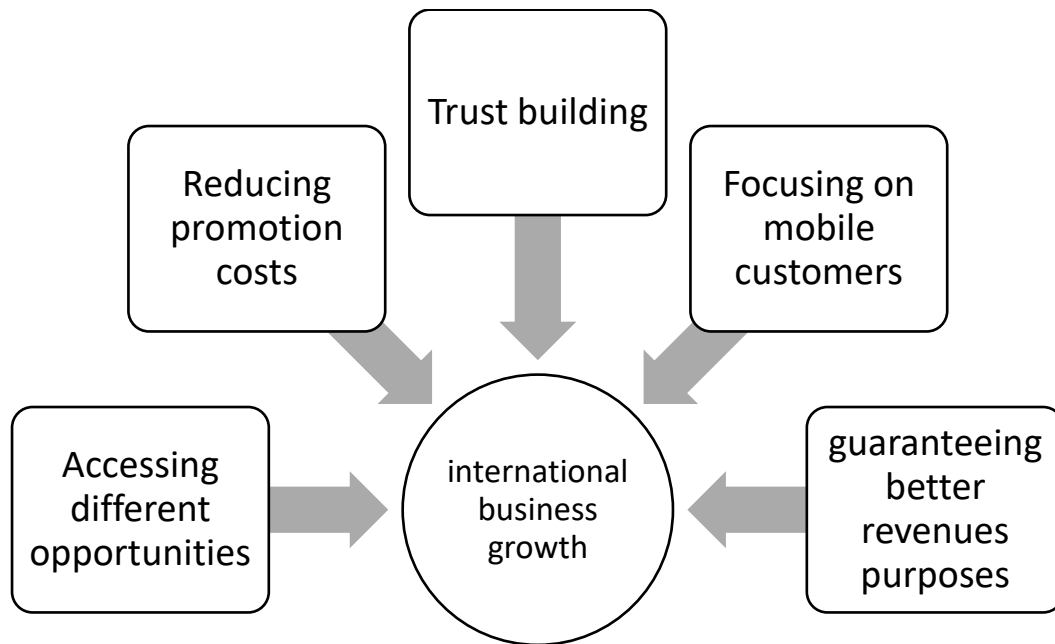
- **H<sub>4</sub>:** The use of digital marketing for focusing on mobile customer's purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.

### 1.10 Conceptual model development

In line with the reviewed studies, it can therefore, be noted that digital marketing services the following purposes in international business growth;

- Accessing different opportunities,
- Reducing promotion costs,
- Trust building,
- Focusing on mobile customers and,
- Guaranteeing better revenues.

The relationship or effects of the established roles with international business growth can be illustrated using a conceptual framework depicted in Figure 2.1 as follows;



**Figure 1.1:** Conceptual framework (Source: Author, 2020)

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides details of the methods and steps taken to carry out this study. As such, this chapter places focus on the research design, study participants and sampling procedures, research instrument, data analysis procedures, reliability tests, and ethical procedures.

#### 2.1 Research design

The study will be a qualitative approach to the examination of the role of digital marketing in international business growth. As such, will rely on the use of primary data collected using questionnaires and the use of descriptive statistics, correlation coefficient test, regression analysis and independent t-test to test the formulated hypotheses.

#### 2.2 Study participants and sampling procedures

The study focuses on the examination of data collected from 35 multinational companies based in Erbil, North Iraq. The estimated population size of the employees working under these MNCs is around 700. As a result, the study applied a sample size determination formular provided by Williams (2007) to determine the number of questionnaires to be distributed to each MNC in Erbil as follows;

$$n = \frac{N}{K + Ne^2} \quad (1).$$

Where the sample size is depicted by n, the population size by N, the margin of error e which was presumed to be 0.05 and K representing 1. Inputting the

population size and the related formula constructs as follows resulted in the establishment that a study sample of 256 employees was desirable for fulfilling this study's purposes (see equation 2). However, 249 questionnaires were collected back from the employee participants.

$$256 = \frac{700}{1+700(0.05^2)} \quad (2).$$

**Table 2.1.** Demographic profiling

Variable	Description	Count	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	141	56.6
	Female	108	43.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age group</b>	18-25 years	22	8.8
	26-30 years	109	43.8
	31-35 years	51	20.5
	36-40 years	34	13.7
	42 years +	33	13.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Designation</b>	Marketing manager	98	39.4
	Sales manager	73	29.3
	Finance manager	52	20.9
	Other	26	10.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>100</b>

Thus, 256 questionnaires were distributed to 35 multinational companies based in Erbil, North Iraq. The MNCs' employee demographic profile was produced using the collected data and analysed using frequencies and percentages. The computed findings depicted that the employees were made up of 141 male employees and 108 female employees. 43.8% of the employees were between the age group of 26-30 years, 20.5% between 31-35 years, 13.7% between 36-

40 years, 13.3% 42 years and above, and 8.8% between 18-25 years (see Table 2.1).

### **2.3 Research instrument**

The study will rely on the use of questionnaires to collect the required data from a random sample of 30 multinational companies (MNCs) based in Erbil, North Iraq. The questionnaire will be developed using theoretical concepts on digital marketing outlined in the work by Chaffey, Smith and Smith (2013) and Chaffey (2019). The questionnaire will be composed of three sections. The first section will cater for the demographic features of the MNCs whereas the second part will deal with the roles of digital marketing in international business growth. The last section of the questionnaire will cover details about international business growth. The questionnaire will also be based on the use of a 5-point Likert scale. The values of the Likert scale will correspond to strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, strongly agree and strongly agree.

### **2.4 Data analysis procedures**

The data was analysed using a combination of descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation to obtain details about the magnitude of effect and distribution of the variables. Pearson correlation coefficient test was also be used and the used to determine how the digital marketing roles are correlated with international business growth. The proposed hypotheses were tested using independent t-tests and these can be listed as follows;

- **H<sub>1</sub>**: The use of digital marketing for accessing different opportunities purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.



- **H<sub>2</sub>**: The use of digital marketing for reducing promotion costs purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.
- **H<sub>3</sub>**: The use of digital marketing for trust building purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.
- **H<sub>4</sub>**: The use of digital marketing for focusing on mobile customers purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.
- **H<sub>5</sub>**: The use of digital marketing for guaranteeing better revenues purposes has a significant positive effect on international business growth.

Meanwhile, a regression model was estimated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine the role of digital marketing in international business growth: perceptions of marketing professionals in Northern Iraq. This was essential in providing details about the magnitude and direction of influence of digital marketing on international business growth.

The initial step involved proposing that international business growth (IGB) is a function of accessing different opportunities (ADO), reducing promotion costs (RPC), targeting and conversion purposes (TCP), focusing on mobile customers (FMC) and guaranteeing better revenues (GBR). This was further expressed as a functional form as follows;

$$IGB = F(ADO, RPC, TPC, FMC, GBR) \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Applying regression analysis concepts set forth by Gujarat (2013) involving the use of a constant ( $\alpha$ ), coefficients ( $\beta_1$  to  $\beta_5$ ) and an error terms ( $\mu$ ), the following regression model was obtained;

$$\text{IGB} = \alpha + \beta_1\text{ADO} + \beta_2\text{RPC} + \beta_3\text{TPC} + \beta_4\text{FMC} + \beta_5\text{GBR} \dots \dots \dots$$

(2)

## 2.5 Reliability tests

The study applied Cronbach's alpha test to assess the internal consistency of the model variables. Variables with an alpha value equal to or more than 0.70 were regarded as having a high internal consistency (Souza, Alexandre & Guirardello, 2017). This implied that the variables were highly reliable to provide explanations about the managerial accounting and its role on estimating the efficiency of financial performance.

## 2.6 Ethical procedures

The researcher will apply for ethical approval before commencing the study and the questionnaire will be subject to a series of validity tests to enhance its validity and make sure that it abides by sound research ethics. In addition, the data will not be made available to any individual other than those specified or granted privileges by the research institution.

## 2.7 Limitations

Due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cross-sectional number of MNCs used in the study was restricted to a purposive sample of 35 MNCs. This can hinder the effective ability of the applied sample size to provide an accurate description of how Iraqi's MNCs utilise digital marketing to influence international business activities. As a result, purposive sampling was applied to allow the researcher to draw significant attention to MNCs that are involved in digital marketing and international business activities. .

## **CHAPTER THREE**

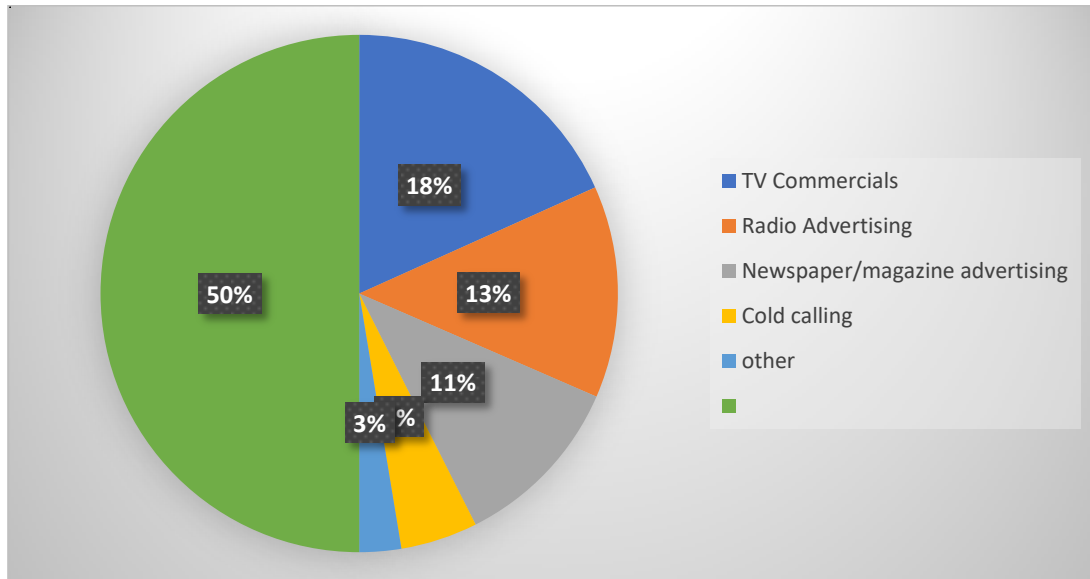
### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

256 questionnaires were distributed to 35 multinational companies based in Erbil, North Iraq and 249 questionnaires were retrieved. Hence, the provided policy implications and suggestions for further studies are based on the analysis and interpretation of the 249 responses. Hence, this chapter is essential for addressing the related empirical concerns so as to identify and fill empirical gaps.

#### **3.2 Use of trading marketing channels**

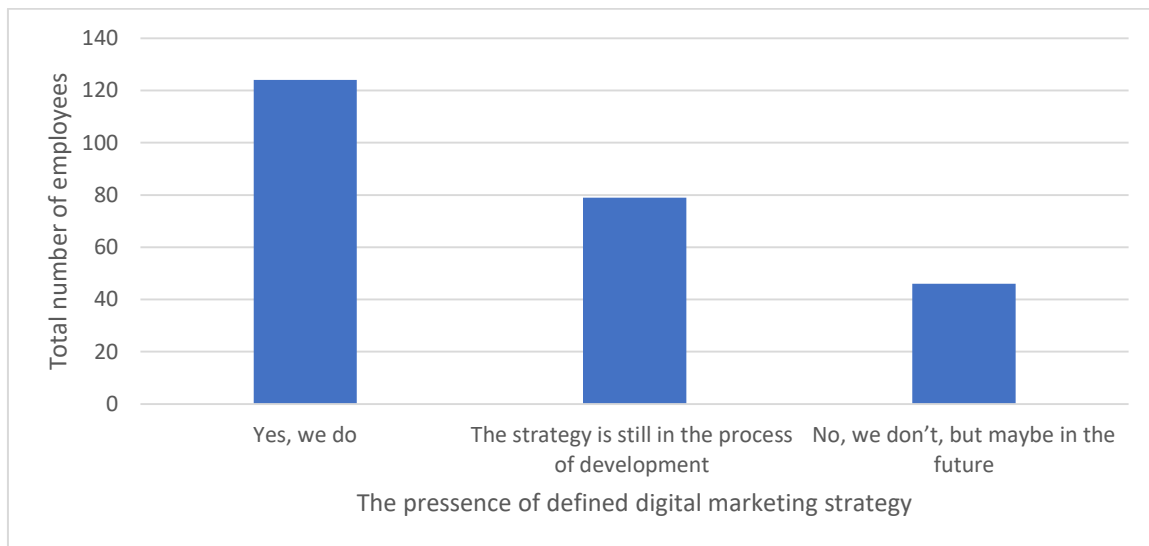
The study sought to determine how the international businesses were using traditional marketing channels. 91 employees indicated that TV Commercials were the highly used form of traditional marketing channels in business. This was followed by radio advertising and newspaper/magazine advertising with 66 and 55 employees supporting its uses and importance in business respectively. 24 and 13 employees regarding the use of cold calling and other traditional marketing channels as the least in terms of use and importance as noted in Figure 3.1.



**Figure 3.1:** Use of trading marketing channels

### 3.3 The presence of digital marketing strategies

The study also placed effort towards determining if the MNCs had defined digital marketing strategy at present. The obtained findings are presented in Figure 3.2 as follows;

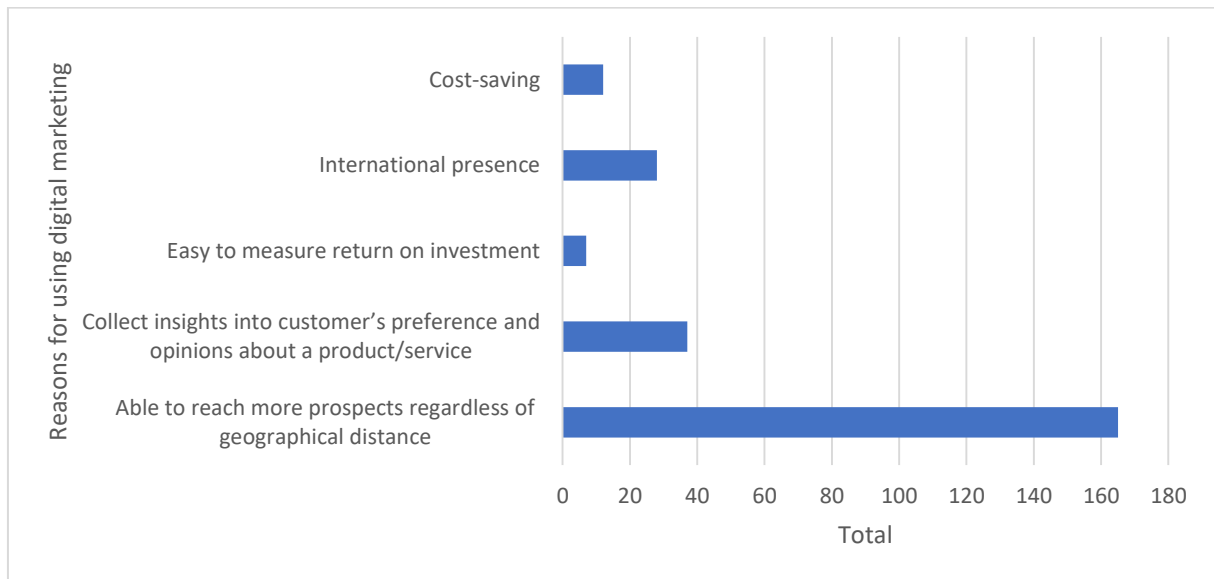


**Figure 3.2.** The presence of digital marketing strategies

124 employees indicated that the companies do have defined digital marketing strategy. 79 employees indicated that the strategy is still in the process of development while 46 employees indicated that they do not have, but maybe they will have digital marketing strategies in the future (see Figure 3.2).

### 3.4 Reasons for using digital marketing

It was established using the analysed data that the notable reason for using digital marketing strategies was related to being able to reach more prospects regardless of geographical distance with 165 employees supporting this notion. The employees further indicated that the second major reason why they use digital marketing is to collect insights into customer's preference and opinions about a product/service. It also noted that using digital marketing for enhancing the easy to measure return on investment and having an international presence were the least reasons for using digital marketing.



**Figure 3.3:** Reasons for using digital marketing

### 3.5 Proportion of funds allocated for digital marketing

The effectiveness of digital marketing strategies lies in the notion of having sufficient funds allocated towards financing investments in digital marketing. This is because companies with effective digital marketing strategies are well positioned to have a huge international presence (Kotane, Znotina & Husko, 2019) and most likely to command a huge digital marketing presence (Wang, 2020). Table 3.1 revealed that 171 employees indicated that they do set aside less than 30% of their funds towards financing digital marketing activities. 40 employees highlighted that their companies set aside 31%–50% of their funds towards financing digital marketing activities. 7 employees considered their companies as setting aside more than 50% of their funds towards financing digital marketing activities. 28 employees highlighted that they do not set aside funds towards financing digital marketing activities as they do not do digital marketing.

**Table 3.1:** Proportion of funds allocated for digital marketing

<b>Proportion of funds allocated for digital marketing</b>	<b>Count</b>
Less than 30%	174
31%–50%	40
<i>more than 50%</i>	7
N/A as we do not do digital marketing	28

### 3.6 Frequency examinations of management accounting roles

The study used frequency tabulation to analyse the distribution of the manufacturing companies' employees about the importance and roles of management accounting in manufacturing companies. As a result, frequency tabulations were done using a 5-point Likert scale for all the management accounting independent variables (strategic analysis role, performance

evaluation roles, Informative and decision-making roles, budgeting roles and cost management role).

### 3.7 Descriptive analysis of international business growth

A descriptive analysis of the manufacturing companies was conducted using mean and standard deviation. Insights from the analysis shown in Table 3.6 reveals that the employees highly agreed that the notable contribution of digital marketing to international business growth was regarding the idea that revenue from international branches had grown significantly over the past few years. (M: 3.727; STD: 0.812). The employees also indicated that the number of our employees in international branches has grown significantly since we started using digital marketing (M: 3.643; STD: 0.836).

**Table 3.2.** Analysis of the manufacturing companies' financial performance

Variable description	Mean	Std. Dev.
Our international sales have increased over the past years following the increased use of digital marketing activities.	3.104	1.282
Our company now have many branches in other countries following the increased use of digital marketing activities.	2.988	1.274
Revenue from international branches has grown significantly over the past few years.	3.727	0.812
The number of our employees in international branches has grown significantly since we started using digital marketing.	3.643	0.836
Our company has more than two products lines offered in other countries.	3.398	1.364
Our number of joint ventures and affiliations with international companies grown significantly since we started using digital marketing.	2.864	1.352
Our brand is widely and internationally recognised.	3.217	1.299

The employees lowly rated the effects of digital marketing on international business growth was on the number of branches the business had. That is, their numbers of joint ventures and affiliations with international companies grown significantly since we started using digital marketing (M: 2.864; STD: 1.352).

This also includes perspectives about their company now having many branches in other countries following the increased use of digital marketing activities (M: STD; 2.988: 1.274).

Their perceptions about other digital marketing roles were fairly high. For instance, regarding ideas that their international sales have increased over the past years following the increased use of digital marketing activities (M: STD; 3.104: 1.282); brand is widely and internationally recognised (M: STD; 3.217: 1.299); company has more than two products lines offered in other countries (M: STD; 3.398: 1.364). Huge variations were linked to the companies having more than two products lines offered in other countries.as noted by a high standard deviation of 1.364. This suggests that positive changes in the sales growth have huge responsive effects on the companies' financial performance.

### 3.8 Model test results

The obtained model summary results show that the model had an R-square of 0.793. this implies that 79.3% of the changes in international business growth were explained by the variables of trust building (TB), accessing different opportunities (ADO), reducing promotion costs (RPC), targeting and conversion purposes (TCP), focusing on mobile customers (FMC) and guaranteeing better revenues (GBR). Thus, 20.7% of the changes in IGB were explained by variables outside the model.

**Table 3.3:** Model summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
0.890 <sup>a</sup>	0.793	0.788
Predictors: TB, ADO, FMC, GBR, RPC		

ANOVA was used as a base upon which the validity of the regression model was examined. As such, the F-statistic value was significant at 1% and this



denotes that the model does not have heterogeneity problems which occurs as a result of the presence of outliers (Chatterjee & Hadi, 2015).

**Table 3.4:** ANOVA

		<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
	Regression	99.576	5	19.915	185.709	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	26.059	243	.107		
	Total	125.635	248			

### 3.9 Co-changes in digital marketing and international business

Wang (2020) established that there are co-movements that characterised digital marketing roles and international business.

**Table 3.5:** Correlation coefficient test

		<b>ADO</b>	<b>RPC</b>	<b>GBR</b>	<b>FMC</b>	<b>TB</b>	<b>IGB</b>
<b>ADO</b>	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
<b>RPC</b>	Pearson Correlation	.753**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
<b>GBR</b>	Pearson Correlation	.647**	.740**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000				
<b>FMC</b>	Pearson Correlation	.323**	.356**	.361**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000			
<b>TB</b>	Pearson Correlation	.355**	.412**	.479**	.423**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		
<b>IGB</b>	Pearson Correlation	.490**	.565**	.644**	.374**	.843**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

International business growth (IGB) is a function of accessing different opportunities (ADO), reducing promotion costs (RPC), targeting and conversion purposes (TCP), focusing on mobile customers (FMC) and guaranteeing better revenues (GBR)

As such, the study applied the Pearson correlation coefficient test to determine how digital marketing roles and international business were correlated. The correlation coefficient results revealed that all the digital marketing roles were positively correlated with each other, and international business growth. A high significant positive correlation of 0.843 was found to exist between international business growth and trust building. This entails that an increase in international business international business growth' efforts to build trust is associated with an increase in their growth. Another high and significant positive correlation of 0.753 was noted to exist between of accessing different opportunities (ADO), and reducing promotion costs. This is possibly because accessing different opportunities allows the international business access to possibilities of engaging in cots cutting strategies. Costs will possibly fall and revenue per unit increase increases due to an increase in opportunities in the format economies of scale, mass production etc. A low positive correlation of 0.323 was linked to the connection between focusing on mobile customers (FMC) and guaranteeing better revenues (GBR) at 0.01 level.

### **3.10 Model estimation results**

The study applied regression analysis techniques to answer questions related to the role of digital marketing in international business. Such was done in accordance to the 5 established digital marketing roles. That is, accessing different opportunities, reducing promotion costs, trust building, focusing on mobile customers, and guaranteeing better revenues.

The estimated regression analysis revealed that improvements in using digital marketing for accessing different opportunities has a positive effect on the growth of international businesses by 0.026. This realigns with ideas suggesting that digital marketing provides business access to international markets which have not been or have not been fully exploited (Suginraj, 2017). Thus, by

gaining access to these international markets, international businesses will be in a position to services those markets, create a niche, gain a competitive edge and grow.

The findings proved that using digital marketing strategies to reducing promotion costs has a positive effect on international business' growth. This is because a 1 unit increase in using digital marketing strategies to reduce promotion costs resulted in an international business growing by 0.072. Possible suggestions revealed that this can be as a result of a reduction in costs will allows the business to expend more resources to the production of other goods and services. These results are supported by ideas given by Wang (2020) citing that reducing promotional costs aids businesses to cut down on operational costs which significantly hinder the growth and development of international businesses.

**Table 3.6.** The roles of digital marketing in international business

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
<b>(Constant)</b>	-0.567	0.180		-3.147	0.002
Accessing different opportunities	0.026	0.034	0.053	0.775	0.439
Reducing promotion costs	0.072	0.039	0.097	1.869	0.063
Trust building	0.949	0.047	0.701	20.016	0.000
Focusing on mobile customers	-0.083	0.053	-0.052	-1.559	0.552
Guaranteeing better revenues	0.172	0.047	0.701	20.016	0.000
Dependent Variable: financial performance efficiency					

Using digital marketing strategies to enhance trust building among customers is pivotal for international business' growth. This is because an increase in trust building activities shown by the business through corporate social responsibility, prompt response, constant updates and supply of information helps to instil customers' trusty in the business. These results are supported by previous

studies which showed that trust building is crucial for enhancing business institutions' growth and performance (Wang, F. (2020; Saura, Palos-Sánchez & Cerdá Suárez, 2017). Such is evident by an unit increase in trust building activities causing a huge growth in international business' by 0.949.

Using digital marketing strategies to focusing on mobile customers proved to be costly for international businesses. This is because such a move caused a decline in international business' growth and performance by 0.083.

### 3.11 The role of digital marketing in internal business growth

Positive contributions were noted regarding the use digital marketing strategies by international businesses to guarantee better revenues. A unit increase in guarantee better revenues activities caused an increase in international business' growth and performance by 0.172 units. This is possibly because international business' growth and performance reduces costs and causes them to them maximises revenue.

**Table 3.7.** Hypothesis results

Hypothesis	Test method	p-value	H <sub>0</sub> Decision
The use of digital marketing for accessing different opportunities purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth	Regression	0.439	Accept H <sub>0</sub>
The use of digital marketing for reducing promotion costs purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth	Regression	0.063	Accept H <sub>0</sub>
The use of digital marketing for guaranteeing better revenues purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth	Regression	0.000	Reject H <sub>0</sub>
The use of digital marketing for focusing on mobile customers purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth	Regression	0.120	Accept H <sub>0</sub>
The use of digital marketing for trust building purposes has no significant positive effect on	Regression	0.000	Reject H <sub>0</sub>

international business growth			
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This is in line with findings provided by (2018) which showed that guarantee better revenues plays a crucial role of enhancing organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

Employing the regression analysis tests results to ascertain the validity of the proposed hypothesis offered different insights of the roles of digital marketing in international business growth. The initial hypothesis was accepted at 5% and thus led to the conclusions that the use of digital marketing for accessing different opportunities purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth. This entails that the changes obtained from using digital marketing for accessing different opportunities purposes result in an increase in international business growth. However, the extent to which international businesses growth as a result of such role is insignificant.

The hypothesis suggesting that the use of digital marketing for reducing promotion costs purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth was also accepted at 5%. This implies that using digital marketing strategies is important for reducing international business' costs but the magnitude of contribution is insignificant.

It was rejected based on information provided that the use of digital marketing for guaranteeing better revenues purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth. Hence, this implies that international businesses ought to use more digital marketing strategies for guaranteeing better revenues purposes. Meanwhile, it was established that the use of digital marketing for focusing on mobile customer's purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth. Lastly, it was found that the use of digital marketing for trust building purposes has no significant positive effect on international business growth.

### 3.11 Reliability tests

Cronbach's alpha was applied to analyse the internal consistency of the study variables and a decision was reached in accordance to ideas provided by Taherdoost (2016) suggesting that variables with alpha values that are at least 0.70 are reliable. All the variables had a combined alpha value of 0.86 and each individual alpha value surpassed 0.80. That is, accessing different opportunities (0.831); reducing promotion costs (0.812); trust building (0.851), focusing on mobile customers (0.871); guaranteeing better revenues (0.813); and international business growth (0.825). Hence, conclusions were made that all the variables were highly reliable in explaining the role of digital marketing in international business growth: perceptions of marketing professionals in Northern Iraq (see Table 3.8).

**Table 3.8:** Reliability tests

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>Acceptable value</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Accessing different opportunities	0.831	0.70	Extremely reliable
Reducing promotion costs	0.812	0.70	Extremely reliable
Trust building	0.851	0.70	Extremely reliable
Focusing on mobile customers	0.871	0.70	Extremely reliable
Guaranteeing better revenues	0.813	0.70	Extremely reliable
International business growth	0.825	0.70	Extremely reliable

*\*Number of items = 6; Overall Cronbach's alpha=0.86*

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

#### **4.1 Conclusions**

The main focus of the study was to examine the roles of digital marketing in international business growth. This was accomplished by applying regression analysis. Digital marketing was established to play five important roles in international businesses and these pertain to accessing different opportunities, reducing promotion costs, trust building, focusing on mobile customers, and guaranteeing better revenues purposes.

Insights from the study depicts that a surge in globalisation and the prevalence of various digital marketing platforms have had different impacts on international businesses. As such, a large number of international businesses are still using traditional marketing channels with TV Commercials being the highly used form of traditional marketing channels in business. This was followed by radio advertising and newspaper/magazine advertising. A vast number of employees regard the use of cold calling and other traditional marketing channels as the least in terms of use and importance.

Notable reason for using digital marketing strategies among international businesses are related to being able to reach more prospects regardless of geographical distance. The second major reason why they use digital marketing is to collect insights into customer's preference and opinions about a product/service. Using digital marketing for enhancing the easy to measure return on investment and having an international presence are the least reasons for using digital marketing. This is because companies devote attention to

establishing and solidifying their international presence which allows them to gain a competitive edge in international markets.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies lies in the notion of having sufficient funds allocated towards financing investments in digital marketing. The study findings support this notion because companies with effective digital marketing strategies are well positioned to have a huge international presence and most likely to command a huge digital marketing presence. However, a few companies were setting aside huge if not desired amount of financial resources needed to support digital marketing activities. Several companies were devoting a small percentage of financial resources towards developing and boosting their digital marketing activities. This is regardless of the potential benefits companies were obtaining from digital marketing. As such, various employees highly agreed that the notable contribution of digital marketing to international business growth was regarding the idea that revenue from international branches had grown significantly over the past few years. The other benefit was related to the number of their employees in international branches having grown significantly since they started using digital marketing. Hence, more financial resources ought to be devoted towards the development and innovation of digital marketing activities so as to enhance its contributions and significance to international businesses. However, international businesses in Northern Iraq lowly rate the effects of digital marketing on international business growth was on the number of branches the business have. That is, they highlighted that the numbers of joint ventures and affiliations with international companies did not grow significantly since they started using digital marketing. Similar deductions were also made regarding perspectives about their company now having many branches in other countries following the increased use of digital marketing activities.

The also establishes that international businesses' perceptions about other digital marketing roles are fairly high. For instance, they highly regarding ideas



that their international sales have increased over the past years following the increased use of digital marketing activities. Similar observations were extending to the idea that their brand are now widely and internationally recognised since the inception of digital marketing strategies. Such has been connected to relatively agreements about the idea that international business companies now have more than two products lines offered in other countries. There are significant differences in the way international businesses perceive the importance and/or roles of digital marketing in their companies. As such, huge variations were linked to the companies having more than two products lines offered in other countries.as noted by a high standard deviation. Hence, positive changes in the sales growth have huge responsive effects on the companies' financial performance.

All the digital marketing roles were positively correlated with each other, and international business growth. This denotes that improvements in either one single digital marketing role or international business aspect will trigger improvements in the other. Of which, international business growth and trust building are significantly and positively correlated with each other. This entails that an increase in international business international business growth' efforts to build trust is associated with an increase in their growth. Another high and significant positive correlation exists between of accessing different opportunities and reducing promotion costs. This is possibly because accessing different opportunities allows the international business access to possibilities of engaging in cots cutting strategies. Costs will possibly fall and revenue per unit increase increases due to an increase in opportunities in the format economies of scale, mass production etc.

The results of this study are in support of previous related studies regarding the positive roles of digital marketing in international business. As such, this study reiterates that using digital marketing strategies to enhance trust building among

customers is pivotal for international business' growth. This is because an increase in trust building activities shown by the business through corporate social responsibility, prompt response, constant updates and supply of information helps to instil customers' trusty in the business. These results are supported by previous studies which showed that trust building is crucial for enhancing business institutions' growth and performance. Using digital marketing strategies to focusing on mobile customers is costly for international businesses increased efforts to focus on mobile customers causes a decline in international business' growth and performance. Digital marketing does result in positive contributions regarding its use to guarantee better revenues. That is, an increase in guaranteeing better revenues activities causes an increase in international business' growth and performance. This is possibly because international business' growth and performance reduces costs and causes them to their maximises revenue. This is in line with previous findings which show that guarantee better revenues plays a crucial role of enhancing organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

The study's theoretical implications are embedded in the notion that digital marketing facilitates the prevalence and growth of both globalisation and international business. As such, the study contributes to the understanding of the connections between digital marketing, globalisation and international business. Furthermore, this aids in enhancing understanding about the roles and importance of digital marketing in business.

The practical implications are that digital marketing provides a powerful platform which firms can use to gain huge access to international markets, and diversify their products and operational environment. An international presence is of huge significance to the business and hence it is crucial for business managers to tap into its benefits so as to gain a huge international market presence.

## **4.2 Recommendations**

In light of the established findings, the study recommends the following measures or strategies;

- More financial resources ought to be devoted towards the development and innovation of digital marketing activities so as to enhance its contributions and significance to international businesses.
- International businesses must strive to build and foster customer trust by engaging in corporate social responsibility activities, providing prompt responses, constant updates and supply of information etc., to customers.
- International business is encouraged not to use digital platforms to place huge attention on mobile customers since its causing them to underperform. But, rather they should concentrate on gaining a international presence and market position through a series of advertising and promotion strategies.
- Digital marketing strategies need to be integrated with modern social media platforms to enhance international businesses' ability to gain access to huge international opportunities.
- Internet based marketing activities and strategies should be used in conjunction with other digital marketing platforms so as to reduce promotion costs.

## **4.3 Suggestions for future studies**

The study is limited to the examination of digital marketing roles in international business using details collected from MNCs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, it was discovered in the course of the study that several small and large corporations other than MNCs were using digital marketing platforms to

engage in international business activities. Hence, future studies need to be extended to examine related activities among individuals and small organisations.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Research questionnaire

#### **User Survey**

#### **The Role of Digital Marketing in International Business Growth: Perceptions of Marketing Professionals in Northern Iraq**

As you know social media is ever more present in our lives. We are interested in gathering information on your use of digital marketing in international business and how we might better match that usage with our educational objectives and your learning experiences. Please take the time to complete this confidential questionnaire.

We will be happy to let you know the survey results in due course.

Thank you.

Near East University  
Kani Rizgar Ali Salayi  
Student No.: 20194056  
kanisalayi@gmail.com

Please complete the following questionnaire with specific regard to '**The Role of Digital Marketing in International Business Growth: Perceptions of Marketing Professionals in Northern Iraq**', by placing a CROSS in the appropriate box.

(1). Gender

- Male  Female

(2). What is your age group?

- 18-24 years  25-31 years  
 32-38 years  39-45 years  
 46 years and above

(3). What is your current designation at the company you're working for?

- Marketing Manager  Sales Manager  
 Sales Manager  Sales Assistant  
 Other (Please specify):

\_\_\_\_\_

(4). Please select traditional marketing methods that the company is currently using (you can select more than one option):

- TV Commercials  Radio Advertising  
 Newspaper/magazine advertising  Cold calling  
 Other (Please specify):

\_\_\_\_\_

(5). Does the company have a defined digital marketing strategy at present?

- Yes, we do.  
 The strategy is still in the process of development  
 No, we don't, but maybe in the future.

(6). Below are common reasons for using digital marketing, please rate them in terms of importance from your own point of view according to scale 1 (Unimportant) to 5 (Extremely important);

Able to reach more prospects regardless of geographical distance

1  2  3  4  5

Collect insights into customer's preference and opinions about a product/service.

1  2  3  4  5

Easy to measure return on investment.

1  2  3  4  5

International presence.

1  2  3  4  5

Cost-saving

1  2  3  4  5

(7). What percentage of the marketing budget of your enterprise was spent only on digital marketing in 2020.

- Less than 30 percent
- 31 percent – 50 percent
- More than 50 percent
- N/A as we do not do digital marketing

(8). What changes will the company make to its current digital marketing expenditures in 2021?

- Maintain the current spending
- Increase the current spending
- Reduce the current spending
- N/A we do not do digital marketing

On a rating of 1 to 5, kindly rate the following responses as to whether 1 you strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 not sure, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree;

	<b>Accessing different opportunities</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
9	Initially our company is able to reach out to customers in new locations easily					
10	International customers now have information of the existence of our products and services.					
11	International customers are willing to use our products and services.					
12	Digital marketing reduces physical, social, and psychological barriers to the use of the company's products and services.					
13	Digital marketing maximises consumers' opportunities to use our products and services.					
14	Digital marketing gives us access to many markets in different areas.					
15	Companies can use digital market to obtain market and competitor information.					
	<b>Reducing promotion costs</b>					
16	Digital marketing allows companies to automate a lot of your daily marketing tasks.					
17	Digital marketing allows companies to save time, while improving their marketing strategy.					
18	Marketing automation also makes it cheaper to manage big data by allowing companies to manage their data in the cloud.					
19	Digital marketing can reach a lot of people at the same with a short period of time.					
20	Digital marketing allows information to be used over and over again thereby reducing production costs.					
21	Digital marketing is cheaper than traditional marketing channels.					
22	Digital marketing strategies can be easily and cheaply personalised to meet to target different markets.					

On a rating of 1 to 5, kindly rate the following responses as to whether 1 you strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 not sure, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree;

	<b>Guaranteeing better revenues</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
23	By reaching more customers, our revenue has increased significantly.					
24	Offering new products in new markets increases our potential revenue sources.					
25	A fall in domestic revenue is covered by an inflow of revenue from international branches.					
26	Failure in domestic products does not have an effect on the success of our international products.					
27	Our international customers have a high positive responsive effect to our digital marketing activities.					
28	Digital marketing has facilitated an increase in our international presence and market share.					
29	Revenue from digital marketing activities is fairly high.					
	<b>Focusing on mobile customers</b>					
30	Our digital marketing strategies are available on all social media platforms.					
31	Mobile customers have easy access to our mobile digital platforms.					
32	It is cheaper for customers to access our mobile digital platforms.					
33	Our mobile digital platforms are available and accessible everywhere.					
34	Our mobile digital platforms are accessible any time.					
35	We offer different digital packages to our mobile customers.					
36	More resources are being used to support mobile digital activities.					

On a rating of 1 to 5, kindly rate the following responses as to whether 1 you strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 not sure, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree;

	<b>Trust building</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
37	Consumers have access to relevant and trustworthy information.					
38	Digital market allows customers to have timeous responses on product enquiries.					
39	The company has digital market that give consumers the right to share their views and complaints.					
40	The company uses digital marketing to engage in corporate social responsible activities.					
41	Digital marketing enhances the company's commitment to ethical practices and conducts.					
42	The company's products can be distinguished from false brands which helps to build consumers' trust in our company.					
43	Consumers trust our company because all the information about our operations and products is digitally available everywhere.					
	<b>International business growth</b>					
44	Our international sales have increased over the past years following the increased use of digital marketing activities.					
45	Our company now have many branches in other countries following the increased use of digital marketing activities.					
46	Revenue from international branches has grown significantly over the past few years.					
47	The number of our employees in international branches has grown significantly since we started using digital marketing.					
48	Our company has more than two products lines offered in other countries.					
49	Our number of joint ventures and affiliations with international companies grown significantly since we started using digital marketing.					
50	Our brand is widely and internationally recognised.					

Please write any further comments overleaf. Thank you for your help

## ETHICAL APPROVAL



### BİLİMSEL ARAŞTIRMALAR ETİK KURULU

27.11.2020

Dear Kani Rizgar Ali Salayi

Your application titled **“The Role of Digital Marketing in International Business Growth: Perceptions of Marketing Professionals in Northern Iraq”** with the application number YDÜ/SB/2020/843 has been evaluated by the Scientific Research Ethics Committee and granted approval. You can start your research on the condition that you will abide by the information provided in your application form.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Direnç Kanol

Rapporteur of the Scientific Research Ethics Committee

**Note:** If you need to provide an official letter to an institution with the signature of the Head of NEU Scientific Research Ethics Committee, please apply to the secretariat of the ethics committee by showing this document.



## SIMILARITY INDEX

### THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS GROWTH: PERCEPTIONS OF MARKETING PROFESSIONALS IN NORTHERN IRAQ

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

<b>13%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>9%</b>
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

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