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Tehlaya Ramadania

Ramadan Gathering Program

Bringing Professionals
Together in the Spirit
of Ramadan



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Introduction

Tahlaya Ramdania is a unique Ramadan gathering that fosters entrepreneurship, innovation, and professional growth. It provides an engaging platform for businesses, creatives, and industry leaders to connect, collaborate, and expand their impact. By bringing together entrepreneurs, designers, programmers, marketers, and educators, Tahlaya facilitates skill development, knowledge exchange, and strategic networking. With its growing influence, Tahlaya has become a key space for businesses to connect with a dynamic audience, making it an ideal platform for sponsors to enhance their brand visibility, engage with potential customers, and position themselves at the heart of Iraq's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Program Objectives

Tehlaya was designed to:

- **Empower entrepreneurs** by providing them with knowledge, skills, and networking opportunities.
- **Bridge the gap between businesses and professionals** through interactive discussions and industry insights.
- **Support local startups** by offering a platform to showcase their products and expand their market reach.
- **Encourage innovation and knowledge exchange** in fields such as marketing, digital transformation, and business development.

Target Audience

The program focused on engaging:

- **Aspiring and established entrepreneurs** looking to enhance their skills and grow their businesses.
- **Startup founders** seeking market exposure and networking opportunities.
- **Professionals from various sectors** interested in expanding their knowledge in marketing, branding, and digital transformation.
- **Investors and private sector representatives** exploring new partnerships and business opportunities.

Methodologies

To ensure a high-impact and engaging experience, Tahlaya 2025 adopted:

- **Expert-led discussion panels** featuring industry leaders sharing insights and real-world experiences.
- **An interactive product fair** allowing startups to showcase their products and engage directly with potential customers.
- **Networking sessions** to facilitate connections between businesses, professionals, and investors.
- **Social media and digital outreach** to maximize visibility and engagement for all participants.

Strategic Partners and Sponsors

Tehlaya program was made possible by the support of key sponsors and partners who played a vital role in enhancing the program's impact and outreach. Our esteemed sponsors included:

Strategic Partners



Sponsors



Hosted Panel Contributors

		 Co-funded by the European Union	 التعاون الألماني DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT Implemented by giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH			
						
						
						
						
						

Product Fair Participants



Expert Dialogues: Insights from Tehlaya's Discussion Panels

The Tehlaya Ramadania 2025 agenda features nine engaging discussion panels designed to empower eight key communities in Iraq: marketers, agribusiness and food entrepreneurs, programmers, educators, female professionals, English professionals and Interior Design. Each panel, held after iftar, provided valuable insights, networking opportunities, and skill building tailored to these dynamic sectors. Additionally, every thusday and friday hosted a product fair, offering sponsors and startups from our incubator a platform to showcase their products and services, fostering collaboration and market exposure within Iraq's growing entrepreneurial ecosystem.

1. Building Your Brand: The Art of Marketing Your Business

This discussion panel brought together leading experts in marketing, advertising, and branding to explore market trends, branding strategies, and the evolving role of digital marketing in Iraq. The session featured industry leaders sharing their insights on how businesses can stand out in a competitive landscape and effectively engage with their audience.





Haider Akab

Managing Director of Moonlight Marketing and Advertising Company

Moderator:

Based on your extensive experience in corporate communications and marketing, what are the most significant transformations you've observed in the Iraqi market over the past few years, and how have they impacted brand management?

Haider Akab:

The Iraqi market has undergone major shifts, especially with the rise of digital platforms and increased competition. Previously, branding was mainly a secondary concern, but today, businesses recognize the importance of building a strong and consistent brand identity. Companies are investing more in customer engagement and storytelling to create an emotional connection with their audience. However, there is still a gap in fully integrating brand strategies with long-term business objectives.

Moderator:

You work with one of the largest companies in Iraq. In your opinion, what is the real role of corporate communications in building brand trust and increasing customer loyalty?

Haider Akab:

Corporate communications play a crucial role in shaping public perception. Effective communication fosters trust and transparency, which are key to brand loyalty. Brands that engage openly with their customers, address their concerns, and maintain a consistent message tend to have stronger customer retention. It's not just about marketing; it's about creating a meaningful relationship between the brand and its consumers.

Moderator:

Digital marketing is essential for any business today. Do you think large companies in Iraq are leveraging digital marketing effectively, or is there still room for improvement?

Haider Akab:

While some companies have successfully adapted to digital marketing, many still struggle with maximizing its potential. There is a reliance on traditional marketing methods, and while digital strategies are implemented, they are not always optimized for engagement and conversion. The key challenge is not just running online campaigns but understanding audience behavior and utilizing data analytics to refine marketing efforts. The key challenge is not just running online campaigns but understanding audience behavior and utilizing data analytics to refine marketing efforts.

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Moderator:

Many companies seek marketing consultants to help shape their strategies. In your opinion, what qualities make a successful marketing consultant, and how can they add real value?

Haider Akab:

A good marketing consultant must have deep industry knowledge, analytical skills, and the ability to understand consumer psychology. Their role is to provide data-driven insights, create innovative strategies, and guide companies in adapting to market changes. Most importantly, they should focus on measurable outcomes rather than just presenting theoretical strategies.

Moderator:

After years of experience with Zain Iraq and holding a leadership position, what motivated you to take the risk of starting your own business instead of continuing in a stable corporate career?

Haider Akab:

The decision was driven by my passion for building something of my own and making a direct impact in the industry. While working in a large corporation offers security, entrepreneurship provides the opportunity for greater creativity and innovation. The Iraqi market is evolving, and I wanted to be at the forefront of that transformation.





Ali Riyadh

Founding Partner of Quick Sell Advertising Agency

Moderator:

How do you see the state of advertising and marketing in Iraq today? What opportunities can new businesses in this field take advantage of?

Ali Riyadh:

The industry is growing rapidly, with an increasing number of businesses recognizing the value of advertising. New agencies have the opportunity to differentiate themselves by focusing on creativity, strategic planning, and digital marketing integration. Companies that understand their audience and create targeted campaigns will stand out.

Moderator:

There are many advertising agencies in the market. What differentiates one agency from another, and how can a company succeed in this competitive field?

Ali Riyadh:

The key differentiators are innovation, strategic execution, and the ability to deliver measurable results. Agencies that offer customized solutions based on thorough market research and data analytics will have a competitive edge. Additionally, building strong client relationships and maintaining a reputation for quality work is essential.

Moderator:

Do Iraqi companies and advertisers understand the importance of targeted advertising and well-planned strategies, or are they still relying on traditional methods?

Ali Riyadh:

While there is growing awareness, many businesses still rely on outdated advertising approaches. Some companies view marketing as just a promotional tool rather than a long-term investment in brand building. Educating businesses on the effectiveness of data-driven marketing strategies is crucial.

Moderator:

With the rise of digital marketing, do you think traditional advertising methods (TV, billboards, print) are still relevant? How can businesses integrate both effectively?

Ali Riyadh:

Traditional advertising still holds value, especially for mass awareness campaigns. However, the most effective strategy is a hybrid approach combining digital and traditional media to maximize reach and engagement. Businesses need to analyze their target audience and allocate their budget accordingly to ensure they are reaching the right consumers through the most effective channels.





Ibrahim Salim

CEO of Qafia Creative Agency

Moderator:

You specialize in building strong brands in Iraq. What are the main challenges companies face when trying to establish a successful brand?

Ibrahim Salim:

One of the biggest challenges is the misconception that branding is just about logos and visuals. In reality, branding is about storytelling, positioning, and customer experience. Many businesses fail to conduct market research or define their unique value proposition, which makes it difficult for them to stand out.

Moderator:

Is there a clear distinction between marketing and branding in Iraq, or do people still confuse the two? How can we raise awareness about their differences?

Ibrahim Salim:

There is still a lot of confusion. Many companies think that marketing and branding are the same, but they serve different purposes. Branding is about building a long-term identity, while marketing focuses on promoting and selling. Raising awareness through workshops and consulting can help businesses understand that strong branding supports successful marketing.

Moderator:

Many startups are emerging in Iraq. Do you think there is a real demand for branding experts, or are entrepreneurs still not fully aware of their importance?

Ibrahim Salim:

The demand is increasing, but awareness is still lacking. Some startups try to handle branding themselves without professional guidance, which often leads to weak brand positioning. As competition grows, businesses will realize the value of expert branding.

Moderator:

What are your top recommendations for entrepreneurs who want to build a strong brand and make a lasting impact in the Iraqi market?

Ibrahim Salim:

First, define your brand's core values and mission. Second, ensure consistency in your messaging and visuals. Third, engage with your audience genuinely and continuously evolve based on feedback. A strong brand is built over time through trust and authenticity.





Montader Mohammed

Co-founder of Dhalma
Creative Agency

Moderator:

How do you see the evolution of graphic design and motion graphics in Iraq? Do companies fully understand the importance of professional design?

Montader Mohammed:

The field has grown significantly in the past decade. Clients are becoming more aware of design quality, but some still see it as an optional extra rather than a business necessity. Professional design is crucial for brand identity and market positioning.

Moderator:

You have trained over 550 designers. What are the essential skills that designers need to succeed in today's market?

Montader Mohammed:

Technical skills are important, but communication, marketing knowledge, and adaptability are equally critical. Designers must stay updated with trends, understand consumer psychology, and build a strong portfolio to showcase their expertise.

Moderator:

The Iraqi audience's preferences are constantly changing, especially with social media. How can designers and creatives keep up with these shifts to remain relevant?

Montader Mohammed:

They must continuously research audience behavior, experiment with new styles, and stay active on digital platforms. Engagement with trends while maintaining originality is key to staying influential in the market.



2. Career or Entrepreneurship? Navigating the Right Path

This inclusive discussion panel explored career and entrepreneurship pathways for all individuals, including persons with disabilities. Industry experts, successful entrepreneurs with diverse abilities, and professionals shared their experiences navigating both traditional employment and business ownership, providing valuable insights for building an accessible and inclusive professional future.





Najma Khan

Women's Protection and Empowerment
Programme Officer - UNFPA

Moderator:

Based on your experience in women's empowerment, what cultural and social factors influence a woman's decision between employment and entrepreneurship?

Najma Khan:

Women face many of the same challenges as men, such as securing opportunities, having sufficient capital, and acquiring the necessary skills. However, they also encounter additional barriers, such as societal norms, safety concerns, and family responsibilities. The level of independence and autonomy a woman has significantly impacts her choices. In many cases, these factors shape whether she can pursue entrepreneurship or must opt for employment.

Moderator:

Do women require different skills than men to enter entrepreneurship? Why or why not?

Najma Khan:

Women don't need different skills, but they do require different support systems.

They need a supportive family, an understanding employer, and societal awareness of the barriers they face. Many women juggle multiple responsibilities before they even start their workday, taking care of children, managing household tasks, and more. We need allies, especially men, to recognize these challenges and advocate for policies that enable equal opportunities. For example, if we offer maternity leave, we should also push for paternity leave. If a mother takes a day off for a sick child, fathers should be expected to do the same. Gender equality in the workplace must be reflected in policies and cultural expectations.





Hanin Shahin

National Livelihood Officer
IOM

Moderator:

Do you see gaps in current policies and their implementation regarding the economic empowerment of women with disabilities? How can these gaps be addressed?

Hanin Shahin:

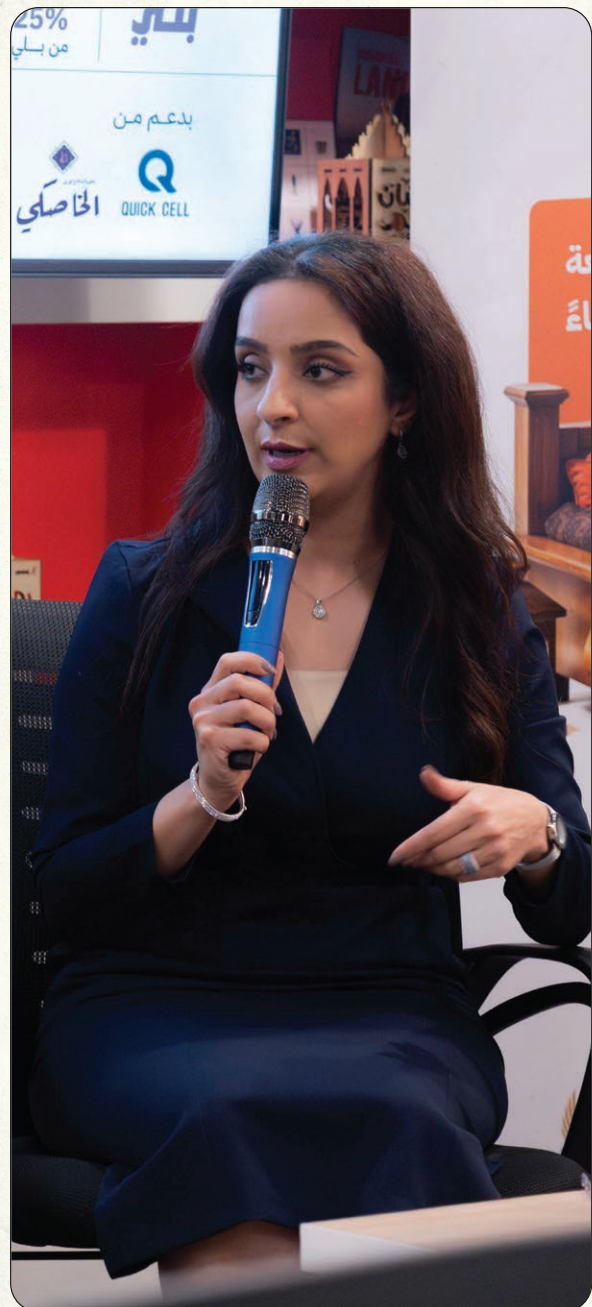
There isn't necessarily a gap in policies themselves, but there is a major gap in their implementation. According to Iraqi law, private sector companies are required to employ 1-3% of persons with disabilities, but enforcement is weak. Additionally, there is a lack of specialized training programs to prepare women with disabilities for employment and entrepreneurship. Beyond that, most workplaces are not physically accessible, lacking features such as elevators and adaptive infrastructure. Social stigma and discrimination also remain significant barriers.

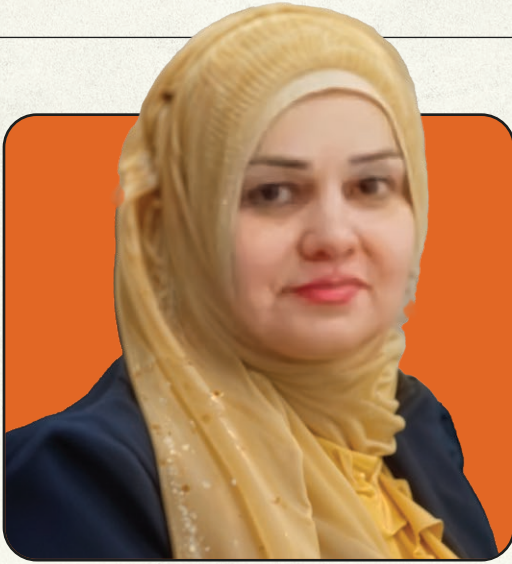
Moderator:

How can the private sector become more inclusive, not just in hiring persons with disabilities, but in ensuring their career growth and retention?

Hanin Shahin:

Collaboration between the private sector, public institutions, and educational organizations is essential. Currently, we lack data on what skills women with disabilities need to enter the workforce. There are no dedicated job platforms tailored for them, and few job fairs consider their specific requirements. By fostering cross-sector cooperation, we can create better employment pathways and training opportunities.





Alaa Haseeb Waheeb

Head of Department, Rafidain Bank
& Women with Disabilities Advocate

Moderator:

Do you believe financial literacy and investment awareness are bigger barriers to women's entrepreneurship than cultural and social factors?

Alaa Haseeb Waheeb:

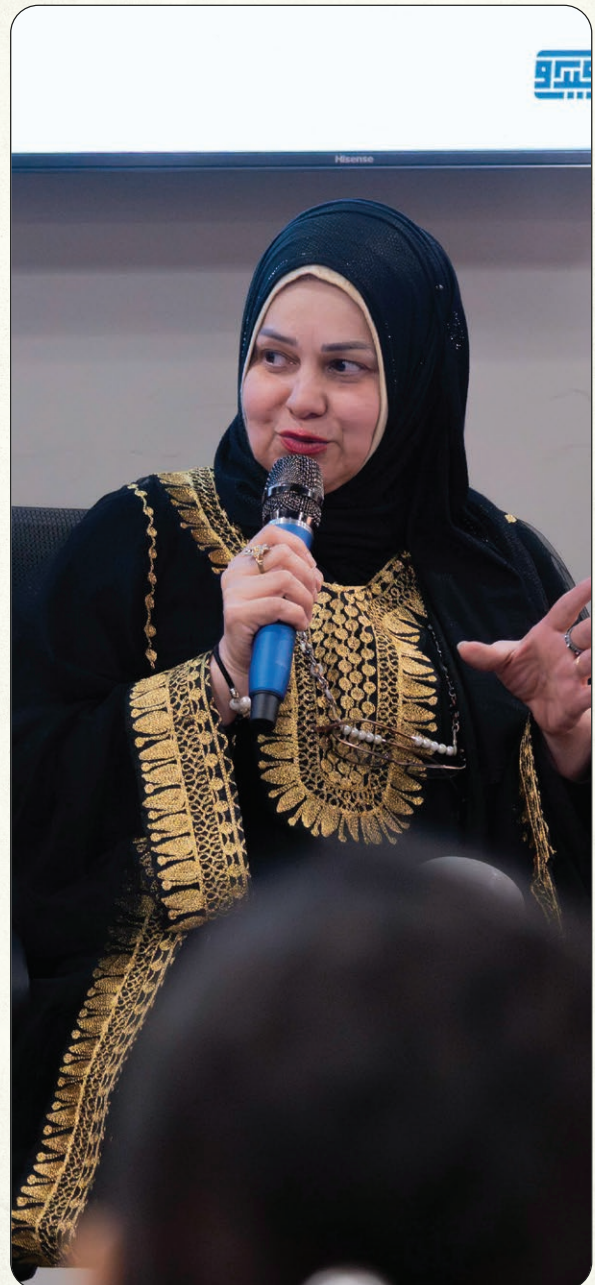
Financial literacy is crucial for both men and women, but it is particularly essential for women. Proper financial management directly impacts one's quality of life. It's not just about how much money you earn, but how you manage it. Many wealthy individuals go bankrupt due to poor financial decisions. If women start saving just 10% of their monthly income, it can be a stepping stone toward financial stability. Understanding investment strategies such as buying assets like real estate or gold rather than liabilities is key to long-term financial security.

Moderator:

From your experience in both traditional banking leadership and advocacy, how do you compare job security in employment versus the freedom of entrepreneurship for women with disabilities?

Alaa Haseeb Waheeb:

Many believe public sector jobs provide job security, but that's not always true. For women with disabilities, inclusive budgeting is critical. Iraq is part of an international agreement to support persons with disabilities, and for this to be effective, inclusive budgeting must be incorporated into financial planning. This means allocating resources to meet the specific needs of persons with disabilities within mainstream budgets, rather than treating them as an





Narjis Kanaan

Enterprise Development Coordinator
IOM

Moderator:

Through your work in enterprise development, what common skills have you observed in successful women in the private sector and those who transition successfully into entrepreneurship?

Narjis Kanaan:

The most common trait is a willingness to adapt and grow. Whether they are employees or entrepreneurs, successful women constantly seek improvement. They understand that staying stagnant means falling behind, as the market and business landscape are always evolving.

Moderator:

Are there particular life stages in post-conflict communities when private-sector employment is a better fit than entrepreneurship, or vice versa?

Narjis Kanaan:

It depends on individual circumstances, but after conflict, stable employment can provide much-needed financial security. However, as economic conditions improve, more women may shift toward entrepreneurship to gain greater autonomy and financial independence.

Moderator:

How can we build effective support networks for women entrepreneurs, whether through mentorship, partnerships, or market access?

Narjis Kanaan:

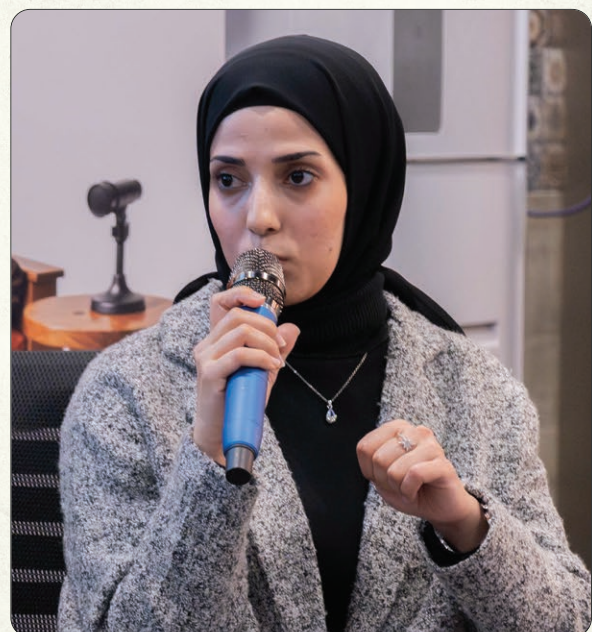
Strengthening partnerships between women's support organizations and startup incubators is key. Organizing business fairs that spotlight women-led ventures can significantly boost visibility and open up new opportunities. Additionally, creating mentorship programs where experienced businesswomen guide newcomers can foster long-term success.

Moderator:

What tools or programs can help enhance leadership and financial skills for women entrepreneurs, particularly in resource-limited environments?

Narjis Kanaan:

Capacity-building initiatives, financial literacy workshops, and accessible microfinance programs can help bridge these gaps. Providing targeted training and mentorship can empower women to overcome challenges and succeed in business.



3. Digital Transformation: Enhancing Digitization for Traditional Businesses in Iraq

This discussion panel explores the role of programming in supporting entrepreneurs by developing digital solutions and enhancing efficiency in startups. Discussions will cover how coding helps build products, optimize processes, and create innovative ideas that drive entrepreneurship and sustainable growth.





Asir Hassan Abu Alsoor

CEO, Fresh Fields & Founder, Alwa Al-Rasheed Platform

Moderator:

What challenges did you face in digitizing Iraq's food trade sector?

Asir Hassan Abu Alsoor:

Traditional markets rely heavily on personal negotiations and relationships. Setting fixed prices contradicts this practice, making digital adoption difficult. However, large businesses and restaurants increasingly demand direct sourcing, which has fueled the need for a structured platform.

Moderator:

How does digital transformation impact price stability and inflation in the Iraqi market?

Asir Hassan Abu Alsoor:

A digital platform reduces unnecessary steps in the supply chain, cutting waste, costs, and delays. It also enables better data analysis for pricing trends, helping stabilize market fluctuations.





Ahmed Baqir

Co-founder, Boxy & Board
Member, Arika

Moderator:

How does Boxy address Iraq's lack of a unified addressing system for deliveries?

Ahmed Baqir

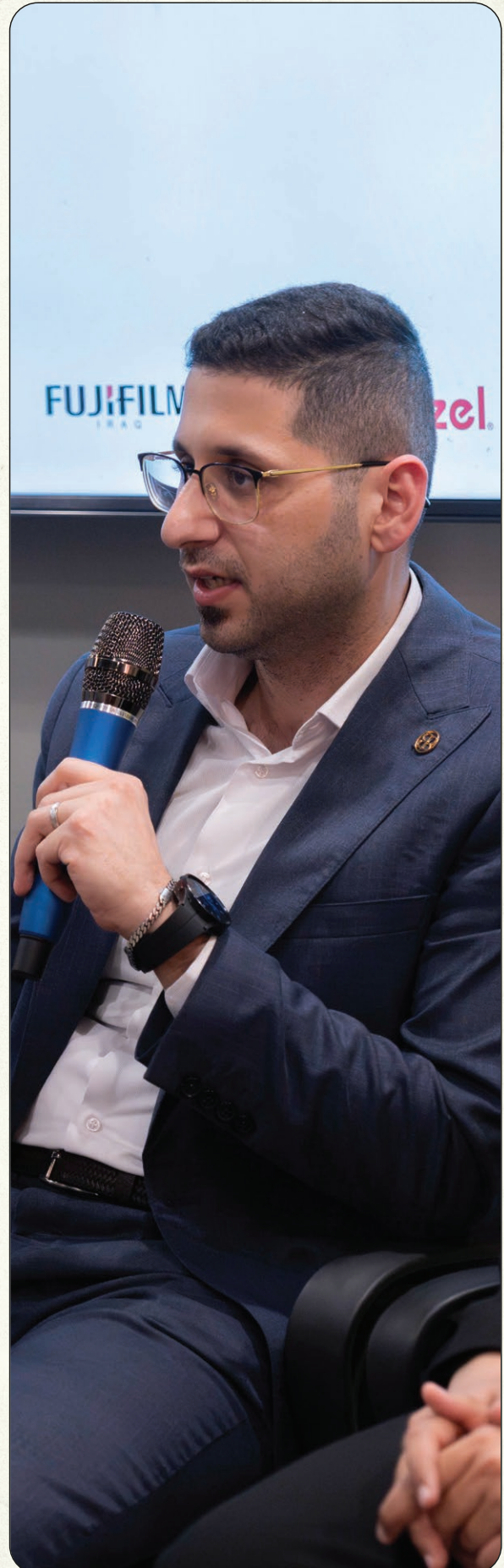
We initially faced competition from over 1,200 delivery companies offering the same service. Our solution integrates multiple providers to ensure faster deliveries while continuously refining our strategy.

Moderator:

How do you build trust with traditional traders who rely on personal interactions?

Ahmed Baqir:

Many traders prefer handwritten logs over digital records due to concerns about data manipulation. To ease the transition, we introduced hybrid models that mirror their paper records, helping them build confidence in digital tracking.





Noor Alhuda Jawad

Founder, Virtual Court
Platform

Moderator:

What inspired the creation of Virtual Court, and how does it modernize legal training?

Noor Alhuda Jawad:

The gap between legal education and real-world practice motivated me to launch this platform. Many fresh law graduates struggle with procedural knowledge, so we provide specialized training and online legal consultations.

Moderator:

How has technology been received in Iraq's legal sector?

Noor Alhuda Jawad:

Younger lawyers are more open to digital tools, while firms and older professionals remain hesitant. Over time, as digital services prove their efficiency, adoption is expected to increase.





Yousif Khalid

Co-founder, Faya Software Solutions

Moderator:

How can small businesses benefit from digital transformation without large investments?

Yousif Khalid:

Many business owners lack the knowledge to develop their own applications. We provide subscription-based solutions, making digital tools more accessible and affordable.

Moderator:

How do digital platforms enhance competitiveness in Iraq's market?

Yousif Khalid:

Most businesses are unaware of the digital solutions available to them. By understanding their operations, we help them optimize efficiency, track productivity, and make data-driven decisions for growth.

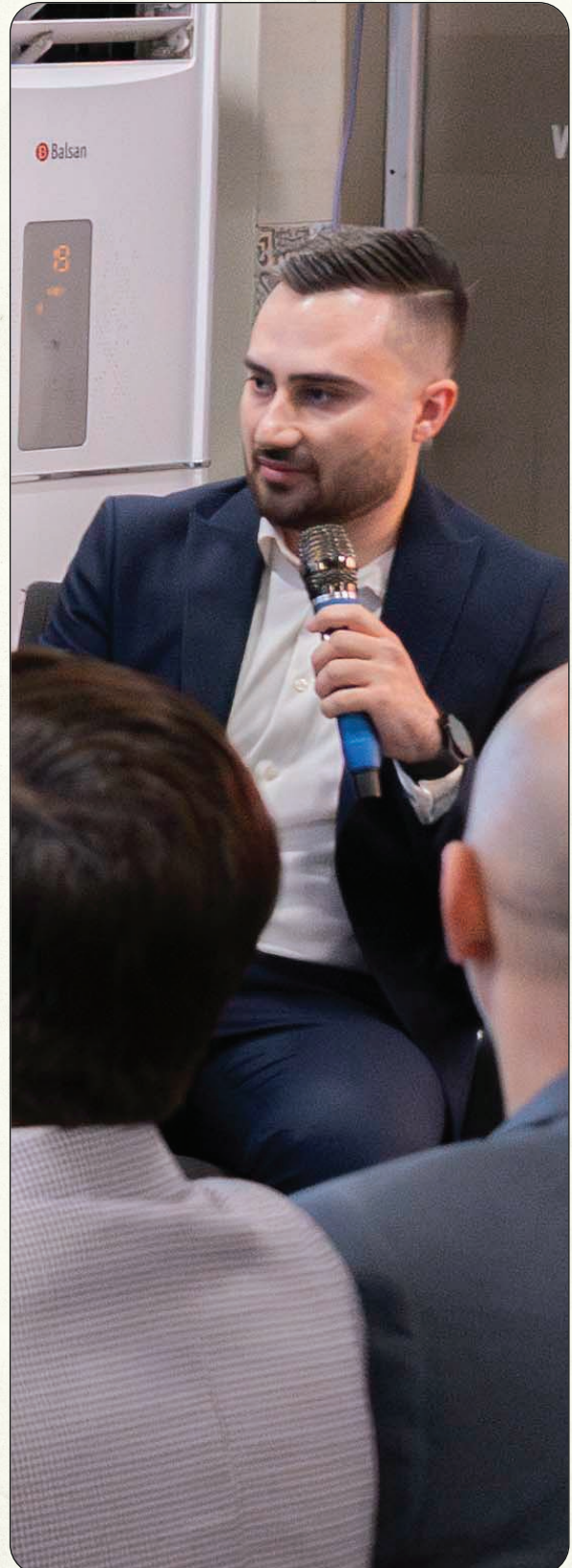
Moderator:

What is the future of e-commerce in Iraq, and what steps should entrepreneurs take?

Yousif Khalid:

E-commerce is growing, but awareness and trust are still developing.

Entrepreneurs should focus on user experience, secure payment methods, and building credibility through consistent service quality.





Dr. Saad Ahmed Diab

Digital Transformation Lead,
Ministry of Education

Moderator:

What are the Ministry's current plans to integrate technology into education, especially in areas with weak infrastructure?

Dr. Saad Ahmed Diab:

We are working on a digital platform that provides students with access to academic records, grades, and coursework. However, budget constraints often prioritize student services over digital transformation.

Moderator:

How is the Ministry addressing the digital divide between urban and rural schools?

Dr. Saad Ahmed Diab:

There is a gap between our digital transformation goals and existing legislation. Resistance to change from educational staff is also a challenge. Kurdistan is ahead in digital education, and we aim to implement similar initiatives nationwide.

Moderator:

What partnerships exist between the Ministry and the private sector to support digital education?

Dr. Saad Ahmed Diab:

Our primary collaborations are with UNESCO recommended international firms, but we hope to engage with local companies in the future. Platforms like Classera offer models we can adopt in Iraq.



4. The Power of Digital Educational Platforms

This discussion panel brought together businesses leading digital transformation in education, exploring the importance, effectiveness, and adoption of technology-driven learning. Experts discussed key opportunities and challenges, including the role of online learning platforms and how they are reshaping the education sector in Iraq.





Nizar Mohammed

Director of Information & Communication Center, Ministry of Education

Moderator:

How is the Ministry supporting digital transformation in education?

Nizar Mohammed:

Financial constraints limit our ability to fully support digital transformation, but we have initiated several projects. One key initiative is shifting student registration processes to a digital system. For private schools, we've developed an electronic system to track school, student, and teacher data. We also provide training for teachers to create interactive digital materials and have signed agreements with international organizations to advance digital education.

Moderator:

What are the Ministry's key digital education initiatives, and what impact have they had?

Nizar Mohammed:

The Educational TV Directorate broadcasts lessons 24/7, including literacy programs. We operate three online platforms for students and are working on standards for transitioning printed curricula into interactive digital formats. Additionally,

we are launching a project to integrate artificial intelligence into education and transform subjects like mathematics into interactive learning games.

Moderator:

How does the Ministry plan to keep pace with rapid technological advancements?

Nizar Mohammed:

We aim to collaborate with more local companies and implement global best practices. Kurdistan is already ahead in digital education, and we're looking at their model for inspiration.





Dr. Mustafa Khalid

Founder, Generations for Tech
Empowerment & CEO, Steamers

Moderator:

How do programming and robotics prepare students for a tech-driven job market?

Dr. Mustafa Khalid:

The idea of teaching children programming originated from collaborations like LEGO and MIT, which turned coding into a game. One challenge we face is resistance from parents who see coding as too complex for children. However, coding is an essential skill for the future.

Moderator:

What strategies do you use to integrate coding into traditional curricula?

Dr. Mustafa Khalid:

We use micro-learning techniques and intelligence tests to determine students' strengths and recommend suitable tech fields for them. This approach helps personalize learning experiences.





Mustafa Salam

Founder, Coursey
Platform

Moderator:

How has your platform improved students' learning experiences compared to traditional methods?

Mustafa Salam:

Education relies on five key elements: students, teachers, parents, infrastructure, and curricula. We identified gaps and used data analytics to address them. For example, we found that 78% of students re-watch lessons, and their average viewing time is 28 minutes for a 48-minute video. To enhance engagement, we introduced micro-learning, gamification, and storytelling techniques.

Moderator:

How do you personalize learning to accommodate different student needs?

Mustafa Salam:

Our platform assesses student interests and preferred learning methods - video lessons, games, quizzes—and tailors content accordingly. After completing lessons, students take tests to measure comprehension, ensuring adaptive learning paths. engagement, we introduced micro-learning, gamification, and storytelling techniques.

Moderator:

Is there collaboration between your platform and schools to align with official curricula?

Mustafa Salam:

Yes, we recently launched a feature called White Label, allowing teachers to create customized interactive environments within our platform. This will roll out in the next academic year.





Najah Anwar

CEO, Al-Manhaj
Platform

Moderator:

What differentiates Al-Manhaj from other educational platforms?

Najah Anwar:

Unlike purely digital platforms, Al-Manhaj combines online learning with in-person education. We offer live-streamed lectures, enabling remote students to attend classes virtually.

Moderator:

How do you leverage digital analytics to enhance learning?

Najah Anwar:

We track attendance and participation. If a student logs in more than 15 minutes late, they lose access to the lecture. Teachers also conduct pre-course assessments to group students by skill level. We provide parents with performance analytics, ensuring they stay involved in their child's education.

Moderator:

Given the prevalence of private tutoring, how can digital platforms serve as effective alternatives?

Najah Anwar

By offering structured, high-quality digital lessons, we can reduce the dependency on private tutors. Our goal is to make education more accessible and ensure students receive the necessary support through digital tools.



Key Insights & Future Considerations

- The Ministry plans to roll out new accredited digital platforms in September 2025 and welcomes proposals to enhance the curriculum.
- One of the biggest challenges for digital education platforms is poor internet infrastructure, which disrupts lesson streaming.
- Many graduates lack computer literacy skills; to address this, the Ministry is expanding IT and AI coursework. A new \$2 billion initiative will equip public schools with computer labs to support digital learning.

5. Image Makers: Photography and Media Production Secrets

This session brought together leading experts in photography and media production to share their experiences, discuss industry challenges, and explore opportunities for success. The panel covered the latest tools and techniques, essential skills for excelling in the field, and strategies for building a strong personal brand as a photographer.





Adnan Salah

Brand Representative, Fujifilm &
Director, Black Castle Studio

Moderator:

Outdoor photography is becoming more popular. How do you balance studio and outdoor photography while providing unique value to clients?

Adnan Salah:

Many people still associate studios with outdated photography styles. However, modern studios are categorized based on different photography types, providing a controlled environment that eliminates external factors affecting image quality.

Moderator:

As a representative of Fujifilm, how has modern technology impacted professional photography? Has it simplified or created new challenges for photographers?

Adnan Salah:

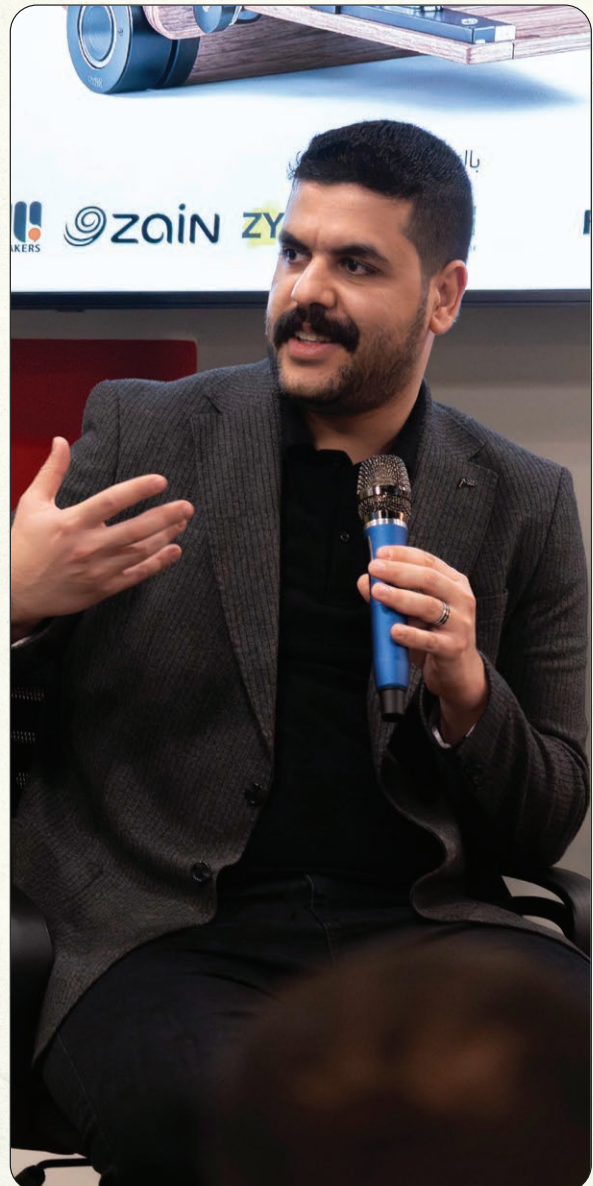
Camera manufacturers compete annually to introduce new features. While these advancements help photographers refine their skills, they also demand continuous learning. AI has significantly improved autofocus and image processing, making photography more efficient. However, technology does not replace a photographer's talent—it enhances it.

Moderator:

Social media is essential for photographers to showcase their work. What are your top tips for building a strong personal brand and attracting clients?

Adnan Salah:

There's a difference between personal branding and marketing. Many young photographers focus solely on financial gains rather than developing their artistic vision. To build a strong brand, photographers must establish a unique visual identity that distinguishes their work. Passion and creativity should drive photography, not just income.





Ghaith Saleh

Freelance Photographer
& Trainer

Moderator:

Artistic and commercial photography require different approaches. How can photographers succeed in both without losing their creative identity?

Ghaith Saleh:

It's easier to learn the commercial side of photography than to develop artistic skills. The key is integrating creativity into commercial projects. Starting with an artistic foundation before moving into business ensures authenticity.

Moderator:

As a freelance photographer, how do you build lasting client relationships without formal contracts?

Ghaith Saleh:

Maintaining client relationships is crucial. Unfortunately, independent photographers rarely operate under a company name clients remember the photographer, not the studio. Today, many freelancers offer high-quality services at competitive prices, making trust and creativity more important than ever. Clients appreciate photographers who think beyond their requests and offer innovative solutions.

Moderator:

What are the biggest challenges freelancers face compared to photographers working in companies? What advice do you have for overcoming these challenges?

Ghaith Saleh:

The biggest challenge is maintaining a steady income. Many freelancers struggle with financial planning, relying on seasonal work. Unlike company-employed photographers, freelancers don't have fixed hours or a guaranteed paycheck. Financial literacy is crucial photographers must manage their earnings wisely throughout the year.





Warith Kuwaish

Project Manager, Cinematheque Iraq
& Film Preservation Expert

Moderator:

You moved from Baghdad to Paris for cinematic projects and now lead Iraq's film archiving efforts. How does Iraq's film production environment compare to the global industry?

Warith Kuwaish:

Iraq's cinema industry is still recovering from decades of neglect. Many initiatives to revive it are individual efforts rather than institutional programs.

Moderator:

What are the essential steps for turning a script into a fully produced film?

Warith Kuwaish:

Photography heavily relies on technology, but true artistry comes from the photographer's vision. Today, entire films can be shot on smartphones, proving that technical skills matter more than equipment. The biggest challenge in Iraq is a lack of imaginative storytelling. My advice to aspiring filmmakers is to think deeply before diving into the field.

Moderator:

The Iraqi film archive project is a crucial cultural preservation effort.

What challenges have you faced, and what lessons have you learned?

Warith Kuwaish:

Cinematheque Iraq is the first film archive initiative in decades. We have over 40,000 film reels, some so old that handling them poses health risks. Our archive includes a 45-minute film documenting King Faisal I's coronation, dating back to the 1940s. Additionally, we house over half a million photographs. Due to financial constraints, we can only restore select films. We are training five Iraqi specialists in archiving, both locally and in France, with government support.

Moderator:

AI is revolutionizing photography and filmmaking. Some believe it enhances creativity, while others fear it may replace traditional skills. What's your take?

Warith Kuwaish:

AI can assist photographers but cannot replace them. While AI-generated visuals can create entire advertisements using historical images, the key lies in how photographers and filmmakers incorporate AI into their work. The future will be shaped by how we adapt and integrate these tools.



6. Food Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Opportunities in a Changing Market

This discussion panel explored the role of women entrepreneurs in the food sector, highlighting their challenges, successes, and opportunities. Experts shared insights on market entry, funding strategies, and overcoming cultural and economic barriers while scaling their businesses.





Dr. Widad Al-Zubaidi

Founder, Bayt
Al-Shai

Moderator:

Has being a woman in the food and beverage industry given you a competitive advantage or been a challenge?

Dr. Widad Al-Zubaidi:

I didn't face significant obstacles because of my gender, but I did experience financial exploitation early on. Women are naturally more detail-oriented, which can be an advantage in building a strong brand. Instead of competing on price, I focused on quality and a niche customer base. Even in a competitive market, uniqueness is key.

Moderator:

How do you retain customers in Iraq's highly competitive tea and coffee market?

Dr. Widad Al-Zubaidi:

We differentiate ourselves through quality. Iraq has hundreds of tea varieties, but customers return to us because we maintain consistency and offer a unique experience. Beyond the product, we focus on branding, customer engagement, and presentation.

Moderator:

In your opinion, do people in Iraq truly understand how to prepare tea and coffee the right way? What's the secret to the perfect taste?

Dr. Widad Al-Zubaidi:

Many people stick to traditional methods without exploring new techniques. The secret is in the balance of ingredients, water temperature, and brewing time. A great cup of tea or coffee is an art that requires knowledge and practice.

Moderator:

There's always debate between tea and coffee lovers based on your insights, which one wins?

Dr. Widad Al-Zubaidi:

It depends on personal preference, but tea has deeper cultural roots in Iraq. However, coffee has gained popularity due to global trends. Both have a dedicated following, so it's not about winning it's about offering the best version of each.





Dunia Al-Haddad

Founder, Karamel
Cake & Tarfeh

Moderator:

How did you come up with the idea for Tarfeh, and why did you choose this particular product?

Dunia Al-Haddad:

I wanted to modernize traditional Iraqi pastries while maintaining their authenticity. Kleija, for example, is a well-known delicacy, but I aimed to introduce new fillings and presentation styles to appeal to younger generations and global markets.

Moderator:

How did your experiences in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE influence your culinary approach?

Dunia Al-Haddad:

Traveling exposed me to diverse techniques and flavors. I learned the importance of branding, packaging, and customer experience. These insights helped me elevate traditional Iraqi desserts to a more premium level.

Moderator:

What is the biggest challenge you hope to overcome in the coming years?

Dunia Al-Haddad:

Expanding market reach and improving marketing strategies. It's not just about creating a great product but about ensuring it reaches the right customers. Branding and packaging play a huge role in achieving this.

Moderator:

Do you think the Iraqi market is open to innovative desserts, or does it still favor traditional flavors?

Dunia Al-Haddad:

There is growing interest in new flavors, especially among younger generations. However, traditional preferences remain strong. The key is to offer a balance modern twists on classic favorites that maintain the essence of Iraqi cuisine.





Suhair Issa

Director of Entrepreneurship, Baghdad Chamber of Commerce

Moderator:

Do you think Iraq is currently a suitable environment for entrepreneurship, or are there significant barriers?

Suhair Issa:

Iraq has potential but lacks maturity in its entrepreneurial ecosystem. Market size and export opportunities exist, but regulatory and financial obstacles remain. However, support programs are increasing awareness and preparing young entrepreneurs.

Moderator:

How does the Baghdad Chamber of Commerce support entrepreneurs, and are there real funding opportunities for startups?

Suhair Issa:

We offer training programs, networking opportunities, and legal guidance. While funding remains a challenge, we connect entrepreneurs with investors and international organizations to secure grants and financial support.

Moderator:

How can women be empowered to enter the business world more confidently?

Suhair Issa:

Family support plays a huge role. Many women hesitate due to societal expectations, but when husbands and fathers encourage them, confidence grows. Awareness programs and mentorship initiatives also help women develop their skills.

Moderator:

What are the most common mistakes new entrepreneurs make in Iraq?

Suhair Issa:

Many lack financial planning skills and expect immediate returns. Some secure loans but don't know how to allocate them effectively. Others focus too much on product pricing rather than building a strong brand and customer base first.



7. English as a Career: Opportunities, Challenges, and Impact

This panel brings together English professionals who have built careers and businesses in language training to explore the growing demand for English proficiency in Iraq. Discussion topics include essential language skills for the private sector, how English enhances job and business opportunities, and the challenges of starting a career in English training. Panelists will also debate whether formal education is necessary or if skill alone is enough to succeed in the field.





Noor Ashour

Business Development
Manager, IDP IELTS Iraq

Moderator:

With the growing demand for IELTS certification, what opportunities can entrepreneurs leverage to offer training and preparation services?

Noor Ashour:

Training centers and businesses can collaborate with IELTS organizations to become certified registration centers. Additionally, they can form partnerships with educational institutions, such as universities, to provide accredited IELTS preparation programs.

Moderator:

Do you believe Iraq needs more specialized English training businesses for international exams? What are the challenges for entrepreneurs in this sector?

Noor Ashour:

IELTS certificates are now essential for both academic and professional purposes. The main challenge is the competition between certified training providers and lower cost, non-certified training options.

Moderator:

As companies in Iraq increasingly require English proficiency for employment, how can trainers and educational entrepreneurs take advantage of this trend?

Noor Ashour:

Entrepreneurs and trainers should organize awareness sessions about the importance of English proficiency tests. Training centers should also offer specialized English courses tailored to specific fields like medicine or law.





Mina Ali

Certified English Trainer, Founder of VOX Language Training

Moderator:

Starting an educational business in Iraq is challenging. What were the biggest obstacles you faced when establishing VOX, and what lessons did you learn from your journey?

Mina Ali:

The challenges included navigating the legal and financial aspects of launching a business and finding the right audience. Persistence and adaptability were key to overcoming these difficulties.

Moderator:

Marketing is crucial for any educational venture. What are the most effective strategies that helped you attract students and ensure business continuity?

Mina Ali:

The success of VOX relied heavily on online content. Identifying the target audience and creating relevant content helped attract students. Keeping up with trends and language evolution on social media is also essential.

Moderator:

Social media has become a powerful educational tool this space?

Can an English trainer build a successful business solely online? What steps do you recommend for those starting in

Mina Ali:

Yes, an online business can be successful, but it comes with challenges. Content must be innovative and engaging to retain an audience. Trainers should focus on niche markets and consistently provide valuable material.





Rusul Al-Hayali

Founder, English Gate Academy

Moderator:

Establishing a private academy instead of following the traditional teaching path is a bold move. What motivated you, and what advice would you give to others looking to start a similar venture?

Rusul Al-Hayali:

Teaching in traditional settings showed me that students had different proficiency levels, making standard curriculums ineffective. I developed new teaching methods, some of which weren't supported by traditional schools. This inspired me to start my own academy.

Moderator:

With digital learning on the rise, what challenges do traditional academies face? Do you think online teaching can replace physical learning centers?

Rusul Al-Hayali:

Online training offers broader reach but requires different teaching skills. While it lacks the energy of in-person training, it allows educators to connect with students outside Iraq. The key is adapting training methods to fit digital platforms effectively.

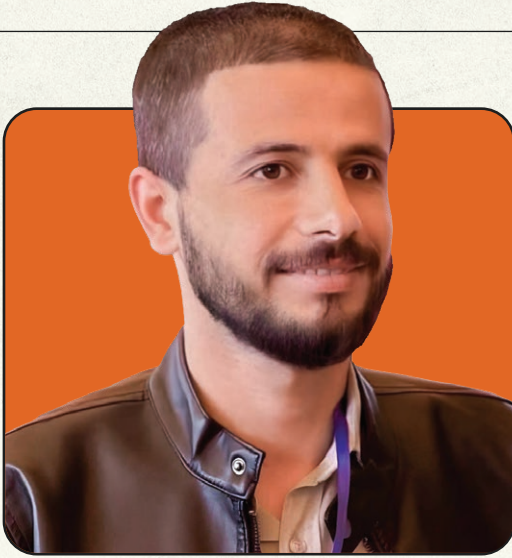
Moderator:

What entrepreneurial skills does someone need to turn English teaching into a business rather than just a job?

Rusul Al-Hayali:

A strong command of English is a must, but business skills are equally important. Trainers need to offer practical benefits, set realistic expectations for students, and ensure financial and administrative sustainability.





Nawar Al-Ani

President, Baghdad Toastmasters & Public Speaking Trainer

Moderator:

Many people learn English but struggle with speaking confidently. Is there an opportunity for entrepreneurs to create specialized programs for public speaking?

Nawar Al-Ani:

Public speaking skills are crucial in professional settings. Many people seeking our training lack confidence due to weak language skills. We encourage them to first build their English proficiency before joining Toastmasters.

Moderator:

Baghdad Toastmasters has helped many individuals develop their speaking skills. How can this type of training be transformed into a successful business?

Nawar Al-Ani:

Online training and content creation can expand our reach significantly. Virtual workshops and recorded courses provide scalable solutions to deliver public speaking skills to a broader audience.

Moderator:

Do you think academic qualifications alone are enough for someone to be a professional English trainer? Or should entrepreneurs focus more on practical skills and innovative teaching methods?

Nawar Al-Ani:

A degree in English is essential for credibility, but practical experience and innovative training approaches are what truly make a difference. Traditional education often focuses on theory rather than real-world language application.



8. Interior Design: Philosophy and Application in the Art of Interior Decoration

This panel explored the challenges and opportunities of entrepreneurship in Iraq's design and architecture sectors, highlighting the need for practical experience, strong branding, and business acumen alongside creative skills. Speakers emphasized bridging the gap between academic training and market demands, the value of client education, and the importance of adapting to evolving industry standards. Whether in architectural firms, interior design, or production design, success requires combining artistic vision with management, marketing, and a deep understanding of client behavior and market trends.





Mohammed Awni Kamel

Director, TAD Engineering Design Office –
Entrepreneurship in Architectural Engineering

Moderator:

What are the biggest challenges architects face when opening their own firm? How can they differentiate themselves from competitors?

Mohammed Awni Kamel:

Experience plays a significant role. A fresh graduate should not necessarily start their own office immediately after graduation. It's preferable to gain practical experience beforehand. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of client awareness about design aesthetics. Therefore, differentiation can come through educating and convincing clients about modern designs that align with artistic sensibilities.

Moderator:

With your experience in project management, how do you balance the artistic and creative aspects with market and client demands?

Mohammed Awni Kamel:

There are two sides to this: during academic studies, creativity and imagination are encouraged in design, which is logical and beneficial.

On the other hand, clients always seek cost-effective solutions. Balancing these two aspects is a challenge that designers must address from their early studies. Understanding market prices in detail and learning how to persuade clients about certain ideas, even if they are slightly more expensive, is crucial.

Moderator:

In your opinion, does entrepreneurship in architectural design require managerial and marketing skills as much as technical skills? How can designers develop these aspects?

Mohammed Awni Kamel:

Absolutely. Managerial and marketing skills are essential for building a brand that attracts clients. Developing these skills allows you to reach a stage where you can lead a team of designers and architects rather than solely focusing on design. While our field is somewhat seasonal, as you grow and take on more work, you can manage multiple teams, handling 10 projects in a season instead of just five. Additionally, new media channels like MBC Iraq have expanded opportunities in our industry, increasing artistic projects.





Amna Zaid

Co-founder and Architectural Director,
Design District

Moderator:

As a co-founder of Design District, what advice do you have for architects and designers looking to start their own businesses?

Amna Zaid:

There are two key aspects: the personal and the business side. When we started Design District, we initially lacked confidence in our idea. It was through trial and persistence that we began believing in our project. My advice to designers is to keep experimenting and trying this is what will lead to success. The Iraqi market is open to new ideas and ventures.

Moderator:

How does brand identity influence an interior designer's decisions? Can interior design help solidify a brand in the customer's mind?

Amna Zaid:

Any form of design commercial, artistic, or advertising incorporates branding. We once conducted an experiment where we displayed images of interior designs alongside portraits of individuals with distinct styles and asked the audience to match them.

A true designer understands how to connect the two. Asking the right questions is what leads you to the correct branding and design approach.

The initial meeting in any design project is crucial. It's important to read the client's style, preferences, and even their choice of drink, as it reflects their taste and financial standing.

Moderator:

Do you think the Iraqi market is beginning to appreciate modern architectural design, or is it still heavily influenced by traditional styles?

Amna Zaid:

Traditional architecture is often misunderstood as mere repetition and obvious design. We wish clients would recognize the benefits of traditional designs in terms of cost effectiveness and environmental harmony. The challenge today is that clients often bring in pre-selected online designs and request their implementation. Unfortunately, we are not fully utilizing traditional architectural elements in Iraq.

In commercial projects, aesthetics often take a backseat. Many clients prioritize maximizing space for advertisements, TV screens, and commercial gain over the artistic integrity of a structure. Our challenge is not just convincing clients about modern designs but also educating them on the value of traditional architecture.





Mohammed Khalid

Production Designer – Set Design
in Advertising and Film

Moderator:

Set design for advertising and film differs from traditional interior design. How can a designer establish a business in this field?

Mohammed Khalid:

The primary distinction is that production design focuses on showcasing a product, meaning materials differ significantly from those used in interior design. Success in this field depends heavily on personality, client interaction, and selecting the right clientele. A strong portfolio is essential, as is staying updated on international trends. However, in Iraq, legal requirements often limit freelancers' opportunities, as many companies prefer contracting with registered businesses, making it necessary to establish a company for career sustainability.

Moderator:

Do production designers need a personal brand to stand out in the industry? What steps should they take to build their name?

Mohammed Khalid:

Before building a name, it's crucial to understand the market landscape. When I was a student, interior design offices were rare, limiting work opportunities.

Skills, experience, and staying current with global trends make a designer stand out. I personally take online courses in art direction and familiarize myself with filmmakers' perspectives to enhance my work. Early in your career, gaining experience is more valuable than financial gain, as it sets the foundation for future success.

Moderator:

The visual production and advertising industry can be seasonal. How can designers maintain job continuity and generate stable income?

Mohammed Khalid:

I always make sure to work with multiple teams. This approach ensures that whenever a client order comes in, there's always a team ready to execute the project. Since the launch of MBC Iraq, the local media market has become more dynamic, offering more opportunities for professionals in this field. However, the nature of the work remains seasonal, so building strong networks and maintaining team flexibility is key to sustaining income throughout the year.





Saif Ali Talib

Scientific Associate, College of Fine Arts,
Al-Turath University

Moderator:

What is the gap between academic education and the job market in design? Do current curricula prepare students for entrepreneurship?

Saif Ali Talib:

The issue is that clients often prefer traditional designs. There is a significant gap between education and market demands. Academic programs in Iraq still focus on outdated tools that are no longer relevant in practice. Private universities are working to change this. Theoretical learning helps provide logical reasoning for design choices when presenting ideas to clients.

Moderator:

Is an academic degree enough for a designer to start a business, or do they need additional skills in marketing and management?

Saif Ali Talib:

If we calculate student attendance across 30 weeks per academic year, it's clear that this time is not enough to learn everything. Therefore, online training and extracurricular learning are necessary. Many graduates do not work in design due to outdated education.

Practical experience should be emphasized over theory. Additional skills in technology, business management, and market analysis are essential, as design skills alone are not enough for success. We recently introduced a project management course, but again, 30 weeks is not sufficient to cover everything.

Moderator:

What are the key skills students should develop if they aim to start their own business in design and architecture?

Saif Ali Talib:

The most crucial skills are creativity and critical thinking. Visual inspiration and distinguishing unique designs help designers stand out. These skills allow for problem-solving and adaptation in an evolving industry. Designers must continuously update their knowledge and skills to remain competitive.



9. From Cash to Digitization: Iraq's Journey Towards a Digital Financial Future

The discussion panel explored the rapid developments in Iraq's digital economy, focusing on the newly introduced e-commerce regulations, the Central Bank's launch of digital currency, and the significant growth of electronic payments. Experts and industry leaders will discuss how these changes impact consumers, businesses, and the broader financial landscape, addressing both opportunities and challenges in Iraq's evolving digital market.





Manar Al-Obaidy

CEO of First Finance Company and
Executive Director of the Iraq Future

Moderator:

Financial inclusion is crucial for supporting entrepreneurs. What steps are needed to achieve true financial inclusion in Iraq?

Manar Al-Obaidy:

Many assume financial inclusion benefits government institutions more than individuals. However, it ensures accurate tracking of income and expenses, simplifying loan eligibility assessments. A key factor is restoring public trust in banks without it, people hesitate to deposit funds or conduct financial transactions. Addressing past banking failures and penalties is critical. Public awareness campaigns should build confidence in banks and counteract misinformation. Additionally, individuals must learn how to analyze banking data to make informed financial decisions.

Moderator:

How can Iraqi banks adopt new solutions to ease startup financing, and what role does fintech play in this process?

Manar Al-Obaidy:

Iraq's economy is overly dependent on oil revenues (60%) and imports, which stifles other sectors.

The solution is fostering a business ecosystem where large companies rely on smaller enterprises for services and materials. Fintech solutions can streamline financial transactions, enhance transparency, and introduce innovative funding models tailored to startups.

Moderator:

Large corporations in Iraq are hesitant to invest in startups. How can training programs reduce investment risks and encourage corporate financing of startups?

Manar Al-Obaidy:

Investors avoid unregistered startups due to legal and financial risks. Business incubators play a crucial role in transitioning ideas into legally recognized businesses. These programs help startups meet regulatory requirements, reduce investor concerns, and make them more investable.





Fadel Jawad

Microfinance and Banking Advisor in the Financial Inclusion Project for Economic Restart and Integration in Iraq, implemented by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ)

Moderator:

Can you explain the GIZ financial inclusion program and how it is working in Iraq?

Fadel Jawad:

The financial inclusion program focuses on two key areas: expanding access to financial services and enhancing financial literacy. We collaborate with banks to ensure financial services reach all societal groups while also educating individuals on managing their finances effectively.

Moderator:

Financial inclusion not only facilitates funding access but also trains entrepreneurs in financial management. How can financial inclusion and training be combined to reassure investors?

Fadel Jawad:

Financial inclusion and training go hand in hand. Entrepreneurs need financial skills to manage funds efficiently. Training programs should emphasize preparing detailed financial plans before seeking funding, ensuring entrepreneurs understand how to allocate resources and repay loans.

This reassures investors that funds will be used effectively.

Moderator:

Fintech has transformed financial inclusion in advanced economies. Can Iraq adopt similar models? If so, what steps are needed?

Fadel Jawad:

Fintech is essential for modern financial inclusion. It simplifies transactions, expands banking reach, and enhances financial management for startups. For Iraq to adopt fintech solutions, we need regulatory frameworks that support digital financial services while ensuring security and transparency.

Moderator:

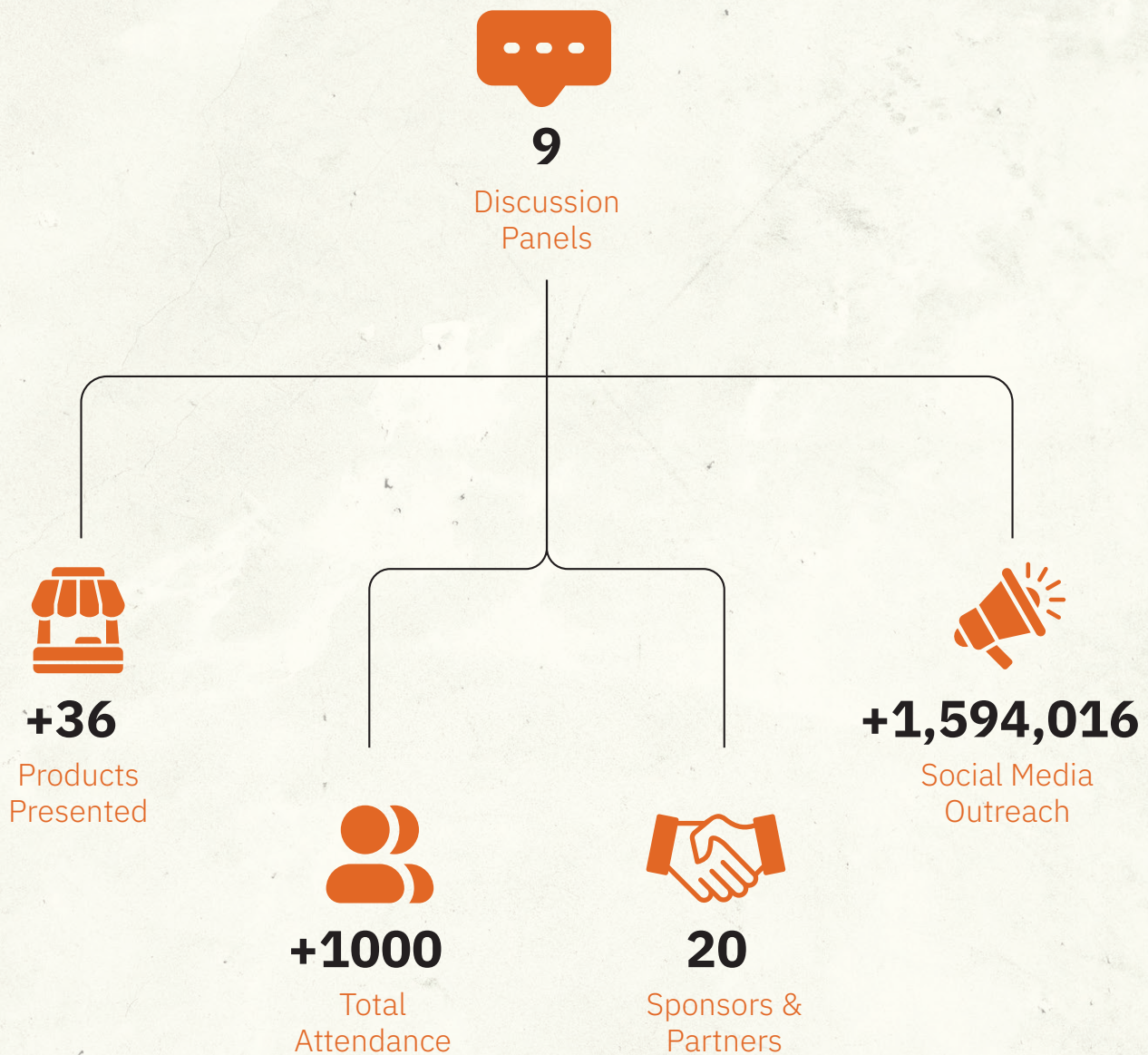
What key advice would you give to entrepreneurs seeking funding?

Fadel Jawad:

Entrepreneurs must address real market needs, conduct thorough research, and develop a sustainable business model. Having clear financial projections and a strategic growth plan increases their chances of securing investment. Investors look for well-structured businesses with a solid market foundation.



Impact & Engagement



Conclusion

Tehlaya Ramdania was more than just a gathering, it was a catalyst for action. Over the course of the events, new collaborations emerged, ideas transformed into tangible opportunities, and participants left with fresh perspectives on entrepreneurship and innovation in Iraq. The dynamic discussions and interactive sessions not only provided practical insights but also sparked meaningful conversations about the future of various industries.

The program stood out for its emphasis on real world solutions, bridging the gap between vision and execution. Entrepreneurs connected with investors, businesses discovered new markets, and creatives found platforms to showcase their talents. More than anything, Tehlaya proved that Iraq's entrepreneurial ecosystem is thriving with a community eager to drive sustainable change. As we look ahead, the momentum built here will continue to shape new ventures, fuel innovation, and strengthen professional networks across the country.



تلايف



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