IMPACT OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT ON SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE EXPLORATORY STUDY IN IRAQI AIRWAYS COMPANY

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Abstract

Purpose: The present study seeks to know the relationship and impact between customer relationship management and IAC's sustainable competitive advantage. **Problem:** The research problem is summarized in the main question (is there an impact of customer relationship management on achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in Iraqi Airways?) **Method:** The analytical descriptive approach was used by the researcher to achieve the research objective, and the questionnaire was used as a research measure. Based on the organizational structure of IAC, a non-probability sample of 104 management leadership participants was chosen. A set of statistical methods based on SPSS V.25 and AMOS V.25 were used to test the research hypotheses. The findings revealed that customer relationship management is strongly associated with sustainable competitive advantage, implying that the company can strengthen its customer relationships to support its competitive role, giving it strength in responding to threats. It has been demonstrated that when Iraqi Airways' senior management is actively engaged in implementing and achieving customer relationship management for its employees, this adds value and a sustainable competitive advantage. **Originality/Value:** Clarifying the role of IAC's customer relationship management in achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords: Customer relationship management (CRM), sustainable competitive advantage (SCA)

INTRODUCTION

Given the current global circumstances, changes, challenges, and economic opportunities, customers have become more aware of the quality of services provided and how company employees interact with customers, particularly in the field of air transport, which is one of the most important sectors of economic activity and one of the most important elements of development for any country. Although all carriers provide the same service; the transportation of passengers and cargo, the difference is in the way the service is provided, such as speed in bookings, the provision of facilities in the transportation of bags, and the adoption of advanced and renewed techniques in the provision of its services, which provides comfort to the customer. With these challenges, as well as the similarity of services and the maturity of the customer, the company's leadership has had to maintain its reputation and sustain its relationships with the customer by adopting the marketing philosophy of customer relationship management (CRM), as the customer is a continuation and sustainability artery of the company in the market, which helps it communicate more closely with the customers and give it greater value. It is one of the marketing approaches that supports the organizational structure of the

firm that serves and meets the wants and requirements of the consumers, as well as who is accountable for preparing the suitable choice to fulfill the customers' needs and aspirations. As a result, the happier consumers are with the service, the greater the likelihood of maintaining them and attracting new customers. The lack of competitors in the same field and the acquisition of a sustainable competitive advantage are elements of the company's survival, learning, development, and continuous improvement, which are unique characteristics that distinguish it from competitors and place its services at the forefront.

Chapter 1

METHODOLOGY

1.1 Research Problem

The openness of life and the economic growth witnessed in the Iraqi market have led to the entry of a number of international companies in the field of air transport services, both to achieve their policy of global expansion and to seek marketing opportunities within the Iraqi market. This has brought Iraqi Airlines into constant competition with these international companies to earn customers, which is accompanied by a possible decline in market share. These challenges obliged Iraqi Airways to care for the customer through attention and activation of CRM within the company and service offices to achieve a long-term goal of sustainable competitive advantage as the customer is the most important factor for excellence.

The main question of the research problem is: (Is CRM having an impact on achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in Iraqi Airways?)

1.2 Importance of research

a. Working to increase the objectives and understanding of Iraqi Airways' management leadership of the importance of applying and utilizing research variables to interest the customer as a key element, as well as enhance the ability of Iraqi Airways to provide its services to suit the expectations and needs of its customers as a basis for competition.

b. The research dealt with an important sector of Iraqi Airways as it is used in all sectors whether in the transport of passengers or cargo.

c. Highlighting CRM to acquire and maintain customers and build a long-term relationship with them given that the customer is the reason for the existence and continuation of Iraqi Airways to operate in the market and contribute to achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

d. Enriching the Iraqi Library with scientific efforts on the issues of CRM and SCA.
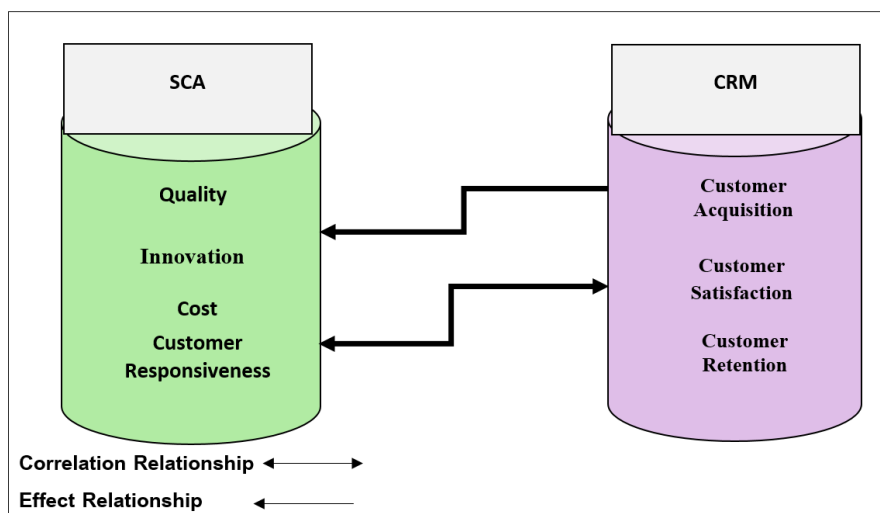
1.3 Research Objectives

• Demonstrates the role of CRM in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in Iraqi Airways.

- Familiarizes senior leadership with the importance of CRM in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage.

- Identifies the correlation and effect relationship between CRM and SCA.

- Provides a set of conclusions and recommendations for IAC during the application of the Customer Relationship Management Strategy.

1.4 Model and Hypotheses

A. Research Model:

Figure 1: Research Model

B. Research hypotheses:

H1: "There is a statistically significant correlation between customer relationship management and the company's sustainable competitive advantage.

H2: "There is a statistically significant effect of management of customer relationships on the company's sustainable competitive advantage sample research."

1.5 Research Population

The research Population consists of management leaders, their staff , department heads and management division officials working for Iraqi Airways. A non-probability sample was selected based on the company's organizational structure of 104 participants. 104 questionnaires were distributed, and the number of retrieved forms was 102, valid 100, i.e., the rate of retrieval was 96%. Table 1 shows distributed questionnaires and the invalid forms as follows:

Table 1: Sample response					
Status of Questionnaire	Number distributed	Number not retrieved	Number retrieved	Number Invalid	Number Valid
Number	104	2	102	2	100
Percentage	100%	2%	98%	2%	96%

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

2.1 Concept of (CRM)

Today's organizations have realized that they need to stay ahead of their competitors because of changes brought about by the marketing environment, technological developments and current and future competition. These many challenges have encouraged organizations to adopt a new approach known as "Customer Relationship Management" (CRM) (Hamid, 2015, p. 152). The purpose of this term's emergence is not only to create relationships but also to build a network of relationships to acquire customers and maximize long-term interaction with the Organization, giving customers a personality and a high profile in the present era known as the Age of Consumption (Haddadin, 2014, p. 11). There are perspectives for a number of writers and researchers on this concept, as both Frow & Payne see customer relationship management as "A multi-functional strategic approach that focuses on enhancing shareholder value by developing appropriate relationships with key clients and different segments of these customers. This usually includes identifying appropriate business and customer strategies, identifying appropriate sector specifications, managing the joint creation of customer value, developing integrated channel strategies, intelligent use of data and technological solutions to create a superior customer experience" (Frow & Payne, 2009, p. 11). While Ali sees it as "an organizational capacity that enables the organization to manage long-term profitable relationships with its customers and enhance its competitiveness. This capacity is based on a total of four resources: technology, processes, customer guidance and organization "(Ali et al., 2019, p. 81), while Gil-Gomez explained that customer relationship management "is part of smart and modern information systems that provide business decision makers with value data, especially with respect to the three components (MRC) marketing, sales and services" (Gil-Gomez et al., 2020, p. 2745).

In light of the above, the researcher defines customer relationship management as "a means of helping the organization to strengthen its competitive position by establishing strong long-term relationships with the customer based on techniques supportive of dialogue to achieve common interests, and obtaining competitive advantage by providing high-quality and timely services to improve customer acquisition, ensure customer satisfaction and thus maintain them for a long time."

2.2   Importance of CRM.

The importance of Customer Relationship Management for organizations is highlighted through the following categories:

1. The importance of CRM at the organization level is as follows: (Abidat, 2021, p. 22)

    - Knowing and predicting the customer wishes and needs.

    - Building a long-term relationship with the customer.

    - Increasing awareness of the organization's brand and increased customer loyalty.

2. The importance of CRM for the customer is as follows: (Nori, 2021, p. 17)

    - Customer awareness of high costs of change and transfer from one organization to another.

    - Customer trust in the organization he used to deal with.

    - Establishing social relations with service providers or the organization.

    - The customer goals and sense of importance to the organization especially when he gets everything he desires

2.3   CRM Dimensions

Customer relationship management can be measured through the following dimensions:

- **Customer acquisition**: A goal that any organization seeks whatever the size of its work, it helps it achieve profits and sustainable growth, so it has become a necessary activity in maintaining customers because its low number reduces the profit of the organization (Celestin, 2021, p. 168-169).
- **Customer satisfaction**: The customer objective of the value received in a relationship or transaction, where the value is equal to the perceived quality of service compared to the expected value of relationships or transactions with competing providers (Amoako et al., 2012, p. 18).
- **Customer Retention**: Customer intention to engage with the organization continuously providing many benefits, namely to retain workers, provide better customer service, cost and sensitivity of lower price, market share and high productivity efficiency (Swidan, 2011, p. 664).

Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA)

1. Concept of SCA:

Most organizations that want to stand out seek to possess a sustainable competitive advantage and make it their main goal, because the road to this advantage will lead to the organization's survival for as long as possible under conditions of intense competition, and this prompts organizations to invest the necessary efforts and resources to achieve this advantage or benefit (Yahaoui, 2013, p. 58). It is also vital for all organizations because it leads to a better strategy

and higher-than-average profitability for the organization in the future, giving them a high chance to perform well and succeed through a sustainable competitive advantage (kyrago, 2010, p. 5). Al-Tai & Al-Sabi believe that sustainable competitive advantage "is the source that enhances the organization's position in the market to earn profits by distinguishing it from its competitors in the areas of cost, price and product or service focus" (Al-Tai & Al-Sabi, 2012, p. 312). Mahdi & Nassar also stated that it is "the organization's core, heterogeneous and decisively immovable resources, capabilities and competencies based on four features of empirical indicators of value, scarcity, incomplete imitation and organization of resource capture and exploitation" (Mahdi & Nassar, 2021, p. 4). Yusuf also considers it "the ability of the organization to manage its resources and utilize them in a smart manner by creating maximum value that its competitors cannot achieve, leading to outstanding financial performance that outperforms competitors" (Yusuf, 2021, p. 754). In the light of the foregoing, the researcher defines sustainable competitive advantage as; "A set of characteristics that distinguish the organization's services from its competitors in the field of profit, operation and customer satisfaction, thus placing it in a superior position for these competitors in the long run."

2. Importance of SCA

Maintaining the sustainability of competitive advantage is not easy, especially in a business environment characterized by extreme competition and rapid changes that make competitors able to emulate and mimic competitive advantage. Innovation and creativity are therefore required through the creation of new ideas and innovations and the acquisition of new technologies, information and knowledge that help organizations strengthen their ability to create new services to ensure their survival and ensure the survival of their competitiveness (Shakir & Ibrahim, 2021, p. 269). The importance of sustainable competitive advantage lies in the critical role it plays in the life of organizations (Benign, 2018, p. 16). It is the gem of the organizations' work (Mahdi et al., 2018, p. 4). The basic rule underpinning the organization's performance, as well as a strategic objective, the organization seeks to achieve to be able to cope with the competition imposed on it from both the internal and external environments (Al Hamiri & Al Mahdi, 2019, p. 440). In addition, it is a positive indicator that leads the organization to take a strong position in the market by obtaining greater market share than its competitors, and it is a key factor in the operations and production of all kinds of organizations because it is the basis on which the competitive strategy is formulated. All other factors or variables interact to support sustainable competitive advantage and the emergence of a comprehensive and structured competitive strategy (Russell et al., 2020, p. 269).

3. SCA Dimensions

The dimensions of the sustainable competitive advantage to be addressed in this study is as follows:

- **Quality**: quality means a method or method adopted by organizations to develop design quality that can satisfy the customer by translating consumer demands into design goals

and quality assurance points to meet the aspirations of target customers (Lowe, Ridgway, 2001, p. 1).

- **Innovation**: the process through which organizations use their skills and resources to generate or adopt new ideas and apply them so that they lead to a new service that holds added value to the organization, thereby achieving a sustainable competitive advantage (Yahyaoui, 2013, p. 5)

- **Cost:** the determining factor in the organization's sustainability, survival and success, as it is essential for the organization to pursue a sustainable competitive advantage by reducing costs, i.e., focusing on reducing production costs and marketing products and services below those of competition organizations (Haddrawi, 2015, p. 232).

- **Customer Responsiveness**: ability to meet customers' new or urgent needs through flexibility in service delivery means and procedures (Dassey, 2012, p. 167).
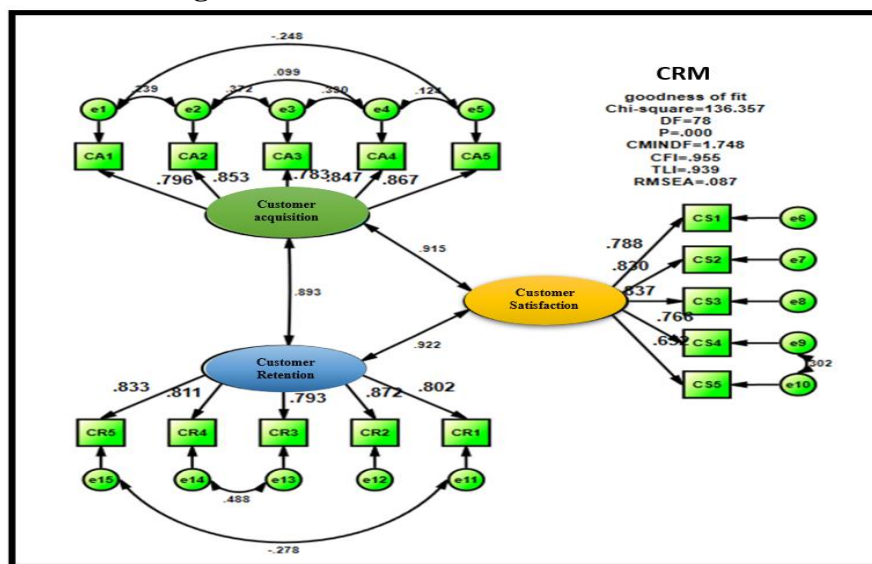
Chapter 3

PRACTICAL RESEARCH

3.1 Assessing the Goodness of fit of the research scales

The measurement model evaluates the customer relationship management variable: Figure 2 shows CRM model consisting of three core dimensions comprising 15.

Figure 2: CRM Model after modification

Source: Amos.25 Outputs

- The composite reliability values of all dimensions were recorded, all within acceptable limits, ranging from 0.929-0.889, which is greater than the approved ratio of 0.70. This is a good indicator of scale reliability, as the results showed high reliability of the scale dimensions.
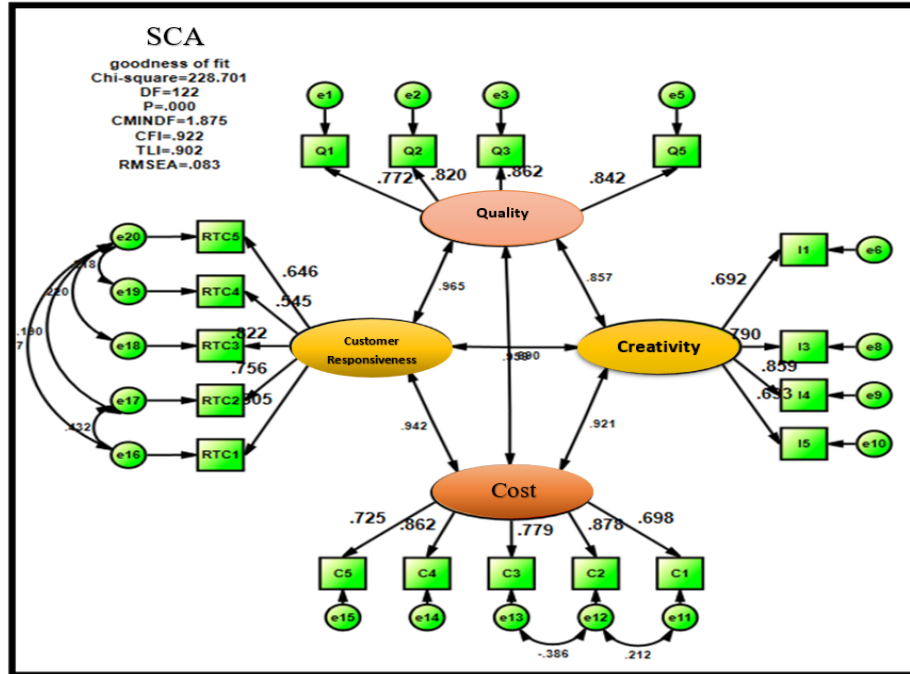
- The value of the Alpha Cronbach coefficient for all dimensions ranging from 0.791-0.734 which is greater than 0.70. This indicates that the measurement instrument has a high degree of validity and reliability .

- Standardized regression weights values for all items achieved between 0.872-0.652, which is a good rate. Standardized regression weights indicate the extent to which each item contributes to the dimension to which it belongs. The higher the item's contribution is the more important it is to explain the dimension to which it belongs.

- The results demonstrated that the construct validity of the scale for all items was significant, as the standard scores for all items ranged from 6.791-10.754, which was greater than the critical ratio (CR) of 1.96, indicating the validity of the items and a good indicator of subsequent statistical analysis.

- The value of the significance level for all items was 0.000, which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. This also indicates that all items are indicative of the validity of items, which is a good indicator.

Table 2: Statistical indicators of the CRM model							
Items	Direction	Dimensions	CR	Alpha Cronbach	Standardized Regression Weights	Critical Ratio	P
CA1	<---	Customer Acquisition	0.929	0.734	.796		
CA2	<---				.853	10.754	0.000
CA3	<---				.783	8.402	0.000
CA4	<---				.847	9.170	0.000
CA5	<---				.867	8.728	0.000
CS1	<---	Customer Satisfaction	0.889	0.791	.788		
CS2	<---				.830	9.186	0.000
CS3	<---				.837	9.291	0.000
CS4	<---				.766	8.273	0.000
CS5	<---				.652	6.791	0.000
CR1	<---	Customer Retention	0.919	0.791	.802		
CR2	<---				.872	10.050	0.000
CR3	<---				.793	8.826	0.000
CR4	<---				.811	9.092	0.000
CR5	<---				.833	8.402	0.000

3.2 Assessing the sustainable competitive advantage model:

Figure 3 shows the sustainable competitive advantage model, which consists of four basic dimensions consisting of 20 items.

Figure 3: Model of sustainable competitive advantage after modification and deletion

Source: Amos. 25 Outputs

The following is shown in table 3:

- All of the composite reliability values of all dimensions were within the acceptable range of 0.895-0.846, which is greater than the approved ratio of 0.70. This is a good indicator of scale reliability, as the results showed high reliability of scale dimensions.
- The value of the Alpha Cronbach coefficient for all dimensions ranging from 0.89-0.841 is greater than 0.70. This indicates that the coefficient of the measurement instrument enjoys a high degree of validity and reliability.
- Standardized regression weights values for all items achieved between 0.878-0.545 which is a good ratio.
- The results indicated that the construct validity of the scale for all items D, as the standard scores for all items were found to be between 11.276-5.703 and greater than the critical ratio of 1.96, which proves the validity of the items, a good indicator of subsequent statistical analysis.
- The value of the significance level for all items is 0.000, which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05, which also indicates that all items are significant and indicates the validity of the items, which is a good indicator.

Table 3: Statistical indicators of the SCA model							
Items	Direction	Dimensions	CR	Alpha Cronbach	Standardized Regression Weights	Critical Ratio	P
Q1	<---	Quality	0.895	0.878	.772		
Q2	<---				.820	8.798	0.000
Q3	<---				.862	9.366	0.000
Q5	<---				.842	9.094	0.000
I1	<---	Innovation	0.846	0.890	.692		
I3	<---				.790	7.280	0.000
I4	<---				.859	7.852	0.000
I5	<---				.693	6.442	0.000
C1	<---	Cost	0.891	0.841	.698		
C2	<---				.878	9.014	0.000
C3	<---				.779	7.252	0.000
C4	<---				.862	8.009	0.000
C5	<---				.725	6.822	0.000
RTC1	<---	Customer Responsiveness	0.855	0.890	.805		
RTC2	<---				.756	11.276	0.000
RTC3	<---				.822	9.578	0.000
RTC4	<---				.545	5.703	0.000
RTC5	<---				.646	6.467	0.000

3.3 Analysis of the relative importance of the research variables

1. **Customer Relationship Management Variable:** Table 4 shows the overall indicators of customer relationship management variable and its dimensions using SPSS V.25 in the company under study. The mean of customer relationship management was 3.609 with a standard deviation of 0.795. This shows the relative importance of customer relationship management dimensions after customer satisfaction, it has the highest level of importance and the most compatible in the first order compared to other dimensions, at the lower level, it came after the customer acquisition in the third and final order.

Table 4: Summary of CRM Dimensions							
#	CRM Dimensions	Mean	SD	CV	Availability	Gap Size	Order
1	**Customer acquisition**	3.546	0.924	26.049	70.92	29.08	**Third**
2	**Customer satisfaction**	3.688	0.786	21.310	73.76	26.24	**First**
3	**Customer Retention**	3.592	0.864	24.042	71.84	28.16	**Second**
	CRM	3.609	0.795	22.023	72.18	27.82	

2. **Sustainable competitive advantage variable:** Table 5 shows the order of relative importance of the sustainable competitive advantage variable and its dimensions. It was found that the arithmetic mean of the sustainable competitive advantage amounted to 3.611 with a standard deviation of 0.709. The relative importance of the dimensions of sustainable competitive advantage also became clear. Compared to the other dimensions, as for the least important, it was the cost dimension, which came in the fourth place.

Table 5: Summary of CRM Dimensions							
#	SCA Dimensions	Mean	SD	CV	Availability	Gap Size	Order
1	Quality	3.67	0.755	20.582	73.4	26.6	Second
2	Innovation	3.518	0.789	22.436	70.36	29.64	Third
3	Cost	3.558	0.803	22.574	71.16	28.84	Fourth
4	Customer Responsiveness	3.698	0.739	19.979	73.96	26.04	First
SCA Dimensions		3.611	0.709	19.634	72.22	27.78	

3.4 Hypotheses Testing

A. Hypothesis Testing - Correlation

Table 6 presents the results of the correlation hypothesis test:

H1 Testing: Table 6 shows a statistically significant correlation between CRM and SCA. The value of the coefficient of correlation between CRM and SCA is 888.0 * * at a significance level of 0.000 below the significance level of 0.05, and the Z value is 13.910, which is greater than tabular value of Z of 1.96, this result indicates the significant value of the correlation, It came at a strong level, which means rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternative hypothesis (There is a statistically significant correlation between CRM and SCA).

Table 6: Values of correlation between CRM and SCA dimensions						
DV	CRM Dimensions	Correlation and Level of Significance		Relationship Direction	Relationship Strength	Sig.
SCA	Customer Acquisition	R	0.816**	Positive	Strong	Significant
		Sig.	0.000			
		Z	11.274			
	Customer Satisfaction	R	0.825**	Positive	Strong	Significant
		Sig.	0.000			
		Z	11.546			
	Customer Retention	R	0.826**	Positive	Strong	Significant
		Sig.	0.000			
		Z	11.576			
	CRM	R	0.888**	Positive	Strong	Significant
		Sig.	0.000			
		Z	13.910			
No. of accepted hypotheses		4				
Percentage		100%				

Source: SPSS V.25

B. hypothesis testing - Effect

Table 7 presents the statistical results and indicators obtained from the effect hypothesis testing for customer relationship management variable on sustainable competitive advantage as follows:

H2 Testing: (there is a statistically significant effect of customer relationship management on sustainable competitive advantage), as the analysis will be conducted according to the simple

linear regression model. A statistically significant effect of customer relationship management on sustainable competitive advantage was found.

- The calculated F value achieved 363.602, greater than the tabular F value of 3.94 at a significance level of 0.05.
- The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.789 shows that customer relationship management explains 78% of the variables of sustainable competitive advantage.
- The t calculated value of the customer relationship management variable marginal slop factor is 19.068, which is greater than the tabular value of t of 1.984 at a significance level of 0.05. This indicates the significance of the marginal slop factor of customer relationship management .
- The t value of marginal slop factor of 0.792 shows that increasing customer relationship management by one unit will increase sustainable competitive advantage by 79%.
- Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (there is a statistically significant effect of customer relationship management on sustainable competitive advantage) is accepted.

Table 7: Statistical indicators for analyzing the impact of CRM dimensions on SCA								
DV	CRM Dimensions			R2	Adjusted R^2	F	t	Sig.
SCA	Customer Acquisition	(α)	1.389	0.666	0.663	195.706	13.990	0.000
		(β)	0.627					
	Customer Satisfaction	(α)	0.866	0.680	0.677	208.714	14.447	0.000
		(β)	0.744					
	Customer Retention	(α)	1.174	0.683	0.680	211.242	14.534	0.000
		(β)	0.679					
	CRM	(α)	0.754	0.788	0.786	363.602	19.068	0.000
		(β)	0.792					
Critical F-Value= 3.94 Critical T-Value= 1.984 Sample Size = 10								

Source: SPSS V.25

Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Findings

1. The senior management of the researched company is keen to provide its services beyond the expectation of its customers, as well as to treat customers in a good and appropriate manner, which is reflected in the company's reputation in general.

2. The lack of interest of the company in the customer acquisition dimension indicates that the company under study does not provide distinctive services at competitive prices than other companies to win customers. The results also showed little interest in the advertising methods of its promotional campaigns.

3. The researched company seeks to build relationships based on trust and mutual commitment with its customers, as it is interested in developing good relationships with existing customers and keen not to move to another company.

4. The company does not continuously pursue R&D to improve the service, nor does it apply procedures that can reduce the cost of the service provided.

5. Customer relationship management is strongly correlated with sustainable competitive advantage, which means that the company can strengthen its relationship with customers to support its competitive role giving it strength in the face of threats.

6. When the senior management of Iraqi Airways is actively interested in applying and achieving customer relationship management for the staff, this will add value and a sustainable competitive advantage.

4.2 Recommendations

1. The need to adopt and benefit from the concept and dimensions of customer relationship management and to intensify efforts in its application to provide high quality and distinct services from other companies.

2. The need to strengthen the efforts of the management of the company to take care of the sustainable competitive advantage and make it a fundamental pillar to enable it to face the difficulties encountered by competitors.

3. The researcher Emphasize the need to increase the customer trust and satisfaction as it is of paramount importance in the field of service. A special approach that contributes to the customer satisfaction by treating customers in a good manner and providing services in ways that exceed their expectations and ensuring that they receive them.

4. The researched company should take care to retain customers and ensure that they do not move to competing companies, by providing new and sophisticated services leading to customer retention.

5. The researcher recommends taking advantage of the philosophy of customer relationship management using methods to attract and acquire new profitable customers by creating extensive promotional campaigns and offering offers and discounts to the company's customers as well as working to provide services at a premium price than its competitor in the same sector.

6. The researcher recommends raising the efficiency and effectiveness of the staff in charge of customer relationship management by providing the reward for its impact in building trust and mutual commitment as well as forming a profitable relationship with customers in order to gain a competitive advantage.

7. The need to establish training courses for the senior management of the company to inform them of the importance of achieving a sustainable competitive advantage for them and their company.

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