Modern Tourism Marketing and Its Impact on Promoting Iraqi Archaeological Destinations: The Archaeological of Babylon as a Case Study—An Exploratory Survey of Tourists' Opinions

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Abstract:

This study aims to diagnose tourists' perception of the modern tourism marketing methods used to promote the archaeological city of Babylon, to determine the level of destination selling, understood as the shift from awareness to visit decision, spending, repurchase and recommendation, and to examine the relationship and effect between the two variables. A descriptive-analytical approach was adopted using a 32-item questionnaire covering two variables and eight dimensions, administered to domestic, Arab and foreign tourists at the Babylon site; 250 valid questionnaires were analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis, reliability and validity tests, correlation, regression, ANOVA and structural equation modelling.

Results show high levels of perceived modern marketing (M = 3.92) and destination selling (M = 3.94). The structural model indicates a significant effect of modern marketing on destination selling (β = 0.76), explaining 58.3% of its variance. Experiential and event marketing was the strongest predictor, followed by content and storytelling and digital platform marketing, while virtual reality and interactive technologies had no significant unique effect and received the lowest rating, reflecting their limited availability. Perceptions differed significantly by tourist type, For the benefit of foreign tourists. A validated final model with three influential dimensions is proposed, with recommendations for marketing Babylon as a global archaeological destination.

Keywords: *modern tourism marketing; destination selling; experiential marketing; storytelling; virtual reality; Babylon; archaeological destinations.*

Introduction:

Possessing a significant archaeological site is no longer sufficient to establish it as a popular tourist destination. Today, a destination is a product that must be promoted, marketed, and sold to tourists within a highly competitive marketplace—a space where destinations vie for the attention of travelers who are bombarded daily by thousands of images and messages (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 65; Morrison, 2019, p. 32). Digital technologies have transformed how tourists discover destinations and decide to visit them; social media platforms, storytelling content, virtual tours, and immersive experiences have become essential tools for marketing a destination (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 180; Tussyadiah et al., 2018, p. 141).

Babylon stands as one of the world's most renowned archaeological cities. It served as the capital for Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar II and is home to the Ishtar Gate and the Hanging Gardens—the latter being one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. In July 2019, the site was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (UN Iraq,

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2019, para. 1). However, this global renown has not translated proportionately into visitor numbers or tourism expenditure. The site continues to suffer from a lack of organized promotion, limited services, and the absence of a marketing strategy capable of converting the well-known name of Babylon into actual visits and revenue (Almasoodi & Rahman, 2023, p. 19). This research sets out to examine the impact of modern tourism marketing methods on the "sale" (attracting visits and generating tourism revenue) of Iraqi archaeological sites, using the ruins of Babylon as a case study. The research is organized into five sections: the first covers the methodology; the second reviews and discusses previous studies; the third establishes the theoretical framework; the fourth addresses the practical/empirical aspect; and the fifth presents conclusions and recommendations.

Research Methodology and Selected Previous Studies:

I. Research Methodology:

1- Research Problem: Iraqi archaeological sites—foremost among them Babylon—possess unparalleled historical value and global renown. Yet, they fail to derive tourism benefits commensurate with this significance. Visitor numbers remain limited compared to less famous archaeological sites in neighboring countries; spending at and around these sites is low; and the rate of repeat visits or recommendations to others is unknown. A major reason for this is that marketing for these destinations remains traditional and fragmented, relying more on historical fame than on modern tools. Furthermore, relevant authorities lack empirical evidence to determine which modern marketing methods are most effective at converting interest in a site into actual visits (or "sales"). The research problem can be articulated through the following questions:

a- What is the level of tourist awareness regarding the modern tourism marketing methods—across their four dimensions—used to promote the ruins of Babylon?

b- What is the level of "sales" (attraction/visitation) for the archaeological site, as perceived by tourists, across its four dimensions?

c- Is there a significant correlation and causal relationship between modern tourism marketing and the "sale" (attraction/visitation) of the archaeological site?

d- Which modern marketing methods are most effective in selling an archaeological destination?

e- Does the perception of modern marketing vary according to the type of tourist, and does the marketing of a destination differ based on a person’s level of education?

2- Significance of the Research: The significance of this research is manifested in the following:

a- Scientific Significance: This research contributes to conceptualizing the "marketing of archaeological destinations" as a multidimensional construct, spanning from awareness to repeat visitation. It examines four modern marketing approaches within a single model—including virtual reality, a method rarely tested in the Arab context—and provides a validated model applicable to other archaeological destinations in Iraq and the broader Arab region.

b- Practical Significance: The research offers the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities, the Tourism Authority, the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, and the local government of Babylon practical indicators regarding which marketing approaches are most worthy of investment. This helps direct limited resources toward strategies that yield the greatest impact on visitor numbers, spending, and loyalty, while also supporting the utilization of Babylon’s status as a World Heritage Site.

3- Research Objectives:

a- To assess the level of tourist awareness regarding modern tourism marketing approaches applied to the archaeological sites of Babylon.

b- To determine the level of "archaeological destination marketing" (in terms of its various dimensions).

c- To examine the correlations and causal relationships between modern tourism marketing approaches and the marketing of the archaeological destination.

d- To identify the most influential marketing approaches and construct a final, validated model.

e- To uncover differences in the perception of marketing based on tourist type, and in the marketing of the destination based on educational background.

f- To provide practical recommendations for developing the marketing strategy for Babylon and other archaeological destinations in Iraq.

4- The Research Hypothesized Framework:

The hypothesized framework represents the logical relationship between modern tourism marketing—as an independent variable—and the marketing/selling of an archaeological destination—as a dependent variable. Its construction is based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974, p. 78) and the "Marketing 4.0" model, which describes the consumer journey through the stages of awareness, attraction, inquiry, action, and advocacy (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 65). These stages correspond to the dimensions of destination marketing/selling as addressed in this research.

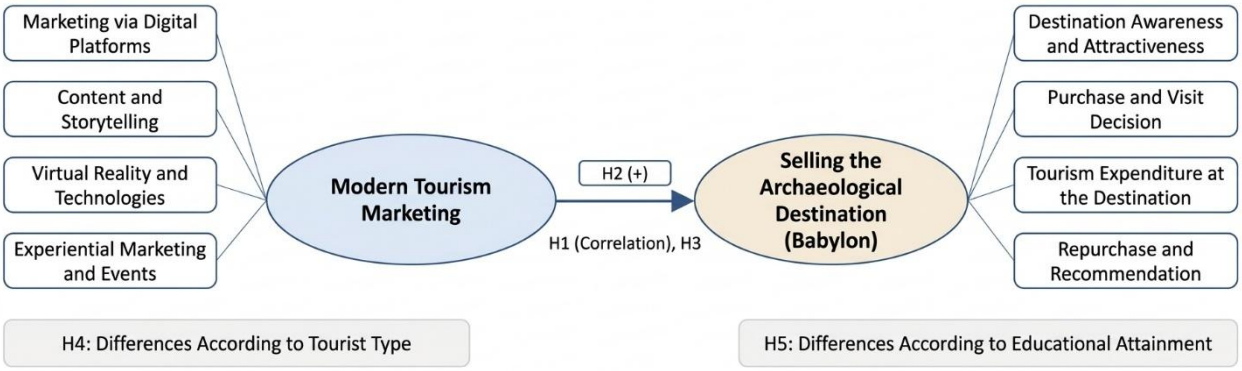


Figure (1) Hypothetical Research Framework

Source: Prepared by the researcher.

5- Research Hypotheses:

a- Main Hypothesis (H1): There is a statistically significant correlation between modern tourism marketing and the sale (commercial appeal/attractiveness) of the archaeological destination. This branches into four sub-hypotheses, corresponding to the dimensions of modern tourism marketing.

b- Main Hypothesis (H2): Modern tourism marketing—in its various dimensions—has a statistically significant impact on the sale (commercial appeal/attractiveness) of the archaeological destination. This branches into four sub-hypotheses, corresponding to the dimensions of modern tourism marketing.

c- Main Hypothesis (H3): Modern tourism marketing has a statistically significant impact on each dimension of the sale (commercial appeal/attractiveness) of the archaeological destination (awareness and attractiveness, purchasing decision, expenditure, and repurchase/recommendation).

d- Main Hypothesis (H4): There are statistically significant differences in the perception of modern tourism marketing based on the type of tourist (local, Arab, or foreign).

e- Main Hypothesis (H5): There are statistically significant differences in the sale (commercial appeal/attractiveness) of the archaeological destination based on the tourist's educational attainment.

6- Research Scope (Boundaries):

a- Spatial Scope: The archaeological site of the city of Babylon, located in Babylon Governorate—approximately 80 kilometers south of Baghdad, near the city of Hillah—which includes the Ishtar Gate (reconstructed version), the Processional Way, the Lion of Babylon, the Southern Palace, and the Babylonian Theater.

b- Human Scope: Local, Arab, and foreign tourists who visited the site and were exposed to promotional content regarding it either before or during their visit.

c- Temporal Scope: A questionnaire consisting of 32 items—organized into two variables and eight dimensions—was administered to a sample of local, Arab, and international tourists at the archaeological site of Babylon. The data collection process, spanning the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaires, took place over two months, from September 8, 2026, to November 8, 2026.

d- Thematic Scope: This study examines modern tourism marketing methods as perceived by tourists, and their impact on the "sale" of an archaeological destination—a process encompassing the progression from awareness to decision-making, expenditure, and loyalty, as experienced by the tourists themselves.

7- Research Methodology:

The study employs a descriptive-analytical approach with an exploratory design, as this is well-suited for describing tourists' opinions and measuring their attitudes. The primary research instrument is a concise questionnaire, administered to a suitable sample of tourists following their visit; this may be supplemented by structured field observations. Ethical considerations include obtaining participant consent, ensuring the anonymity of respondents (by not collecting names or unnecessary personal data), and clarifying that participation is voluntary and that all responses will be used exclusively for research purposes.

8- Research Population and Sample:

The research population consists of all tourists visiting the archaeological site of Babylon. The total size of this population is indeterminate, as there are no detailed, published statistics regarding visitor numbers. The researcher utilized a purposive, accessible sample consisting of tourists who had been exposed to promotional content about the site; this selection criterion is essential, as evaluating marketing methods requires that respondents have actually encountered them. The sample size was set at 250 tourists, in accordance with the criteria for structural equation modeling (SEM). This size exceeds the minimum acceptable threshold of 200 observations required for estimating structural models using the maximum likelihood method (Kline, 2016, p. 50), and it satisfies the requirement of having more than five observations per estimated parameter (Hair et al., 2019, p. 45). While the researcher acknowledges that this sample size is smaller than the 384 observations suggested by Cochran's formula for an infinite population, it should be noted that Cochran's formula assumes a random sample from a general population, whereas this study specifically requires that respondents have been exposed to promotional content. A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed, 264 of which were returned. Of these, 14 were excluded due to incompleteness or because the respondents had not been exposed to any promotional content, resulting in a final sample of 250 valid questionnaires—an effective response rate of 89.3%.

9- Research Instrument and Measurement Scale:

The study utilized a questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. It was designed based on literature concerning digital and experiential tourism marketing, as well as tourist purchasing behavior, and was adapted for the

context of Babylon. The questionnaire was prepared in both Arabic and English, employing a back-translation process. It consisted of two parts: the first gathered demographic/identifying information, while the second addressed the study's variables. A five-point Likert scale was used (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Table (1) Structure of the questionnaire and sources of the scale

The variable	Dimensions	Number of paragraphs	Code	Scale Sources
Modern tourism marketing	Digital platform marketing, content and storytelling, virtual reality and interactive technologies, experiential marketing and events	16	A - D	Gaffar et al. (2022); Moscardo (2020); Tussyadiah et al. (2018); Schmitt (1999)
Selling archaeological sites	Destination awareness and appeal, purchasing and visitation decisions, tourism spending, repeat visits and recommendations	16	E - H	Kotler et al. (2017); Morrison (2019); Chen & Chen (2010)
Total	Eight dimensions	**32**		

Source: Prepared by the researcher.

The following criterion was adopted to evaluate the mean scores: the range of the scale (5 − 1 = 4) was divided by the number of levels (5), resulting in an interval width of 0.80. The categories are as follows: 1.00–1.80 (very low), 1.81–2.60 (low), 2.61–3.40 (moderate), 3.41–4.20 (high), and 4.21–5.00 (very high).

10- Statistical Methods Used in the Research:

The research utilized SPSS (v. 27) and AMOS (v. 26) for data analysis, employing the following methods: frequencies and percentages for sample description; arithmetic mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, and relative importance for descriptive analysis; the KMO and Bartlett tests for sampling adequacy; Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for construct validity; Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for reliability and convergent validity; the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio for discriminant validity; Harman's single-factor test; Pearson correlation coefficient; simple and multiple linear regression; one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)—incorporating the Welch test and the Games-Howell test in cases of unequal variances; and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the maximum likelihood estimation method.

11- Operational Definitions (as defined by the researcher):

Modern Tourism Marketing: The set of digital, interactive, and experiential methods encountered by a tourist while learning about and visiting the archaeological site of Babylon. This includes promotion via digital platforms, storytelling content, virtual reality and interactive technologies, as well as live events and experiences. It is measured by items (A1–D4).

Selling the Archaeological Destination: The capacity of a destination to guide a tourist from the stage of initial awareness to the decision to purchase (visit) it, followed by on-site spending, repeat visitation, and recommendation. Here, the destination is treated as a tourism product being "sold." It is measured by items (E1–H4).

II- Review and Discussion of Previous Studies:

The researcher prioritized selecting previous studies from journals indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science (Clarivate) databases. Additionally, studies specifically addressing the site of Babylon were included. These studies

were categorized into three themes based on their relevance to the research variables, then discussed to highlight their contributions, justify their inclusion, and identify the research gap.

Theme One: Studies on Digital Marketing and Social Media in Tourism:

Table (2) Study by Xiang & Gretzel (2010)

Element	Content
Author & Year	Xiang & Gretzel (2010)
Title	Role of social media in online travel information search
Source	Tourism Management, 31(2), 179-188
Objective	To determine the extent to which social media appears in search engine results for tourism information.
Methodology & Sample	Analysis of search engine results for a number of destinations.
Key Findings	Social media represents a significant proportion of tourism search results, making digital content a major part of the destination's image.

Table (3) Study by Leung, Law, van Hoof & Buhalis(2013)

Element	Content
Author & Year	Leung, Law, van Hoof & Buhalis (2013)
Title	Social media in tourism and hospitality: A literature review
Source	Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 30(1-2), 3-22
Objective	To review studies addressing social media in tourism and hospitality.
Methodology & Sample	A systematic literature review.
Key Findings	Social media plays a critical role in pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip stages, and is used for promotion and customer relationship management with tourists.

Table (4) Study by Gaffar, Tjahjono, Abdullah & Sukmayadi(2022)

Element	Content
Author & Year	Chen, Huang & Wang (2020)
Title	The impact of social media marketing on brand equity and purchase intention: The mediating role of brand image
Source	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 53, 101962
Objective	To examine the impact of social media marketing on brand equity and purchase intention.

Methodology & Sample	A questionnaire distributed to 428 consumers, analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM).
Key Findings	Social media marketing influences brand equity and purchase intention through brand image.

Second Axis – Studies Addressing Storytelling, Virtual Reality, and Experiential Marketing:

Table (5) Moscardo (2020) Study

Element	Content
Author & Year	Moscardo (2020)
Title	Stories and design in tourism
Source	Annals of Tourism Research, 83, 102950
Objective	To build a conceptual framework for the role of stories in experience design and destination promotion.
Methodology & Sample	Literature review and conceptual framework development.
Key Findings	Stories serve as a guiding concept for designing experiences and promoting destinations, and the study presented a comprehensive framework for storytelling in tourism.

Table (6) Guttentag (2010) study

Element	Content
Author & Year	Guttentag (2010)
Title	Virtual reality: Applications and implications for tourism
Source	Tourism Management, 31(5), 637-651
Objective	To analyze virtual reality applications in tourism.
Methodology & Sample	Conceptual analytical study.
Key Findings	Virtual reality can be utilized in planning, marketing, education, and heritage preservation, serving as an effective tool for presenting a destination prior to visiting.

Table (7) Study by Tussyadiah, Wang, Jung & tom Dieck(2018)

Element	Content
Author & Year	Tussyadiah, Wang, Jung & tom Dieck (2018)

Element	Content
Title	Virtual reality, presence, and attitude change: Empirical evidence from tourism
Source	Tourism Management, 66, 140-154
Objective	To test the impact of the sense of presence in virtual reality on attitude toward the destination and visit intention.
Methodology & Sample	Two studies on 202 participants in Hong Kong and 724 in the United Kingdom.
Key Findings	The sense of presence increases the enjoyment of the virtual experience and destination preference, and a positive attitude increases visit intention.

Table (8) Williams (2006) study

Element	Content
Author & Year	Williams (2006)
Title	Tourism and hospitality marketing: Fantasy, feeling and fun
Source	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 18(6), 482-495
Objective	To analyze the applications of experiential marketing in tourism and hospitality.
Methodology & Sample	Conceptual analytical study.
Key Findings	Experiential marketing is based on fantasy, feelings, and fun, and is well-suited for tourism because it is a product consumed as an experience.

Second Theme – Studies Addressing the Site of Babylon and Archaeological Destinations :

Table (9) Study by Almasoodi & Rahman (2023)

Element	Content
Author & Year	ALmasoodi & Rahman (2023)
Title	International tourists' satisfaction with tour guide's service quality at Babylon archaeological site
Source	International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning, 18(1), 17-28
Objective	To test the impact of tour guide service quality on international tourists' satisfaction in Babylon.
Methodology & Sample	A questionnaire distributed to 315 international tourists at the Babylon site, analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).
Key Findings	Tour guide characteristics and service quality dimensions are positively associated with satisfaction, visitor expectations mediate this relationship, and tourism policy had no significant effect.

Table (10) Study by Intisar Ma'ani Ali(2018)

Element	Content
Author & Year	Intisar Maani Ali (2018)
Title	Archaeological and Religious Sites in Babylon Governorate
Source	Journal of the College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, 29(3)
Objective	To determine the impact of archaeological and religious sites on the economic and social status of Babylon residents.
Methodology & Sample	A questionnaire distributed to 200 respondents.
Key Findings	Archaeological and religious sites have a significant impact on improving the economic, social, and psychological status of the governorate's residents, and are of great importance in attracting people and revitalizing the economy.

Table (11): Study by Feng, Qin, Lv, Tian & Meng (2024)

Element	Content
Author & Year	Feng, Qin, Lv, Tian & Meng (2024)
Title	Exploring the influence of historical storytelling on cultural heritage tourists' revisit intention: A case study of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang
Source	PLOS ONE, 19(9), e0307869
Objective	To examine the impact of historical storytelling on revisit intention to a heritage site
Methodology & Sample	Questionnaire survey of (325) visitors and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)
Key Findings	Historical storytelling positively influences destination image, perceived value, and revisit intention

Section Four – Discussion of Selected Previous Studies and Justification for Their Inclusion

1-Rationale for Selecting the Studies: The studies in the first cluster were selected because they are among the most highly cited works in the field of digital tourism marketing and were published in journals ranked in the first quartile (Q1); the dimension concerning marketing via digital platforms was derived from them. The studies by Guttentag (2010, p. 640) and Tussyadiah et al. (2018, p. 141) were chosen as they provide the theoretical and practical foundation for employing virtual reality in tourism marketing—serving as the basis for the third dimension—while the studies by Williams (2006, p. 483) and Moscardo (2020, p. 79) provided the groundwork for the dimensions of narrative content and experiential marketing. The study by Almasoodi and Rahman (2023, p. 19) was selected as it is the most recent quantitative study published specifically on the site of Babylon; the study by Ali (2018, p. 29) was included for its

examination of the economic impact of the Babylon sites; and the study by Feng et al. (2024, p. 43) was chosen for linking historical storytelling to the intention to revisit a heritage site.

2- Contributions: The researcher drew upon previous studies to refine the research problem, define the dimensions of the variables, formulate the questionnaire items, select appropriate statistical methods—specifically structural equation modeling—and interpret and compare the findings.

3- Points of Convergence and Divergence: This research aligns with previous studies in viewing modern marketing techniques as influential factors in tourist behavior. It differs from previous studies in that it integrates four approaches into a single model to compare their respective impacts. Furthermore, it adopts the "selling of a destination"—encompassing the full spectrum from initial awareness to repeat visitation—as the dependent variable, rather than focusing solely on the intention to visit. Additionally, while previous research on Babylon has addressed the site from the perspectives of tour-guide quality or economic impact, this study examines it through the lens of modern marketing.

4- Research Gap: It is evident that most existing studies have tested only a single marketing approach and measured its impact on the intention to visit or attitudes toward a destination, rather than on the entire "sales" process. Moreover, research on Babylon has not addressed modern marketing, despite the fact that inadequate promotion is one of the site's primary obstacles. The research gap lies in the absence of a quantitative model that compares modern marketing approaches for promoting Iraqi archaeological destinations—a gap this study aims to bridge.

Section One – Theoretical Framework:

I. Modern Tourism Marketing:

1- The Concept of Modern Tourism Marketing:

Tourism marketing is defined as the managerial process through which tourism destinations and organizations identify the needs of current and potential tourists, design products, and communicate with them in a manner that ensures both tourist satisfaction and the achievement of the organizations' own objectives (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 65). Modern tourism marketing is an extension of this concept within the context of digital and technological transformation. It marks a shift from one-way marketing to interactive marketing, from merely selling a service to crafting an experience, and from simple description to simulation. Tourists can now visualize and virtually experience a destination before actually visiting it (Guttentag, 2010, p. 640; Chaffey, 2019, p. 23).

The author defines modern tourism marketing as a suite of digital, interactive, and experiential methods employed by stakeholders of archaeological destinations to promote these sites and persuade tourists to visit. These methods leverage digital platforms, storytelling, interactive technologies, and immersive experiences, with the ultimate goal of converting interest in a destination into actual visits and fostering long-term loyalty.

2- The Importance of Modern Tourism Marketing:

The significance of modern marketing stems from the fact that tourists now rely heavily on digital information and the shared experiences of others when making travel decisions (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 180). This is particularly relevant for archaeological destinations; since an archaeological product is intangible prior to a visit—and its value is difficult to grasp from static images—storytelling provides it with meaning (Moscardo, 2020, p. 79). Virtual reality allows tourists to see an ancient city as it once appeared (Tussyadiah et al., 2018, p. 141), while experiential marketing transforms a visit into a memorable event (Williams, 2006, p. 483). Furthermore, these methods are less costly than

traditional advertising and provide access to international markets—something Babylon requires following its inclusion on the World Heritage List.

3- Types of modern tourism marketing methods:

Table (12) Types of modern tourism marketing methods and their applications in Babylon

Approach	Description	Applications in Babylon
Digital Platform Marketing	Promotion and engagement via websites and social media platforms	Site pages, relevant authorities, and tourism companies
Content Marketing and Storytelling	Producing content that tells the destination's story (Moscardo, 2020)	Stories of Hammurabi, Nebuchadnezzar, the Hanging Gardens, and the Ishtar Gate
Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR)	Digital simulation of the destination before or during the visit (Guttentag, 2010)	Digital reconstruction of ancient Babylon and 3D virtual tours
Experiential and Event Marketing	Providing a live experience that stimulates the senses and emotions (Schmitt, 1999)	Babylon International Festival and performances at the Babylonian Theater
Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Marketing	Published visitor reviews and recommendations (Litvin et al., 2008)	Site reviews on travel platforms and maps
Influencer Marketing	Utilizing content creators for promotion (Pop et al., 2022)	Tours by local and international content creators

Source: Prepared by the researcher, based on Kotler et al. (2017) and Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019).

4- Characteristics of Modern Tourism Marketing:

Modern tourism marketing is characterized as being interactive—based on dialogue with the tourist; participatory—involving tourists in content creation; experience-based—selling feelings and memories; immersive—allowing for a "preview" of a destination before visiting; data-driven—measuring impact and refining messages; borderless—reaching international markets at a low cost; and narrative-driven—imbuing a destination with meaning and identity (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 65; Moscardo, 2020, p. 79).

5- Dimensions of Modern Tourism Marketing:

This research adopts four dimensions:

Dimension 1: Marketing via Digital Platforms and Social Media – This refers to the extent to which a tourist learns about a destination, obtains information, and interacts with relevant stakeholders through digital platforms (Leung et al., 2013, p. 5; Gaffar et al., 2022, p. 452).

Dimension 2: Content Marketing and Storytelling – This refers to the extent to which promotional content presents a destination’s story, its "characters," and its landmarks in an engaging manner (Moscardo, 2020, p. 79; Feng et al., 2024, p. 43). The Third Dimension – Virtual Reality and Interactive Technology Marketing: This refers to the extent to which a tourist is exposed to virtual tours, digital simulations, and interactive media at a destination (Guttentag, 2010, p. 640; Tussyadiah et al., 2018, p. 141).

The Fourth Dimension – Experiential Marketing and Events: This refers to the extent to which events, shows, tours, and workshops provide a vivid, firsthand experience of a destination (Schmitt, 1999, p. 55; Williams, 2006, p. 483).

6- Models for Interpreting Modern Tourism Marketing:

a- The Experiential Marketing Model: Schmitt (1999) identifies five strategic types of experience—sense, feel, think, act, and relate—positing that customers seek experiences that stimulate their senses, emotions, and intellect.

b- The Experience Economy Model: Pine and Gilmore (1998) argue that economic value has shifted from goods and services to experiences, which they categorize into four domains: entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism.

c- The Marketing 4.0 Model: Kotler et al. (2017) describe the digital consumer's journey through five stages—awareness, attraction, inquiry, action, and advocacy—which serves as the foundation for the dimensions of destination marketing explored in this research. b- The Virtual Presence and Behavioral Intention Model (Tussyadiah et al., 2018): This model posits that the sense of presence within a virtual environment enhances the enjoyment of the experience and the preference for a destination, which in turn fosters an intention to visit.

c- The Conceptual Framework of Storytelling in Tourism: Moscardo (2020) argues that storytelling serves as a tool for both experience design and promotion; it imbues a location with meaning, helping tourists to understand and remember it.

Second: Selling the Archaeological Destination:

1- The Concept of Selling an Archaeological Destination:

In the literature on destination marketing, "selling a destination" refers to the set of efforts that transform a destination from a mere known location into a product that a tourist actually purchases—manifesting as a paid visit, on-site expenditure, and loyalty to the destination (Morrison, 2019, p. 32). This process is not limited to the moment a ticket is purchased; rather, it spans the entire consumer journey—beginning with awareness of the destination and the formation of an appealing image, progressing through the decision to visit and the purchase of a travel program, continuing with on-site spending, and concluding with repeat visits and recommendations that attract new customers (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 65).

The researcher defines "selling an archaeological destination" as the capacity of such a destination to guide a tourist from the stage of initial awareness to the decision to purchase and visit, followed by on-site expenditure, and ultimately, repeat visits and recommendations—thereby generating a sustained economic return for the destination and its local community. 2- The Importance of Selling an Archaeological Destination:

Selling an archaeological destination represents the ultimate goal of any marketing effort; historical renown holds no economic value unless it translates into actual visits and spending. Successful sales generate financial resources for the maintenance and protection of sites, while creating employment opportunities for tour guides, craftspeople, and owners of restaurants and hotels in the surrounding area (Ali, 2018: 29). Furthermore, it contributes to diversifying Iraq's oil-dependent economy and enhances the country's international image. Additionally, repeat visits and recommendations reduce the cost of acquiring new customers, as a satisfied tourist effectively becomes a free promoter for the destination (Chen, 2010, p. 31).

3- Types of Sales for an Archaeological Destination:

Selling an archaeological destination takes several forms, including: direct ticket sales—whether at the site entrance or online; the sale of tourism packages through travel agencies, which bundle transportation, guided tours, and accommodation; the sale of ancillary services such as guided tours, performances, and workshops; the sale of products like souvenirs, replicas, and books; the sale of access to events, such as festivals or special performances; and cross-selling, which links the destination to nearby locations—such as the cities of Hilla, Karbala, or Najaf (Morrison, 2019, p. 32).

4- Dimensions of Selling an Archaeological Destination:

This research adopts four dimensions that correspond to the stages of the consumer's journey (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 65):

a- Awareness and Attractiveness of the Destination: This refers to a tourist's knowledge of the destination and the formation of an appealing, distinct image that leads them to include it among their travel options. b- Purchase and Visit Decision: This reflects the role of marketing in the decision to visit, purchase a ticket or a travel package, and favor a specific destination over its alternatives.

c- Tourist Spending at the Destination: This refers to the amount a tourist spends on services such as tour guides, souvenirs, food, transportation, and accommodation.

d- Repurchase and Recommendation: This captures a tourist's intention to return, provide recommendations, share their experience, and participate in future events (Chen, 2010, p. 31).

5- Characteristics of Marketing Archaeological Destinations:

Marketing an archaeological destination is characterized by several factors: it is intangible, as the tourist purchases an experience rather than a physical product; it is multi-staged, spanning from initial awareness to loyalty; it involves multiple stakeholders, including government entities, tourism companies, and the local community; it is constrained by the need for preservation, requiring a balance between commercial promotion and site conservation; it is seasonal, influenced by climate, specific seasons, and events; and it is image-driven, being heavily affected by the mental image of the country and its perceived safety (Morrison, 2019, p. 32).

6- Destination Marketing Models:

The Consumer Journey Model in Marketing 4.0 (Kotler et al., 2017): This model outlines five stages—Awareness, Attraction, Inquiry, Action, and Advocacy.Table The ultimate goal is not a one-time sale, but rather transforming the customer into an advocate. According to the destination management and marketing model (Morrison, 2019, p. 32), selling a destination requires coordination between the destination management organization and the private sector, along with product development and a clear destination brand. Furthermore, the model of experience quality and behavioral intentions (Chen, 2010, p. 31) suggests that the quality of a heritage tourist's experience influences perceived value and satisfaction, which in turn affect the intention to return and to recommend the destination to others.

Third: Babylon as an Archaeological Destination

The ancient city of Babylon is located in Babylon Governorate, approximately 80 kilometers south of Baghdad. It served as the capital of two empires in the history of Mesopotamia—most notably during the reign of Hammurabi, known for his famous code of laws, and later under Nebuchadnezzar II, who constructed the Ishtar Gate and the Processional Way. The Hanging Gardens, considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World, are also attributed to the latter. The site was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in July 2019 (UN Iraq, 2019, para. 1). Today, the site features a reconstructed version of the Ishtar Gate, the Lion of Babylon statue, the remains of the Southern Palace, and the Babylonian Theater, which hosts events for the Babylon International Festival.

From a marketing perspective, Babylon possesses a globally recognized name—a rare advantage. However, converting this name recognition into actual sales still faces obstacles, including limited services and a lack of adequate tourist guidance (Almasoodi & Rahman, 2023, p. 19). The weakness of official digital content, the scarcity of interactive technologies at the site, and the irregularity of events make the study of the impact of modern marketing methods a practical necessity.

Fourth: The interactive relationship between the research variables:

The relationship between modern tourism marketing and the promotion/sale of archaeological destinations is grounded in three theoretical arguments. The first is that marketing stimuli generate a cognitive and emotional state that drives "approach behavior," in accordance with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model—a concept supported by studies such as Feng et al. (2024, p. 43) regarding historical narratives, and Tussyadiah et al. (2018, p. 141) concerning virtual reality. The second argument is that modern marketing methods function at every stage of the consumer journey: digital platforms build awareness, narrative-driven content generates attraction, and immersive experiences convert a visit into actual spending and recommendations (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 65). The third argument posits that because an archaeological product is intangible, methods that bring it closer to the senses—such as live events—are more effective in driving engagement and visitation (Schmitt, 1999, p. 55; Williams, 2006, p. 483). However, the impact of any given method depends on its actual availability to the tourist—a factor examined in the practical component of this research, particularly with regard to virtual reality.

Section Two: The Practical Aspect of the Research:

First: Description of the sample characteristics: (13) Demographic characteristics of the sample members (N = 250)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	139	55.6%
	Female	111	44.4%
Age Group	Under 25 years	71	28.4%
	25 - 39 years	90	36%
	40 - 54 years	51	20.4%
	55 years and above	38	15.2%
Tourist Type	Domestic Tourist	148	59.2%
	Arab Tourist	53	21.2%
	Foreign Tourist	49	19.6%
Educational Attainment	High School or Below	38	15.2%
	Bachelor's Degree	115	46%
	Higher Diploma and Master's	67	26.8%
	PhD	30	12%
Source of Destination Knowledge	Social Media Platforms	119	47.6%
	Friends and Relatives	71	28.4%
	Tourism Companies	38	15.2%
	Traditional Media	22	8.8%

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the results of the statistical analysis.

The table shows that males account for (55.6%) of the sample, with the age group (25–39 years) being the most represented (36%). Domestic tourists make up (59.2%), followed by Arab tourists (21.2%) and international (non-Arab) tourists (19.6%)—a distribution that reflects Babylon's openness to international tourism following its inclusion on the World Heritage List. Furthermore, (46%) of the respondents hold a bachelor's degree. Regarding the source of information about the destination, social media platforms ranked first (47.6%), followed by recommendations from

friends and relatives (28.4%), tourism companies (15.2%), and finally, traditional media (8.8%). This underscores the prominence of digital channels in promoting the destination.

Second: Testing the Validity and Reliability of the Measurement Instrument:

1- Face Validity:

The initial version of the questionnaire was presented to a panel of experts specializing in tourism marketing, archaeology, digital media, and statistics. Adjustments were made based on the consensus of (80%) or more of these experts. Subsequently, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on a sample of (25) tourists to ensure the clarity of the items; this pilot group was excluded from the final analysis.

2- Sample Adequacy and Normality Distribution Test:

Table (14): Results of the KMO test, Bartlett's test, and the normality distribution test.

Variable	KMO	Bartlett χ^2	df	Sig.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Modern Tourism Marketing	0.914	1926.50	120	0.000	-0.486	-0.517
Archaeological Destination Selling	0.936	2409.99	120	0.000	-0.535	-0.050

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the results of the statistical analysis.

The KMO values exceeded the acceptable threshold (0.70), and the Bartlett's test values were significant at the 0.001 level, confirming the adequacy of the sample and the suitability of the matrix for factor analysis. Skewness and kurtosis values fell within the acceptable range, indicating that the data approached a normal distribution and were suitable for maximum likelihood estimation (Kline, 2016, p. 50; Hair et al., 2019, p. 45).

3- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Construct Validity):

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for each variable independently, and model fit was evaluated based on established criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999, p. 35). A model is considered acceptable if the χ^2/df ratio is less than 3; the CFI, TLI, and GFI indices are greater than 0.90; the RMSEA and SRMR indices are less than 0.08; and the standardized factor loadings are greater than 0.50.

Table (15): Goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement models

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Criterion	—	—	< 3	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	< 0.08	< 0.08
Modern Tourism Marketing	89.63	98	0.91	0.958	1.000	1.006	0.000	0.033
Archaeological Destination Selling	99.59	98	1.02	0.954	0.999	0.999	0.008	0.026

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on AMOS software outputs.

The measurement models met all established fit indices, indicating that the field data align with the hypothesized theoretical structure and that the items effectively measure the dimensions they were designed to assess.

Table (16): Standardized factor loadings, reliability indices, and convergent validity indicators.

AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	Standardized Loadings	Dimension
0.592	0.853	0.851	A1: 0.77 A2: 0.77 A3: 0.72 A4: 0.81	Digital Platforms & Social Media Marketing
0.573	0.842	0.841	B1: 0.76 B2: 0.82 B3: 0.72 B4: 0.73	Content & Storytelling Marketing
0.539	0.824	0.823	C1: 0.78 C2: 0.69 C3: 0.72 C4: 0.74	Virtual Reality & Interactive Technologies Marketing
0.623	0.868	0.868	D1: 0.80 D2: 0.80 D3: 0.75 D4: 0.80	Experiential & Event Marketing
		0.906		Modern Tourism Marketing (Total)
0.631	0.872	0.871	E1: 0.83 E2: 0.78 E3: 0.74 E4: 0.82	Destination Awareness & Attractiveness
0.662	0.887	0.886	F1: 0.80 F2: 0.83 F3: 0.85 F4: 0.78	Purchase & Visit Decision
0.655	0.883	0.883	G1: 0.79 G2: 0.84 G3: 0.83 G4: 0.78	Tourist Spending at the Destination
0.569	0.840	0.840	H1: 0.69 H2: 0.85 H3: 0.70 H4: 0.77	Repurchase & Recommendation
		0.933		Archaeological Destination Selling (Total)

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on outputs from the SPSS and AMOS software programs.

Standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.69 to 0.85; all were greater than 0.50 and statistically significant. The lowest Cronbach's alpha value for the dimensions was 0.823, and the lowest composite reliability value was 0.824—both exceeding the 0.70 threshold. The lowest average variance extracted (AVE) value was 0.539, which is above the 0.50 threshold. These results confirm the achievement of both reliability and convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981, p. 42; Hair et al., 2019, p. 45).

4- Discriminant Validity:

Discriminant validity was assessed using the criterion established by Fornell and Larcker (1981, p. 42), which requires the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each dimension to be greater than its correlations with other dimensions. Additionally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was evaluated, which should be less than 0.85 (Henseler, 2015, p. 118). The highest HTMT ratio between the dimensions was 0.760, and the square roots of the AVEs—presented along the diagonal of the table—were greater than their corresponding correlations, confirming the distinctness (discriminant validity) of the dimensions.

Table (17) Discriminant Validity Matrix (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Dimension	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**
A. Digital Platforms & Social Media Marketing	**0.77**							
B. Content & Storytelling Marketing	0.49	**0.76**						

C. Virtual Reality & Interactive Technologies Marketing	0.44	0.49	**0.73**					
D. Experiential & Event Marketing	0.51	0.51	0.45	**0.79**				
E. Destination Awareness & Attractiveness	0.42	0.44	0.34	0.49	**0.79**			
F. Purchase & Visit Decision	0.41	0.39	0.34	0.43	0.63	**0.81**		
G. Tourist Spending at the Destination	0.38	0.49	0.31	0.43	0.59	0.56	**0.81**	
H. Repurchase & Recommendation	0.41	0.43	0.29	0.49	0.65	0.54	0.60	**0.75**

Source: Prepared by the researcher. Values on the diagonal represent the square root of the AVE, while values below the diagonal represent the correlation coefficients between the dimensions.

5- Common Method Bias Test:

Harman's single-factor test was conducted (Podsakoff et al., 2003, p. 879). When all items were entered into an unrotated factor analysis, the variance explained by the first factor was 37.57%. Since this is below 50%, it indicates that there is no significant issue with common method bias.

Third: Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables:

This section presents the arithmetic means, standard deviations, coefficients of variation, and relative importance for the items of each variable and its dimensions, including the ranking of items within each dimension and the ranking of dimensions within each variable.

1- Description of the "Modern Tourism Marketing" variable:

Table (18) Descriptive analysis of the "Modern Tourism Marketing" variable (N = 250)

Code	Item / Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD	CV	Relative Importance	Rank / Level
A1	I learned about the antiquities of Babylon through digital platforms and social media.	2	12	55	107	74	3.96	0.884	22.34 %	79.12 %	4
A2	Official and unofficial pages provide clear information about visiting hours, ticket prices, and access routes.	1	14	40	107	88	4.07	0.878	21.58 %	81.36 %	2
A3	The photos and videos posted about Babylon encourage me to visit it.	1	14	53	105	77	3.97	0.885	22.27 %	79.44 %	3
A4	I can easily communicate with the site authorities or tourism companies via digital platforms.	1	9	34	107	99	4.18	0.827	19.80 %	83.52 %	1
A	Digital and Social Media Marketing Dimension						4.04	0.722	17.86 %	80.86 %	2 / High

Code	Item / Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD	CV	Relative Importance	Rank / Level
B1	The promotional content tells the story of Babylon and its civilization in an engaging way.	2	10	46	127	65	3.97	0.823	20.73 %	79.44 %	4
B2	Promotional materials link the antiquities of Babylon to well-known historical figures such as Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar.	2	9	44	114	81	4.05	0.846	20.89 %	81.04 %	3
B3	The published content provides valuable information about landmarks such as the Ishtar Gate, the Lion of Babylon, and the Hanging Gardens.	1	7	46	114	82	4.08	0.810	19.88 %	81.52 %	2
B4	Storytelling content makes me feel that visiting Babylon is a journey to the origin of human civilization.	1	9	43	101	96	4.13	0.850	20.59 %	82.56 %	1
B	Content and Storytelling Marketing Dimension						4.06	0.685	16.90 %	81.14 %	1 / High
C1	I have watched virtual tours or 3D videos that recreate ancient Babylon.	10	23	73	100	44	3.58	1.012	28.26 %	71.60 %	3
C2	Interactive applications and technologies help me imagine the site before visiting it.	11	18	74	114	33	3.56	0.960	26.97 %	71.20 %	4
C3	Interactive digital tools (QR codes, screens, augmented reality) are available at the site to enrich the visit.	4	35	62	109	40	3.58	0.971	27.09 %	71.68 %	2
C4	Interactive technologies increased my desire to see the site in person.	9	24	67	111	39	3.59	0.983	27.39 %	71.76 %	1
C	Virtual Reality and Interactive Technologies Marketing Dimension						3.58	0.794	22.18 %	71.56 %	4 / High
D1	Events held in Babylon (such as the Babylon International Festival) offer a living experience of the city's history.	2	9	55	108	76	3.99	0.862	21.61 %	79.76 %	2
D2	Theatrical and musical performances at the site make me experience the atmosphere of Babylonian civilization.	1	16	49	119	65	3.92	0.863	22.00 %	78.48 %	4

Code	Item / Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD	CV	Relative Importance	Rank / Level
D3	Guided tours provide me with an interactive experience with the place.	2	17	48	106	77	3.96	0.919	23.24 %	79.12 %	3
D4	Experiential activities (such as cuneiform writing and pottery workshops) encourage me to visit.	3	7	44	110	86	4.08	0.859	21.06 %	81.52 %	1
D	Experiential and Event Marketing Dimension						3.99	0.742	18.61 %	79.72 %	3 / High
	Modern Tourism Marketing (Total)						3.92	0.575	14.68 %	78.32 %	High

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS software outputs.

The table shows that the variable "modern tourism marketing" achieved an overall mean of 3.92, with a standard deviation of 0.575, a coefficient of variation of 14.68%, and a relative importance of 78.32%. This is a high level, reflecting a clear consensus among the sample members. The dimensions were ranked as follows:

Content Marketing and Storytelling: Ranked 1st, with a mean of 4.06, a standard deviation of 0.685, and a coefficient of variation of 16.90% (a high level). Item (B4)—"Narrative content makes me feel that visiting Babylon is a journey to the origin of human civilization"—achieved the highest mean within this dimension (4.13), while item (B1)—"Promotional content tells the story of Babylon and its civilization in an engaging way"—achieved the lowest mean (3.97).

Marketing via Digital Platforms and Social Media: Ranked 2nd, with a mean of 4.04, a standard deviation of 0.722, and a coefficient of variation of 17.86% (a high level). Item (A4)—"I can easily communicate with site authorities or tourism companies via digital platforms"—achieved the highest mean within this dimension (4.18), while item (A1)—"I learned about the ruins of Babylon through digital platforms and social media"—achieved the lowest mean (3.96). Experiential Marketing and Events: Ranked 3rd, with a mean of 3.99, a standard deviation of 0.742, and a coefficient of variation of 18.61%—indicating a high level. Within this dimension, item D4—"Experiential activities (such as cuneiform writing or pottery workshops) encourage me to visit"—achieved the highest mean (4.08), while item D2—"Theatrical and musical performances at the site allow me to experience the atmosphere of the Babylonian civilization"—recorded the lowest mean (3.92).

Virtual Reality and Interactive Technology Marketing: Ranked 4th, with a mean of 3.58, a standard deviation of 0.794, and a coefficient of variation of 22.18%—also indicating a high level. Within this dimension, item C4—"Interactive technologies have increased my desire to see the site in person"—achieved the highest mean (3.59), while item C2—"Applications and interactive technologies help me visualize the site before visiting"—recorded the lowest mean (3.56).

This suggests that narrative-based content and digital platforms are the most prominent elements in tourists' awareness of Babylon—which is to be expected for a destination with a globally recognized story. Conversely, virtual reality and interactive technology marketing ranked last, reflecting a scarcity of such technologies in the promotion of the site and within the site itself. This is particularly notable given that Babylon is among the sites that would benefit most from these technologies, as the physical remains currently on-site reveal only a small fraction of its ancient grandeur.
2- Description of the variable "selling the archaeological destination":

Table (19) Descriptive analysis of the variable "selling the archaeological destination" (N = 250)

Code	Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD	CV	Imp.	Rank
E1	I have come to know more about the antiquities of Babylon than I knew before being exposed to their promotion.	2	11	32	103	102	4.17	0.871	20.90%	83.36%	2
E2	I believe that Babylon is an attractive archaeological destination worth visiting.	3	5	32	111	99	4.19	0.823	19.64%	83.84%	1
E3	Babylon stands out in my mind compared to other archaeological destinations.	0	4	45	107	94	4.16	0.772	18.53%	83.28%	3
E4	Babylon has become one of the destinations I consider when planning a trip.	1	6	47	103	93	4.12	0.824	19.99%	82.48%	4
E	**Destination Awareness & Attractiveness Dimension**						**4.16**	**0.699**	**16.80%**	**83.24%**	**1 / High**
F1	Modern promotion played a role in my decision to visit Babylon.	0	16	62	103	69	3.90	0.879	22.55%	78.00%	3
F2	I purchased an entry ticket or a tour package for Babylon after being exposed to promotional content.	3	12	51	107	77	3.97	0.902	22.72%	79.44%	2
F3	I preferred visiting Babylon over other destinations because of what I learned about it.	1	15	44	113	77	4.00	0.874	21.84%	80.00%	1
F4	It was easy for me to make the decision to visit thanks to the available information.	4	18	55	108	65	3.85	0.945	24.55%	76.96%	4
F	**Purchase & Visit Decision Dimension**						**3.93**	**0.777**	**19.77%**	**78.60%**	**3 / High**
G1	I paid for tour guiding services at the site.	4	20	56	111	59	3.80	0.943	24.79%	76.08%	1
G2	I bought souvenirs or handicrafts inspired by the civilization of Babylon.	11	29	77	94	39	3.48	1.031	29.58%	69.68%	4
G3	I spent money on food, transportation, and accommodation around the site.	7	31	55	109	48	3.64	1.017	27.94%	72.80%	3
G4	During my visit, I spent more than I had planned.	2	27	50	117	54	3.78	0.935	24.75%	75.52%	2
G	**Tourist Spending at the Destination Dimension**						**3.68**	**0.845**	**22.98%**	**73.52%**	**4 / High**
H1	I intend to visit Babylon again in the future.	2	17	45	119	67	3.93	0.889	22.63%	78.56%	4
H2	I will recommend visiting Babylon to my friends and acquaintances.	3	15	48	114	70	3.93	0.905	23.01%	78.64%	3
H3	I will post positive photos and impressions about Babylon on digital platforms.	2	10	38	112	88	4.10	0.854	20.86%	81.92%	1
H4	I will participate in upcoming events held in Babylon.	1	14	50	114	71	3.96	0.863	21.80%	79.20%	2
H	**Repurchase & Recommendation Dimension**						**3.98**	**0.721**	**18.13%**	**79.58%**	**2 / High**
	Heritage Destination Selling (Overall)						**3.94**	**0.634**	**16.10%**	**78.73%**	**High**

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS software output.

The table shows that the variable "archaeological destination marketing" (or "selling the archaeological destination") achieved an overall mean of 3.94, with a standard deviation of 0.634, a coefficient of variation of 16.10%, and a relative importance of 78.73%. This is a high level, reflecting a clear consensus among the sample members. The dimensions were ranked as follows:

Awareness of the destination and its attractiveness: Ranked 1st, with a mean of 4.16, a standard deviation of 0.699, and a coefficient of variation of 16.80%—a high level. Item E2, "I consider Babylon an attractive archaeological destination worth visiting," achieved the highest mean within this dimension (4.19), while item E4, "Babylon has become one of the destinations I consider when planning a trip," had the lowest mean (4.12).

Repurchase and recommendation: Ranked 2nd, with a mean of 3.98, a standard deviation of 0.721, and a coefficient of variation of 18.13%—a high level. Item H3, "I will post positive photos and impressions about Babylon on digital platforms," achieved the highest mean within this dimension (4.10), while item H1, "I intend to visit Babylon again in the future," had the lowest mean (3.93). Decision to Visit and Purchase: This dimension ranked 3rd, with a mean of 3.93, a standard deviation of 0.777, and a coefficient of variation of 19.77%, indicating a high level. Item F3—"I preferred visiting Babylon over other destinations because of what I knew about it"—achieved the highest mean within this dimension (4.00), while item F4—"It was easy for me to decide to visit, thanks to the available information"—recorded the lowest mean (3.85).

Tourist Spending at the Destination: This dimension ranked 4th, with a mean of 3.68, a standard deviation of 0.845, and a coefficient of variation of 22.98%, also indicating a high level. Item G1—"I paid for tourist guide services at the site"—achieved the highest mean within this dimension (3.80), while item G2—"I purchased souvenirs or artisanal products inspired by the civilization of Babylon"—recorded the lowest mean (3.48).

It is observed that awareness of the destination and its appeal rank at the forefront of the dimensions related to the "selling" of the destination, whereas tourist spending ranks last. This suggests that while marketing efforts succeed in building awareness of Babylon's value, this awareness does not translate proportionately into spending at the site or its surrounding area. This is due to a limited range of services and products available for purchase—a gap that pertains more to the product itself than to marketing.

Fourth: Testing the First Main Hypothesis (H1) (Correlation):

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the first main hypothesis and its sub-hypotheses. To interpret the strength of the correlation, the following classification was adopted: a correlation is considered weak if it is less than 0.30, moderate if it falls between 0.30 and 0.50, and strong if it exceeds 0.50.

Table (20): Correlation coefficients between the dimensions of modern tourism marketing and the dimensions of marketing/selling archaeological destinations.

Dimension / Variable	Awareness & Attractiveness	Purchase Decision	Spending	Repurchase	Overall Destination Selling	Sig.	Relationship Strength
Digital & Social Media Marketing	0.416**	0.409**	0.380**	0.406**	0.482**	0.000	Moderate
Content Marketing & Storytelling	0.435**	0.387**	0.492**	0.426**	0.524**	0.000	Strong
Virtual Reality & Interactive Technologies	0.339**	0.343**	0.305**	0.286**	0.382**	0.000	Moderate
Experiential Marketing & Events	0.489**	0.430**	0.428**	0.491**	0.549**	0.000	Strong

Dimension / Variable	Awareness & Attractiveness	Purchase Decision	Spending	Repurchase	Overall Destination Selling	Sig.	Relationship Strength
Modern Tourism Marketing (Overall)	**0.535****	**0.501****	**0.510****	**0.512****	**0.617****	**0.000**	**Strong**

Source: Prepared by the researcher. (**) Significant at the 0.01 level; N = 250.

The correlation coefficient between modern tourism marketing and the "selling" (promotion/positioning) of an archaeological destination is 0.617, which is significant at the 0.01 level. This indicates a strong positive relationship; in other words, as a tourist's perception of modern marketing methods increases, the level of the destination's "selling" also increases. All four dimensions showed a significant correlation with the dependent variable. The strongest correlation was found for the dimension of "experiential marketing and events" (0.549), while the weakest was for "virtual reality marketing and interactive technologies" (0.382). Consequently, the first main hypothesis and its four sub-hypotheses are accepted.

Fifth: Testing the Hypotheses of Effect:

Simple linear regression was used to test the overall effect of modern tourism marketing, while multiple regression was employed to examine the combined effect of its dimensions and to identify those with an independent impact. Furthermore, the absence of multicollinearity was verified using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which is required to be less than 5.

1- Testing the Second Main Hypothesis (H2) (Effect):

Table (21) The effect of modern tourism marketing on the "selling" of an archaeological destination (simple regression)

Independent Variable	B	S.E.	β	t	Sig.	VIF	Decision
Modern Tourism Marketing	0.680	0.055	0.617	12.34	0.000	1.00	Significant
Constant (α)	1.274						
R^2 = 0.380	**Adj R^2 = 0.378**	**F = 152.21**	**df = (1, 248)**	**Sig. = 0.000**			

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS software output.

The calculated F-value is 152.21, which is significant at the 0.001 level, confirming the validity of the regression model. The standardized coefficient (β) is 0.617, indicating that a one-standard-deviation increase in the perception of modern marketing leads to a 0.617-standard-deviation increase in the "selling" of the destination. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.380, meaning that modern tourism marketing explains 38.0% of the variance in the "selling" of the archaeological destination.

Table (22): The impact of the dimensions of modern tourism marketing on the "selling" of the archaeological destination (multiple regression)

Independent Variable	B	S.E.	β	t	Sig.	VIF	Decision
Digital Platforms & Social Media Marketing	0.159	0.054	0.181	2.95	0.003	1.55	Significant

Content Marketing & Storytelling	0.241	0.058	0.261	4.17	0.000	1.62	Significant
Virtual Reality & Interactive Technologies	0.029	0.048	0.036	0.61	0.541	1.47	Not Significant
Experiential Marketing & Events	0.263	0.053	0.308	4.95	0.000	1.60	Significant
Constant (α)	**1.164**						
$R^2 = 0.407$	**Adj R^2 = 0.397**	**F = 42.01**	**df = (4, 245)**	**Sig. = 0.000**			

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS software outputs.

When the four dimensions were included together, the model was statistically significant (F = 42.01, Sig. = 0.000) and explained 40.7% of the variance. The impact coefficients were significant for the dimensions of digital platform and social media marketing, content marketing and storytelling, and experiential marketing and events. In contrast, the impact of the dimension related to virtual reality and interactive technologies was not statistically significant (Sig. > 0.05), despite its meaningful correlation with the dependent variable. Experiential marketing and events yielded the highest impact coefficient (β = 0.308), followed by content marketing and storytelling (β = 0.261), and then digital platform marketing (β = 0.181). This suggests that what truly "sells" Babylon is the tourist's lived experience and their engagement with its narrative—going beyond mere exposure via digital platforms—a finding consistent with the model proposed by Schmitt (1999, p. 55) and the conclusions of Williams (2006, p. 483). As for the lack of statistical significance regarding the impact of virtual reality—which contrasts with the findings of Tussyadiah et al. (2018, p. 141)—it is likely due to the scarcity of such technologies in the marketing of Babylon; a method to which tourists have not been sufficiently exposed cannot exert an independent effect. All Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 5. Accordingly, the second main hypothesis is accepted, as are three of its sub-hypotheses; however, the sub-hypothesis concerning the dimension of virtual reality marketing and interactive technologies is rejected.

2- Testing the third main hypothesis (H3):

Table (23) The impact of modern tourism marketing on each dimension of marketing an archaeological destination

Dependent Variable	**B**	**β**	**t**	**R^2**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Decision**
Destination Awareness & Attractiveness	0.651	0.535	9.97	0.286	99.48	0.000	**Significant**
Purchase & Visit Decision	0.678	0.501	9.12	0.251	83.25	0.000	**Significant**
Tourist Spending at the Destination	0.749	0.510	9.33	0.260	87.00	0.000	**Significant**
Repurchase & Recommendation	0.642	0.512	9.38	0.262	88.04	0.000	**Significant**

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS software outputs.

It is evident that the impact of modern tourism marketing was significant across all four dimensions. The strongest impact was observed in "destination awareness and attractiveness," accounting for 28.6% of the variance.

This was followed by "repurchase and recommendation" (26.2%), "tourism expenditure at the destination" (26.0%), and finally, "purchase and visitation decisions" (25.1%). This aligns with the "Marketing 4.0" model (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 65), which posits that marketing operates throughout all stages of the consumer journey. Furthermore, it is clear that the most significant impact occurs during the first stage of this journey: the phase of building destination awareness. Consequently, the third main hypothesis and its four sub-hypotheses are accepted.

Sixth: Testing the hypotheses regarding differences:

1- Testing the fourth main hypothesis (H4):

Table (24): One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for modern tourism marketing, categorized by type of tourist.

Tourist Type	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Domestic Tourist	148	3.79	0.583
Arab Tourist	53	3.97	0.563
Foreign Tourist	49	4.24	0.416

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η^2
Between Groups	7.504	2	3.752	12.399	0.000	0.091
Within Groups	74.740	247	0.303			
Total	**82.244**	**249**				

Source: Prepared by the researcher. Levene's test for equality of variances = 5.141, Sig. = 0.006.

Table (25) Post-hoc comparisons using the Games-Howell test for modern tourism marketing, by type of tourist

Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean Difference (I − J)	Sig.	Decision
Domestic Tourist	Arab Tourist	-0.180	0.123	Not Significant
Domestic Tourist	Foreign Tourist	-0.445	0.000	Significant
Arab Tourist	Foreign Tourist	-0.265	0.021	Significant

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS software output.

The calculated F-value was 12.399, with a significance level of 0.000. Since the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not met—as indicated by Levene's test (Sig. = 0.006)—the analysis was re-run using the Welch test, which does not assume homogeneity. The resulting value was 16.904 (p = 0.000), confirming the existence of significant differences in the perception of modern marketing based on the type of tourist. For the same reason, the Games-Howell post-hoc test was used instead of the Tukey test. The results revealed significant differences between domestic tourists, Arab tourists, and foreign tourists; foreign tourists recorded the highest mean score (4.24), compared to 3.79 for domestic tourists. This can be explained by the fact that foreign tourists rely more heavily on digital channels and international content regarding Babylon prior to their arrival—engaging with virtual tours and documentaries that domestic tourists typically do not seek out—and because programs tailored for foreign tourists often include more extensive guided services and activities. Consequently, the fourth main hypothesis is accepted.

2- Testing the fifth main hypothesis (H5):

Table (26) One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the marketing of the archaeological destination, categorized by educational attainment.

Educational Level	N	Mean	SD
High School or Below	38	3.88	0.630
Bachelor's Degree	115	3.97	0.631
Higher Diploma & Master's	67	3.97	0.624

PhD	30	3.79	0.675

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η²
Between Groups	1.056	3	0.352	0.875	0.454	0.011
Within Groups	98.947	246	0.402			
Total	**100.004**	**249**				

Source: Prepared by the researcher. Levene's test for equality of variances = 0.115, Sig. = 0.951.

The condition of homogeneity of variance was met (Sig. = 0.951). The calculated F-value was 0.875, with a significance level of 0.454—which is greater than 0.05. Furthermore, post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey test revealed no significant differences between any pair of groups. Consequently, the fifth main hypothesis is rejected, indicating that Babylon's ability to market itself is not limited to any specific educational group; rather, its name and cultural value resonate with tourists across all educational levels.

Seventh: The Structural Model and the Final Tested Model

To verify the preceding results within a single framework that accounts for measurement error, three sequential structural models were tested using the maximum likelihood estimation method: the first focused on the two latent variables, with the dimensions serving as indicators; the second examined the four dimensions of modern tourism marketing as influences on the latent dependent variable; and the third—the final model—retained only the statistically significant paths.

Table (27): Path coefficients in the first structural model (at the level of the two variables)

Path	Standardized Estimate (β)	S.E.	C.R.	Sig.	Decision
Modern Tourism Marketing → Heritage Destination Selling	0.764	0.101	8.73	0.000	Significant
$R^2 = 0.583$					

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on outputs from the AMOS software.

The first model achieved good fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 1.23$, CFI = 0.995, RMSEA = 0.031, SRMR = 0.028). The path was statistically significant (C.R. = 8.73), and the latent construct of "modern tourism marketing" explained 58.3% of the variance in the latent dependent variable—a higher percentage than that observed in the regression analysis, as structural modeling accounts for (isolates) measurement error.

Table (28): Path coefficients in the second model (at the dimensional level) and the final model.

Dimension → Dependent Variable	β (Second)	C.R.	Sig.	β (Final)	C.R.	Sig.
Digital & Social Media Marketing	0.195	2.95	0.003	0.202	3.09	0.002
Content Marketing & Storytelling	0.273	4.01	0.000	0.284	4.33	0.000
Virtual Reality & Interactive Technologies	0.037	0.58	0.559	Deleted	—	—
Experiential Marketing & Events	0.343	5.02	0.000	0.351	5.22	0.000

R^2	**0.474**	—	—	**0.474**	—	—

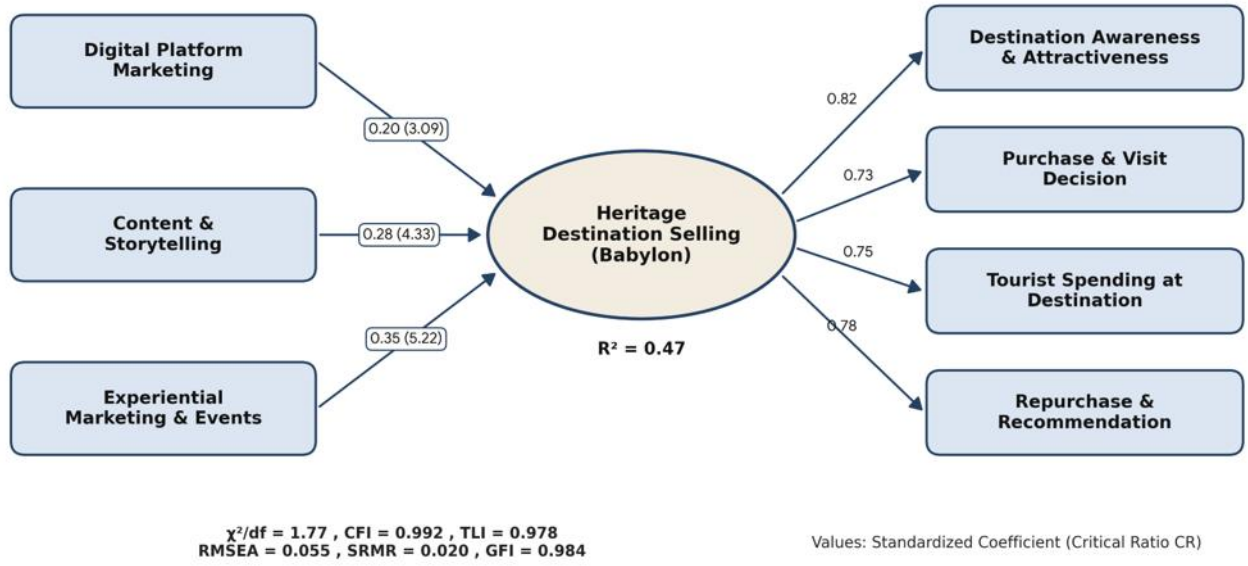
Source: Prepared by the researcher based on AMOS software output. The Critical Ratio (C.R.) is considered significant if it exceeds 1.96.

Table (29) Comparison of goodness-of-fit indices for the structural models

Model	**χ^2**	**df**	**χ^2/df**	**GFI**	**CFI**	**TLI**	**RMSEA**	**SRMR**
Criterion			**< 3**	**> 0.90**	**> 0.90**	**> 0.90**	**< 0.08**	**< 0.08**
First Model (Variables)	23.41	19	1.23	0.977	0.995	0.992	0.031	0.028
Second Model (Four Dimensions)	17.13	10	1.71	0.983	0.991	0.975	0.054	0.020
Final Model (Three Dimensions)	14.13	8	1.77	0.984	0.992	0.978	0.055	0.020

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on AMOS software output.

The second model indicated that the path for the dimension of "virtual reality and interactive technologies in marketing" was not statistically significant; therefore, it was removed—in accordance with the principle of model parsimony—and the model was re-estimated. The final model retained three dimensions, all of which were statistically significant, and achieved excellent goodness-of-fit indices (χ^2/df = 1.77, GFI = 0.984, CFI = 0.992, TLI = 0.978, RMSEA = 0.055, SRMR = 0.020). It explained 47.4% of the variance in the dependent variable—nearly the same percentage as the four-dimension second model (47.4%). This confirms that the removed dimension did not contribute any independent explanatory power, and that the final model is more parsimonious, clearer, and more reliable.



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on outputs from the AMOS software.

The final model reveals that the dimensions, ranked by the strength of their impact, are as follows: experiential marketing and events (0.35), followed by content marketing and storytelling (0.28), and finally, marketing via digital platforms and social media (0.20). This implies that the most effective strategy for promoting Babylon is one based on live experiences and events that transform a visit into a significant occasion; narrative-driven content that tells the story of the city; and digital platforms that convey this story and these events to both local and international audiences.

Eighth: Results of Hypothesis Testing

Table (30): Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement / Content	Value	Decision
H1	**Correlation between Modern Tourism Marketing and Heritage Destination Selling**	**r = 0.617**	**Accepted**
H1-1	Correlation of Digital & Social Media Marketing	r = 0.482	Accepted
H1-2	Correlation of Content Marketing & Storytelling	r = 0.524	Accepted
H1-3	Correlation of Virtual Reality & Interactive Technologies	r = 0.382	Accepted
H1-4	Correlation of Experiential Marketing & Events	r = 0.549	Accepted
H2	**Impact of Modern Tourism Marketing on Heritage Destination Selling**	**β = 0.617**	**Accepted**
H2-1	Impact of Digital & Social Media Marketing	β = 0.181	Accepted
H2-2	Impact of Content Marketing & Storytelling	β = 0.261	Accepted
H2-3	Impact of Virtual Reality & Interactive Technologies	β = 0.036	**Rejected**
H2-4	Impact of Experiential Marketing & Events	β = 0.308	Accepted
H3	**Impact of Modern Tourism Marketing on Destination Selling Dimensions**	—	**Accepted**
H3-1	Impact on Destination Awareness & Attractiveness	R^2 = 0.286	Accepted
H3-2	Impact on Purchase & Visit Decision	R^2 = 0.251	Accepted
H3-3	Impact on Tourist Spending at Destination	R^2 = 0.260	Accepted
H3-4	Impact on Repurchase & Recommendation	R^2 = 0.262	Accepted
H4	**Differences in Modern Marketing according to Tourist Type**	**F = 12.399**	**Accepted**
H5	**Differences in Destination Selling according to Education Level**	**F = 0.875**	**Rejected**

Source: Prepared by the researcher.

Section Three – Conclusions and Recommendations:

I. Conclusions:

1- Tourists demonstrate a high level of awareness regarding modern tourism marketing methods applied to the ruins of Babylon. This confirms that the destination maintains a presence in the digital space, though this presence relies more on historical renown than on a structured marketing strategy.

2- Content marketing and storytelling rank highest in terms of tourist awareness, while virtual reality and interactive technologies rank last. This reveals a technological gap in the marketing of a site that, arguably, is among those most in need of digital simulation.

3- Experiential marketing and events are the most influential methods for driving the "sale" of the destination; live events, performances, and guided tours are the key factors that transform interest in Babylon into actual visits, spending, and loyalty.

4- Virtual reality does not exert an independent influence on the "sale" of the destination when other marketing methods are accounted for. This is likely due to its scarcity rather than a lack of inherent potential, suggesting it remains an untapped opportunity.

5- Modern tourism marketing accounts for a significant portion of the variance in the "sale" of this archaeological destination. Its strongest impact is observed in the initial stage of the consumer journey—specifically regarding awareness of the destination and its overall appeal.

6- Tourist spending ranks lowest among the dimensions of the destination's "sale." This indicates that a lack of available services and products for purchase—both at the site and in its surrounding area—limits the conversion of visits into economic returns.

7- Foreign tourists demonstrate a higher level of awareness regarding modern marketing methods compared to domestic tourists. Furthermore, the marketing of the destination does not vary based on the educational background of the tourists; this suggests that current marketing efforts are more effective in reaching audiences abroad than those within the country.

8- The research has yielded a validated final model—comprising three influential approaches—that demonstrates a good fit. This model can serve as a framework for developing marketing strategies for Babylon and other archaeological destinations in Iraq.

Second: Recommendations

Table (31): Mechanisms for Implementing the Recommendations

Recommendation	Implementation Mechanism	Responsible Entity	Timeframe
Annual Events Calendar	Organize regular events at the site throughout the year alongside the Babylon Festival, such as night theatrical performances and a reenactment of the Babylonian New Year procession.	Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities; Local Government in Babylon	Medium-term
Experiential Workshops	Hold workshops on cuneiform writing, pottery making, and glazed brick crafting for visitors and students.	State Board of Antiquities and Heritage; University of Babylon	Short-term
Digital Reconstruction of Babylon	Produce a virtual tour and an augmented reality (AR) application that reimagines the Ishtar Gate, Processional Street, and palaces as they once stood.	Ministry of Culture; Universities; International Partners	Long-term
Unified Storytelling Identity	Build a unified marketing message for Babylon as the cradle of civilization and law, and produce a multilingual storytelling content series.	Tourism Board; Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Short-term
Official Digital Platform	Launch an official website and mobile application for Babylon that enables online booking of tickets and tour programs and displays upcoming events.	Tourism Board; Local Government	Medium-term
Spending Products Development	Establish a visitor center featuring a souvenir and replica shop, a café, and a restaurant, while supporting local artisans.	Local Government; Private Sector	Medium-term

Recommendation	Implementation Mechanism	Responsible Entity	Timeframe
Targeting Domestic Tourists	Design discounted campaigns and programs for Iraqi families, schools, and universities to bridge the gap between domestic and foreign tourists.	Tourism Board; Ministry of Education	Short-term
Adopting the Model for Evaluation	Use the final structural model as a periodic tool to measure the impact of marketing campaigns on visitor numbers and spending.	Universities; Tourism Board	Ongoing

Source: Prepared by the researcher.

III. Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies:

This research utilized a purposive sample of 250 tourists at a single destination, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, it is a cross-sectional study based on tourists' self-reporting, measuring their perceptions of sales rather than actual sales figures. The researcher suggests that future studies could compare various Iraqi archaeological sites—such as Ur, Hatra, and Ashur—examine the mediating roles of destination image and perceived value, investigate the moderating role of tourist type, assess the impact of an actual virtual reality experience on the intention to visit Babylon using an experimental design, and link questionnaire data with actual statistics on ticket sales and expenditures.

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