

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

QUALITY OF BANKING SERVICES AND EASE TO ACCESS OF BANKING SERVICES IMPACT ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND COMPETITIVENESS OF IRAQI BANKS

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—Abstract—

Competitiveness has long been recognised as a critical factor for organisational success, particularly within the financial sector, warranting the focus of contemporary research. This article examines the impact of banking service quality and accessibility on the competitiveness of Iraqi banks. Additionally, the study investigates the mediating role of customer satisfaction between banking service quality, accessibility, and competitiveness, as well as the moderating role of institutional awareness between customer satisfaction and competitiveness in the context of Iraqi banks. The research employs quantitative methods, collecting primary data through survey questionnaires. Data analysis was conducted using Smart-PLS to explore the relationships among the variables. The findings indicate that both banking service quality and accessibility positively influence competitiveness. Furthermore, customer satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between banking service quality, accessibility, and competitiveness, while institutional awareness plays a significant moderating role between customer satisfaction and competitiveness. The study offers practical recommendations for regulators in formulating policies aimed at enhancing competitiveness through high-quality banking services and improved accessibility.

Keywords: Quality of Banking Services, Ease to Access of Banking Services, Customer Satisfaction, Institutional Awareness, Competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

Banking is a critical component of economic development, playing a pivotal role in improving financial conditions and acting as a driving force for growth. In Iraq, where

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socioeconomic challenges persist and institutional reforms are underway, banking institutions assume a central role. This study aims to explore the relationship between service quality, accessibility, and their combined impact on customer satisfaction and the competitiveness of the Iraqi banking sector. Banks, as key service providers, must prioritise efficiency to influence customer perceptions, with attributes such as reliability, responsiveness, and accuracy being essential in banking services. Moreover, the evolution of both physical and technological services within the banking sector has become crucial in enhancing the customer experience and fostering trust, particularly regarding ease of service access. In this part, customer satisfaction is assumed to mediate the link among service quality and institutional competitiveness, therefore shaping the dynamics among these variables.

For [Zouari and Abdelhedi \(2021\)](#), The performance and reliability of available banking services undeniably make customer satisfaction a critically crucial factor for the sustainable growth of new markets and the long-term sustainability of banks' existing market positions. Research by [Aramburu and Pescador \(2019\)](#) has clearly demonstrated that in competitive banking environments, banks that consistently offer high-quality, readily accessible services successfully gain customer loyalty, significantly enhanced prestige, and notably improved profitability. This study also thoughtfully integrates institutional awareness as a moderating factor, thoroughly examining whether the effect of customer satisfaction on bank competitiveness is substantially amplified or diminished. Organizational awareness refers to customers' comprehensive understanding of a bank's operations and objectives. It greatly plays a vital role in effectively building trust and closely aligning customer expectations with the institution's service delivery.

The financial sector in Iraq is currently operating under extremely challenging conditions, which include post-conflict reconstruction, economic diversification, and the integration of advanced technologies ([Makdisi & Soto, 2023](#)). These factors present both opportunities and challenges for banking institutions. On one hand, there is an increasingly strong demand for efficient banking services, largely driven by individuals and businesses seeking reliable financial products. On the other hand, the sector is significantly hindered by operational inefficiencies, outdated infrastructure, and relatively low levels of technology adoption, all of which substantially impede its ability to compete with international counterparts. In this context, an analysis of the variables influencing customer satisfaction and institutional competitiveness is critically important. ([Prakash, 2019](#)) clearly identified service quality as a multifaceted concept, encompassing service reliability, timeliness, employee competence, and the overall effectiveness of addressing customer needs. Furthermore, high-quality services consistently lead to enhanced customer satisfaction and, over time, gradually enable banks to establish trusted business relationships. To provide effective services, Iraqi banks must steadfastly focus on delivering value by swiftly addressing customer issues,

maintaining clear communication, and strategically adopting strategies that closely align with evolving customer preferences. An additional critical independent variable in this study is the availability and accessibility of banking services, both physical and digital. This broadly encompasses the branch network of individual banks, the carefully selected locations of Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), web-based banking, and mobile banking services. In countries like Iraq, where physical infrastructure is severely lacking and internet penetration is unevenly distributed at the micro level, facilitating easy access necessitates strategic investments in both technology and infrastructure. Public access to banking services not only attracts more clients but also improves the accessibility of financial services for existing customers (Clauss et al., 2021). This has direct implications for customers, as many prefer engaging with financial institutions that offer quick and easy transactions. Thus, accessibility serves as a mediator, delivering tangible competitive advantages to customers by enhancing both service quality and accessibility. According to Mahadin and Akroush (2019), effectively promoting selected banking services can increase customer satisfaction, which, in turn, boosts positive word-of-mouth communication. Satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal, thereby reducing customer turnover and positively impacting the bank's revenue stability. In the context of Iraq, where historical trust issues and the economic crisis may influence customers' trust levels in both specific banks and financial institutions in general, customer satisfaction is not only a key business practice but also the essential course of action (Otto et al., 2020).

The impact of customer satisfaction on bank competitiveness is influenced by the level of awareness of dominant banking institutions in the market. Awareness initiatives, including strategically designed public campaigns, fully transparent operations, and highly effective communication, are critically crucial for significantly improving the value delivery of a bank. As highlighted by Staupoulou et al. (2023) when customers are properly educated about a bank's ethical practices, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and customer-oriented policies, it positively encourages interactions and greatly enhances the bank's competitive stance. In relation to this research, the competitiveness of Iraqi banks refers to their capacity to successfully attract and retain clients, securely guarantee financial sustainability, and effectively compete on both local and international levels. Competitiveness is not exclusively limited to market share and profits; it also involves actively pursuing innovation, consistently achieving operational efficiency, and accurately offering services that closely match customer preferences (Salunke et al., 2019). For Iraqi banks, competitiveness is a remarkably complex idea that can only be truly realized through consistently high-quality service delivery, broadly accessible banking, notably strong customer satisfaction, and deeply rooted institutional awareness.

This paper insightfully explores contributing to the highly desirable improvement of banking operations, the strengthening of customer trust, and the development of a sustainable competitive advantage for Iraqi banks in a competitive environment. Additionally, it addresses a gap in the existing literature by examining how service quality, service accessibility, and customer satisfaction interact within the context of Iraqi banking. While prior research has explored these variables across various industries and organizational settings, limited attention has been given to the Iraqi context, particularly within its financial services sector. By thoughtfully incorporating institutional awareness as a moderating variable, this study successfully provides a more nuanced perspective on how customer perceptions directly influence the competitiveness of banking institutions. The next section of this study will systematically present a comprehensive literature review, clearly outlining the key concepts and extensively discussing previous research relevant to the study. It will also carefully include the proposed hypotheses and meticulously provide a detailed research methodology to effectively guide the investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Banking services undoubtedly play a pivotal role in enhancing the competitiveness of banks in Iraq, with service quality serving as a fundamentally key factor. Delivering high-quality services effectively reduces customer dissatisfaction by consistently meeting or exceeding expectations, thereby significantly fostering customer loyalty. As [Sreejesh \(2024\)](#) rightly notes, customers' perceptions of service quality in competitive banking are strongly influenced by reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Reliability, in particular, substantially helps build trust, encouragingly driving repeat transactions and recommendations ([Gupta et al., 2023](#)). By proactively reducing errors, efficiently shortening transaction times, and thoughtfully offering tailored solutions, banks can successfully attract new customers while effectively retaining existing ones, which is crucially essential for long-term success. Moreover, the strategic enhancement of banking services notably strengthens the credibility of institutions. Lenders gain customer trust when their operations are widely perceived as professional and entirely free from corruption. This trust significantly reduces the likelihood of customers seeking services from competing providers, thus effectively making the bank's customer base less vulnerable to competitors. Research in similar markets, such as that by [Ozbekler and Ozturkoglu \(2020\)](#), has demonstrated a strong link between service quality and customer satisfaction, which in turn defines competitiveness. For Iraqi banks, offering superior services helps distinguish them from informal financial services and emerging competitors. By attracting more customers through high-quality services, banks can solidify their position, improve various aspects of the sector, and enhance their reputation, transforming challenges into opportunities. Therefore, we propose that,

H1: *Quality of banking services has a positive impact on competitiveness of Iraqi banks.*

The ease of access to banking services positively impacts the competitiveness of Iraqi banks by enhancing customers' ability to efficiently use available services, fostering customer satisfaction and loyalty. As [Bankuoru Egala et al. \(2021\)](#) note, banks that offer both physical and electronic interfaces create a more convenient environment for customers. Factors such as extended working hours, widespread branch networks, and accessible ATMs improve physical accessibility and expedite transactions. In Iraq, access remains a critical factor in customers' ability to open financial accounts, with mobile and online banking playing a crucial role in reducing time and costs, particularly for those in rural or conflict-affected areas ([Sharma & Sharma, 2019](#)). By implementing such solutions, banks can attract more customers, expand their market share, and strengthen their competitive advantage ([Łóska & Uotila, 2024](#)). Easy and customer-friendly banking services address diverse customer demands, fostering customer confidence and long-term loyalty. According to [Oladapo et al. \(2022\)](#), this adaptability strengthens customer relationships, while banks failing to meet these expectations risk losing clients to competitors offering more convenient services. Research by [Wilkins et al. \(2023\)](#) highlights that availability is a key driver of customer loyalty, influencing perceptions of convenience and reliability. For Iraqi banks, focusing on ease of access and customer satisfaction enhances competitiveness, positioning them as responsive and innovative institutions. Therefore, we propose that,

H2: *Ease to access of banking services has a positive impact on competitiveness of Iraqi banks.*

Satisfaction serves as a crucial link between the quality of banking services and the competitiveness of Iraqi commercial banks. According to [Pooya et al. \(2020\)](#), customers are more likely to experience satisfaction when banks provide services that are easily understood and efficiently delivered. Examples of such satisfaction include accurate and convenient transactions, excellent customer service, and tailored services. As customers perceive greater value and trust in a bank, their emotional attachment deepens, as illustrated by [Mainardes and Freitas \(2023\)](#). Satisfaction fosters customer loyalty, which in turn becomes a significant source of competitiveness for banks. Loyal customers are less likely to switch to competitors, as satisfied customers tend to demonstrate repeat patronage behaviour. Furthermore, [Yasin et al. \(2020\)](#) note that satisfied customers often share their experiences with others, thereby enhancing the bank's reputation. In a competitive and increasingly challenging market, particularly in countries like Iraq recovering from past instability, word-of-mouth marketing can significantly improve a bank's market position. Moreover, customer satisfaction influences perceptions of key factors such as reliability and trust. When satisfaction is high, consumers provide feedback that the bank has delivered valuable services, encouraging others to patronise the bank. In markets such as Iraq, where customer

loyalty is closely tied to service quality, satisfaction directly correlates with a more tangible competitive advantage. Satisfied customers can thus be viewed as a mediator between service quality and competitiveness, playing a crucial role in defining long-term success and fostering growth in the banking sector. Based on this, we hypothesise that,

H3: *Customer satisfaction mediates the relation between quality of banking services and competitiveness of Iraqi banks.*

Customer satisfaction acts as a crucial mediator through which the convenience of accessing banking services influences the competitiveness of Iraqi banks. According to [Al Shraah et al. \(2022\)](#), easy access to banking services facilitates customer tasks, with factors such as online banking interfaces, extended hours, and well-positioned branches and ATMs contributing to customer satisfaction. As [Bankuoru Egala et al. \(2021\)](#) suggest, accessibility is a key determinant of satisfaction, where quick access to services fosters positive customer attitudes. Satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal, particularly in competitive environments, thus driving the bank's success ([Asnawi et al., 2020](#)). In Iraq, offering simple and convenient services, which remain scarce in many regions, can provide a significant competitive advantage. Customers who face fewer barriers to accessing banking services are more likely to build long-term trust with the bank. When customers are satisfied, they are more likely to recommend the bank to others, which enhances the bank's reputation and attracts new clients, thereby increasing its competitiveness. As customer satisfaction grows, the bank's position in the market strengthens, enabling it to not only retain existing customers but also attract new ones through positive word-of-mouth ([Mainardes & Freitas, 2023](#)). Consequently, satisfaction not only moderates but also amplifies the relationship between the ease of access to services and the bank's competitiveness. The more accessible the services, the higher the satisfaction, leading to greater competitiveness in the market. Therefore, we propose that,

H4: *Customer satisfaction mediates the relation between ease to access of banking services and competitiveness of Iraqi banks.*

Institutional awareness moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and the competitiveness of Iraqi banks. As [Fauzi and Suryani \(2019\)](#) note, Clearly, a better understanding of the available services and the policies of the bank in respect of legal compliances instils greater trust and confidence in its customers. The ability of a higher degree of awareness to improve perceived reliability and credibility adds strength to the relationship between customer satisfaction and competitive advantage. In Iraq, where the banking industry has faced challenges such as political instability and economic fluctuations, institutional awareness becomes particularly important. When customers perceive security, transparency, and obedience to the law, they can then feel their bank

relationships are secure, thus giving them a higher level of satisfaction. (Azeem et al., 2021). There will be more loyalty amongst a well-informed customer base, which will enhance the competitive advantage of the bank in a marketplace. Moreover, it also facilitates the bank to establish differentiation because the customers with sufficient information will consider these institutions as reliable and credible. (Del Sarto et al., 2024). In the context of the Iraqi market, where customer attitudes are influenced by environmental conditions, institutional awareness acts as a mediator, ensuring that higher satisfaction leads to increased customer loyalty and market dominance. Therefore, we propose that,

H5: *Institutional awareness moderates the relation between customer satisfaction and competitiveness of Iraqi banks.*

METHODS AND MATERIAL

This paper tries to study the effect that banking service quality and its access have on the competitiveness of financial institutions; the same is done by studying the intermediary part played by customer satisfaction in the latter three variables of service quality, accessibility, and competitiveness. Additionally, the research has assessed how institutional awareness might work as a moderator in the relation between customer satisfaction and the competitiveness of Iraqi banking institutions. This quantitative study will measure primary data through survey questionnaires. Questionnaires were designed based on previous literature: five questions about service quality proposed by (Rahaman et al., 2020), five questions about ease of access adapted from (Prastiawan et al., 2021), eight questions on customer satisfaction based on (Nguyen et al., 2020), four questions on institutional awareness founded by (Yang et al., 2021), and four questions about competitiveness adapted from (Schaefer et al., 2021). The study was based on primary data obtained through banking clients, who were respondents or units of analysis.

The participants in this study were chosen employing a simple random sampling method. Surveys were administered via personal visits to various banking institutions, culminating in the distribution of 601 surveys at the outset. Following a period of 15 days, 357 valid responses were collected, yielding a response rate of 59.40%. For the purpose of data analysis, the research utilized Smart-PLS, a principal tool recognized for its efficiency in managing extensive datasets and delivering precise outcomes (Hair Jr et al., 2020). It contained two separate independent variables, QBS that stands for quality of banking services and EABS standing for ease of access to banking services. Where, CS was the mediating construct, IA was a moderating variable, and competitiveness came under the predictive construct shown in Figure 1.

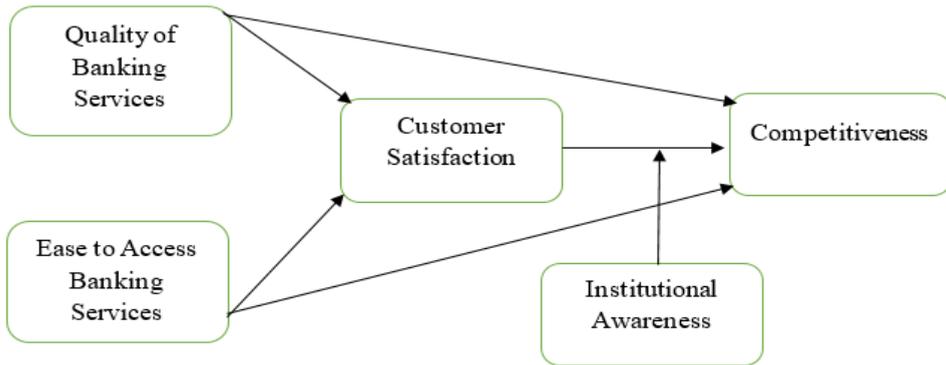


Figure 1: Theoretical Model

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Before testing the structure model, it is befitting to establish whether the measurement model, as indicated in [Figure 1](#), is valid. Hence, this research has focused on the relationships between the items, which are essential in the analysis. In establishing the relationships of the items otherwise known as the convergent validity, this research has relied on the Composite Reliability test and Cronbach's Alpha test where the results were above 0.70. For construct validation, the AVE assessment as well as the assessment of factor loading were used. The values which both yielded exceeded the threshold 0.50, hence reflecting good internal correlation among items. Data is shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1: Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Competitiveness	CM1	0.732	0.794	0.866	0.619
	CM2	0.751			
	CM3	0.833			
	CM4	0.825			
Customer Satisfaction	CS1	0.853	0.905	0.923	0.601
	CS2	0.802			
	CS3	0.771			
	CS4	0.681			
	CS5	0.795			
	CS6	0.794			
	CS7	0.741			
	CS8	0.751			
Ease to Access Banking Services	EABS1	0.834	0.934	0.950	0.792
	EABS2	0.946			
	EABS3	0.919			
	EABS4	0.870			
	EABS5	0.875			
Institutional Awareness	IA1	0.810	0.864	0.907	0.710

	IA2	0.850			
	IA3	0.818			
	IA4	0.890			
Quality of Banking Services	QBS1	0.808	0.901	0.927	0.718
	QBS2	0.881			
	QBS3	0.857			
	QBS4	0.885			
	QBS5	0.802			

Figure 2 shows the result of the measurement model evaluation. The validation of this measurement model forms a premise to the validation of the structural model. Therefore, this study has further investigated the relationships that exist among the variables; this is an important step within the analytical procedure. This research has used the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio as a way of testing the discriminant validity, especially about the relationship among the variables. The findings indicated that the relationship between the variables is weak. This is depicted in the values that are all less than 0.90. These results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: HTMT Ratio

	CM	CS	EABS	IA	QBS
CM					
CS	0.761				
EABS	0.642	0.557			
IA	0.648	0.458	0.577		
QBS	0.761	0.658	0.518	0.537	

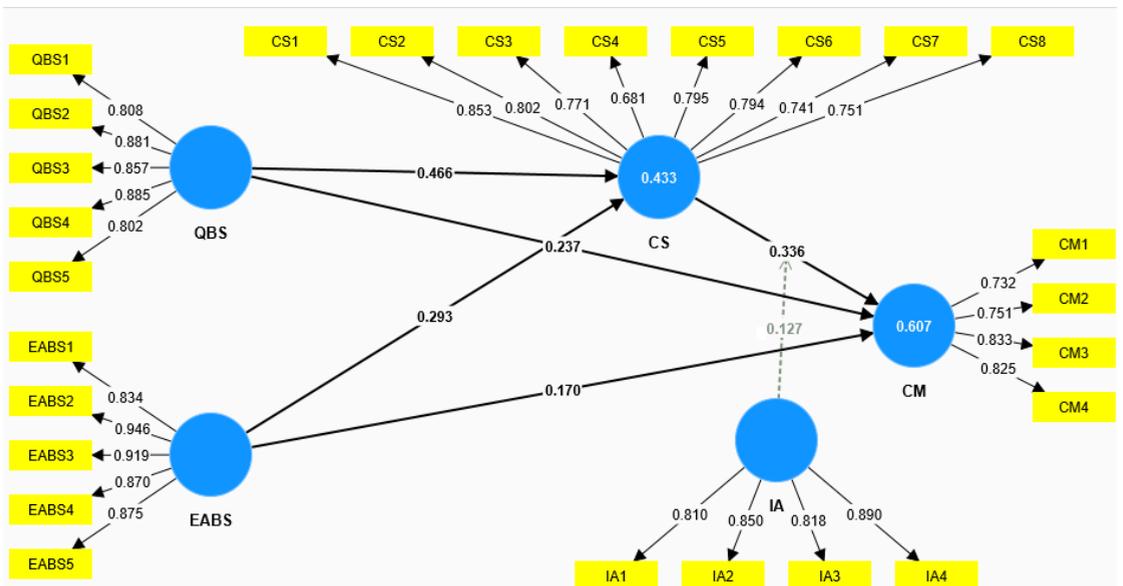


Figure 2: Measurement Model Assessment

Moreover, the result of direct path analysis supported H1 and H2 because quality of banking services and its availability positively influenced the competitiveness. In the same way, customer satisfaction increases the quality and availability of the financial services that have the positive impact on the competitiveness. The Table 3 presents these findings and structural model assessment reported in Figure 3.

Table 3: Direct Path Analysis

Relationships	Beta	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
CS -> CM	0.336	0.048	6.972	0.000
EABS -> CM	0.170	0.046	3.731	0.000
EABS -> CS	0.293	0.050	5.843	0.000
IA -> CM	0.199	0.045	4.453	0.000
QBS -> CM	0.237	0.056	4.210	0.000
QBS -> CS	0.466	0.047	9.820	0.000

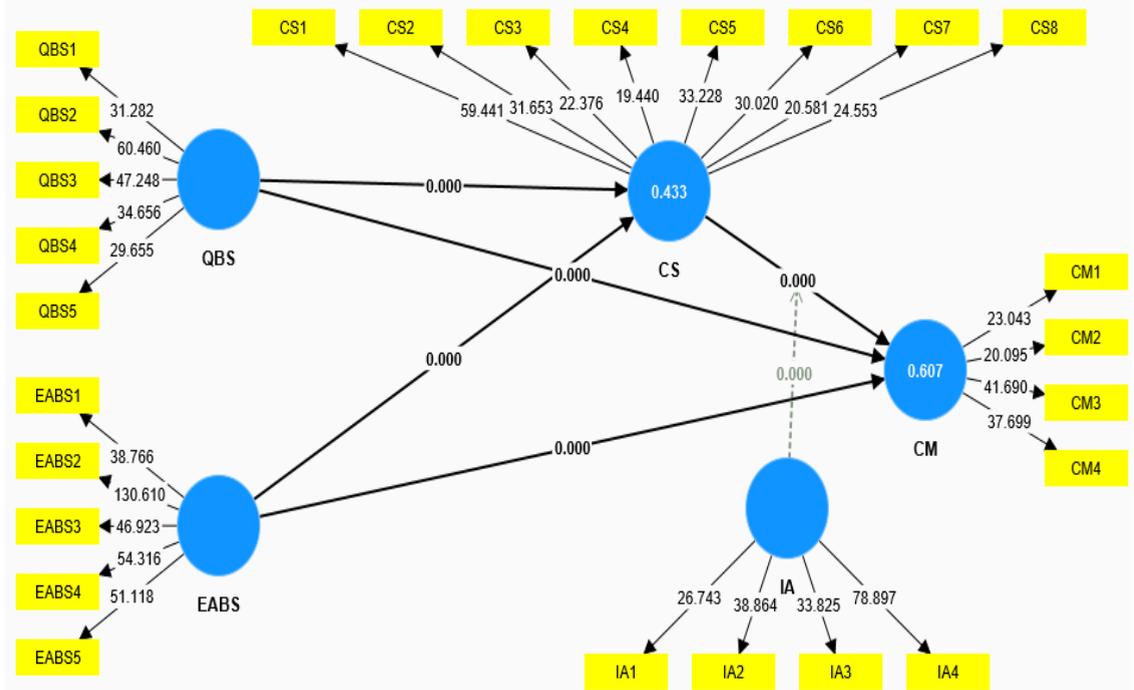


Figure 3: Structural Model Assessment

The findings wedded with the ancillary path analyses gave a hand to H3 and H4 by markedly indicating that customer satisfaction strongly mediates the association among banking service quality, accessibility, and competitiveness. Nonetheless, the data had remarkably reinforced H5 by showing that institutional awareness substantially moderates the relation among competitiveness and consumer satisfaction. Table 4 illustrates such results, providing key data on how such factors interact dynamically to shape overall competitiveness.

Table 4: Indirect Path Analysis

Relationships	Beta	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
EABS -> CS -> CM	0.099	0.020	5.021	0.000
QBS -> CS -> CM	0.157	0.030	5.200	0.000
IA x CS -> CM	0.127	0.029	4.378	0.000

DISCUSSION

This present study has clearly identified the quality and accessibility of banking services to firmly stand as the most imperative determinant that significantly affects the competitive capacity of Iraqi banks. Besides, it strategically positions the aspect of customer satisfaction in such respect as a mediating influence, while institutional awareness was among the notably enhancing moderators for competitiveness. The study is also remarkably timely because Iraq has embarked on rebuilding its financial sector; hence, this study will substantially add to the literature on how banks can effectively use customer orientation and institutional trust to obtain a competitive advantage. The empirical literature on the quality of banking services and customer satisfaction has been quite extensively voluminous. The authors, [Ahmad et al. \(2019\)](#), insightfully unraveled reliability, empathy, and responsiveness as the basic dimensions that would ultimately help create a distinctive service environment. It is evidently clear that improvement in service quality has successfully helped restore customer confidence in Iraq's context, and that confidence is something critically important in an environment plagued by operational inefficiencies and political disturbances. Stable transactions and transparent information policies are especially crucial in attracting new customers and consistently maintaining a competitive advantage, aligning with findings that strongly demonstrate a positive correlation between service quality and long-term development ([Li et al., 2022](#)).

Another factor significantly affecting the satisfaction of customers is the access to banking facilities. As [Baabdullah et al. \(2019\)](#) have clearly mentioned, customers' convenience will be greatly enhanced once banking facilities are more accessible and readily available. Since in Iraq the banking industry is still in its development stage, improvements in this respect, such as an extensively expanded ATM network and substantially extended hours of banking, can be strategically utilized to offset some of the barriers to service utilization. Improvements in this respect would be notably more effective in successfully meeting customers' needs since convenience is often one of the most critically deciding factors for customers when they ultimately choose a bank. The customers, in turn, whose access to bank services is faced with fewer obstacles, are more likely to consistently develop loyalty, which is what significantly strengthens the bank's position in the market. Customer satisfaction significantly and critically moderates the relationship that strongly connects service quality, access, and

competitiveness. Indeed, the findings clearly reveal that such satisfied customers greatly increase bank success through recommendations, repeated purchases, and loyalty. Satisfaction, on its part, has a highly significant relationship with perceived value, which is crucially important to any organizational outcome, posits [Ariyanto et al. \(2020\)](#). In the Iraqi environment, customer satisfaction is particularly sensitive since most people generally create an overall negative perception about the sector. On the contrary, the loyalty of customers would substantially increase their satisfaction; they will confidently trust the brand, ultimately enabling the bank to create competitive advantages in various domestic and global markets. The above framework has been notably enriched by ([Ariyanto et al., 2020](#)) by thoughtfully adding institutional awareness as a moderating variable. Institutional awareness relates to the understanding carefully developed among customers about the banks' knowledge of banking policies, regulatory measures, and stability of the institution that effectively helps inspire confidence. As [Esmaeili et al. \(2021\)](#) confirm, well-informed customers are considerably easier to handle, especially in turbulent regional markets. Although the legal standards and industry formalities are still at a relatively developing stage in Iraq, those banks that diligently follow through with compliance initiatives and consistently communicate financial stability successfully develop better relations with their customers. This moderation effect suggests that greater institutional knowledge further significantly strengthens the positive relationship between customer satisfaction and competitiveness, indicating the increasingly important role of effectively designed communication strategies and policies in successfully building trust that will lead to competitive advantages.

This integrates the variables into a systematically designed approach toward effectively improving Iraqi banks' competitive advantage. There are clearly established links between service quality, satisfaction, and competitiveness, as frequently reiterated from the works of [Donbesuur et al. \(2020\)](#), to which this study appropriately applies to the post-conflict, unstable Iraqi context. Thus, the banks must steadily advance their standards of service and significantly better their access, while consistently ensuring more institutional openness if competitiveness is to be realized. Practically, this means actively pursuing digital transformation, diligently investing in workforce development, and creatively implementing customer-centric innovation. The government can further help through proactively developing an enabling regulatory environment and effectively engendering public confidence in banking institutions. ([Mazzucato et al., 2020](#))

CONCLUSION

The present research thoroughly gives valuable insight into determining factors of competitiveness of the Iraqi banking industry, carefully considering the link of service quality, access convenience, customer satisfaction, and, finally, competitiveness. It clearly underlined the customer-oriented strategy, especially in particularly unfavorable

conditions of the macroeconomic environment and increasingly growing pressures from regulatory authorities. While as an institutional moderator, it goes further to explicitly detail how this relationship is strongly influenced by things like transparency and strict adherence to regulatory requirements that thereby significantly improve the quality of this relationship with competitiveness. The current research has consistently highlighted service quality, availability, and bank credibility as the very significant ones in effectively generating customer loyalty and market positioning. It also thoughtfully puts these findings into the broader context of Iraqi rebuilding and clearly points out how local solutions can be combined with the current trend of banking today. Of course, there are several limitations of this study, among which are geographical focus, small businesses in Beijing, and the lack of historical data that could help meaningfully conduct comparisons. This study creates, however, a remarkably sound foundation for the work of policymakers and practitioners seriously interested in improving competitiveness through customer satisfaction-generating initiatives.

IMPLICATIONS

Consequently, it implies that this research study has several implications for leaders and policymakers in Iraqi banking. Most definitely, the respective banking institutions should completely try to develop the level of service quality and accessibility for attaining higher extents of customer satisfaction. This can be achieved through more investment in digital banking tools, personnel training, branch networks, and improvements in web portals. There is, however, a felt urgent need to develop institutional transparency through communication and demonstration of compliance with rule of law, financial stability, and stability of services in creating customers' confidence. For that, the policy makers must ensure legal stability in the domain of financial services while motivating investment in backward areas. Thus, the paper concludes by paying attention to customer satisfaction and institutional transparency, raising customer loyalty and competitiveness of Iraqi banks for a final stabilizing of the Iraqi financial system.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations There are several limitations that should be considered for this study. First, the banking sector of Iraq has been the focus, so that the results will hardly be applicable to the countries that have a different banking environment. Recommendation for Iraq may not be appropriate for other countries that do not face similar challenges that come in the aftermath of some sort of conflict-like situation: political instability and poor infrastructure. The index applied concerning the concentration of service's quality and approachability is based on customers' perception and thus might bring distortion and subjectivity. Cross-sectional nature of the research design prohibits any attempt of the analysis of casual relationship because data were collected at one point in time. Lastly,

the study does not explore how emerging technologies, such as fintech, might influence the competitiveness of banking in the future.

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