



# The Effect of Strategic Foresight on Tourism Marketing after COVID-19

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## Abstract

Since the 2019 protests, the services sector within Iraq has undergone a considerable decline. As such, the tourism sector which was already in a negative state prior to the COVID-19 outbreak has even worsened just like the rest of the world. In spite of the existence of civilizational, archaeological, religious, and other tourist attractions that Iraq enjoys, the matter is in need of tourism marketing policies and procedures that are capable of supporting and succeeding it, performing the role required of it, and achieving its goals. So, there is a great need to search for strategic tools that contribute to facing this crisis and improving tourism marketing. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to identify the importance of strategic foresight and its impact on tourism marketing in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were captured using the technique of focus groups of university professors by using an online form. The study was based on the structural equation modeling method in identifying the nature of causal relationships between variables. The results indicate that there is great importance in employing strategic foresight in improving tourism marketing after COVID-19.

**Keywords:** Iraq, tourism, customer, market, competitive, technology, COVID-19, SEM.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly all sectors of the global economy. These range from transport, tourism, commerce, and many other sectors. This novel COVID-19 virus is highly infectious and is airborne (Daga et al., 2019). For this reason, social distancing stipulations, partial/complete lockdowns, in addition to the general ban on gathering in public have caused a lot of disruptions to many daily activities. The novel coronavirus cases in Iraq had hit 266 with 23 deaths (Jaffal, 2020). The fast-growing number of new infections indicated a difficult situation that the country may face and could change the way citizens live. To contain the spread of the virus, the government put in place measures to salvage the lives and the



economy of the country, which was staring at the damage (WHO,2020). The steps taken by the government included closing roads between cities, the imposition of the curfew, and canceling all the religious tourism (Osborn et al., 2019). To avoid contracting the COVID-19, many Iraqis started wearing face masks and stayed at home rather than going to their jobs due to the fear that the country will suffer a more widespread outbreak (Kim,2019).

Iraq can be considered a third world country with the majority of the population living from hand-to-mouth as they work in the informal sector. The ceasing of air transport, as well as other forms of international transportation, have negatively impacted tourism in Iraq as well as all other countries around the world. Worse still, Iraq is burdened by high levels of insecurity as well as political instability. At the moment, the Iraqi tourism industry is underdeveloped as well as neglected by state authorities. The reason is that the country has been through decades of war, recurrent insecurity and instability, as well as dictatorial regimes. Nevertheless, Iraq is slowly but surely developing and gaining stability. Therefore, it will be able to meet its massive potential as a worldwide tourist destination. What's more, this nation will be able to reap the economic benefits associated with large numbers of tourist visits (Razzaq & Abbood, 2019). However, whatever is undertaken requires an ethical compass. For example "Many hotels are not looking at the consequences of their unethical actions in aspects such as advertising. There should however be an approach to advertising in which hotels strive to reach consumers in an honest way without subjectively embellishing and making blatant untruths about their offerings" (Nicolaidis, 2018).

Increased developments in Iraq's tourism industry means that the economy will become more diversified and new jobs within the private sector will be formed both within the big and smaller cities. The construction sector is also likely to directly benefit from the establishment of museums, tourist hotels, restaurants, as well as other attractions. Infrastructural developments will also occur within the country to support the above-mentioned benefits (Kana, 2011). The private sector will as well be able to develop, operate, manage, and maintain the related infrastructure, and also create job openings and as such close relationships are needed with all relevant stakeholders (Nicolaidis, 2015). Such jobs include travel agencies and operators, tour guides, hotel workers, and many more (Nawar, 2014). The enhanced interest in Iraq's archaeological and historic sites can enable this nation to better its archeological workforce and ability by providing the requisite excavation training, reconstruction, and restoration. Accordingly, there is a great need to search for strategic tools that contribute to facing the crisis and improving tourism marketing. Hence, strategic foresight is one of the successful strategic tools that can be adopted for this purpose. This invariably includes careful consideration of the element of service quality delivery which remains the core marketing driver by word of mouth reports (Nicolaidis, 2008; 2012). The aim of this study was to identify the importance of strategic foresight and its impact on the tourism marketing in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Literature Review**

### **Strategic foresight**

Strategic foresight is considered one of the important capabilities of organizations, which includes supporting the future capabilities and strategic plans of the leader (Hines & Bishop, 2006). It is the ability to create and sustain a high-quality, coherent and practical future vision, and the use of emerging visions according to useful organizational methods, and helps to uncover unconfirmed circumstances, develop strategies and explores markets and new products and services (Slaughter, 2000), it represents a mixture of future methods with strategic management methods (Martinet, 2010). And when asked, with foresight we can answer that by the points of a balance between past, present, and future, that refers to certain, moving and

uncertain aspects as shown in Figure 1. Can be considered:

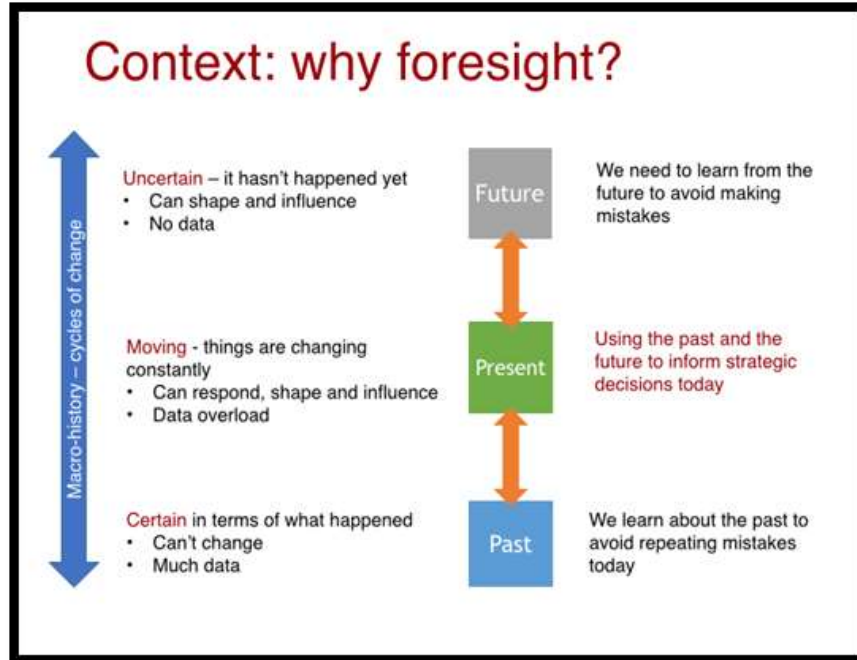


Figure 1. Why Foresight

The literature indicates that strategic foresight consists of four basic dimensions (David,2012) as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Strategic Foresight Dimensions

Customer foresight refers to the potential role of the client is assumed through user-driven innovation, which uses five tools to identify emerging needs (exploratory interviews, daily research, daily life visits, vision clinics, and major studies) and make them quantifiable (Rohrbeck & Gemünden, 2011).Market foresight is seen as the company's ability to anticipate changes in the serviced market and to anticipate the emergence of new markets. This ability is developed through organizational processes, values, standards and coordination effects that together provide knowledge related to future market conditions (McCardle, 2005). The competitive foresight is carried out by the home production unit and aims to identify and anticipate the movements of competitors (Vishnevskiy & Karasev, 2016).Technology foresight is implemented by the technology exploration unit, which uses technology as a tool for classification and visualization, similar to products and services (Miles,2010).



## Tourism Marketing

Marketing is one of the most advanced business aspects in recent years (Ripollés & Blesa, 2012). It is not the same as it was in the past as selling goods and services, but rather implementing the various activities of the establishment that aim to direct the flow of goods and services from the product to the consumer. The concept of marketing is greater than advertising and promotion (Ilić et al., 2014). It is the process of understanding customer desires, trying to satisfy them, and stimulating their desires to obtain the goods, programs, and products offered by the facility. Marketing is also one of the most important activities undertaken by modern enterprises. Aware of the importance of the scientific method in dealing with the markets it serves, and in identifying the desires and needs of consumers, and working to satisfy them, which brings mutual benefit to both parties. Nicolaidis (2008) states that exceeding customer expectations and good value for money offerings are essential nowadays. Tourism marketing is an administrative activity that includes all the functions of management from planning, organizing, directing and controlling, and the scientific management of marketing achieves several benefits (Kotler et al., 2017).

## Material and Methods

The instrument of this study was the survey and it was used and conducted in the tourism sector in Iraq. The population of the study was the university professors, and the sample has been purposively selected among them. The sample size was 107 respondents. The first section deals with strategic foresight (SF) and its dimensions (SF1, SF2, SF3, SF4), depending on the scale which was developed and standardized by David (2012), and the second part is about tourism marketing (TM), depending on the scale was developed and standardized by Kotler et al., (2017). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency and it is referred to as a good value of all the items and the value of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.802 for SF , and 0.837 for TM, and in general it ensures the reliability of the instrument as it shown in Table 1. This is according to the rule of thumb on Cronbach's Alpha in Table 2 (Hair et al.,2012).

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha for the Indicators

Variable	Cronbach's Alpa
SF1	0.781
SF2	0.796
SF3	0.741
SF4	0.731
SF	0.802
TM	0.837

Table 2. Rule of Thumb on Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha Range	Strength of Association
<0.6	Poor
0.6 to <0.7	Moderate
0.7 to <0.8	Good
0.8 to <0.9	Very Good
0.9	Excellent

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed shall further conceptualize the impact of SF dimensions on TM, and it is developed according to the literature and scales, as it is presented in Figure 3.

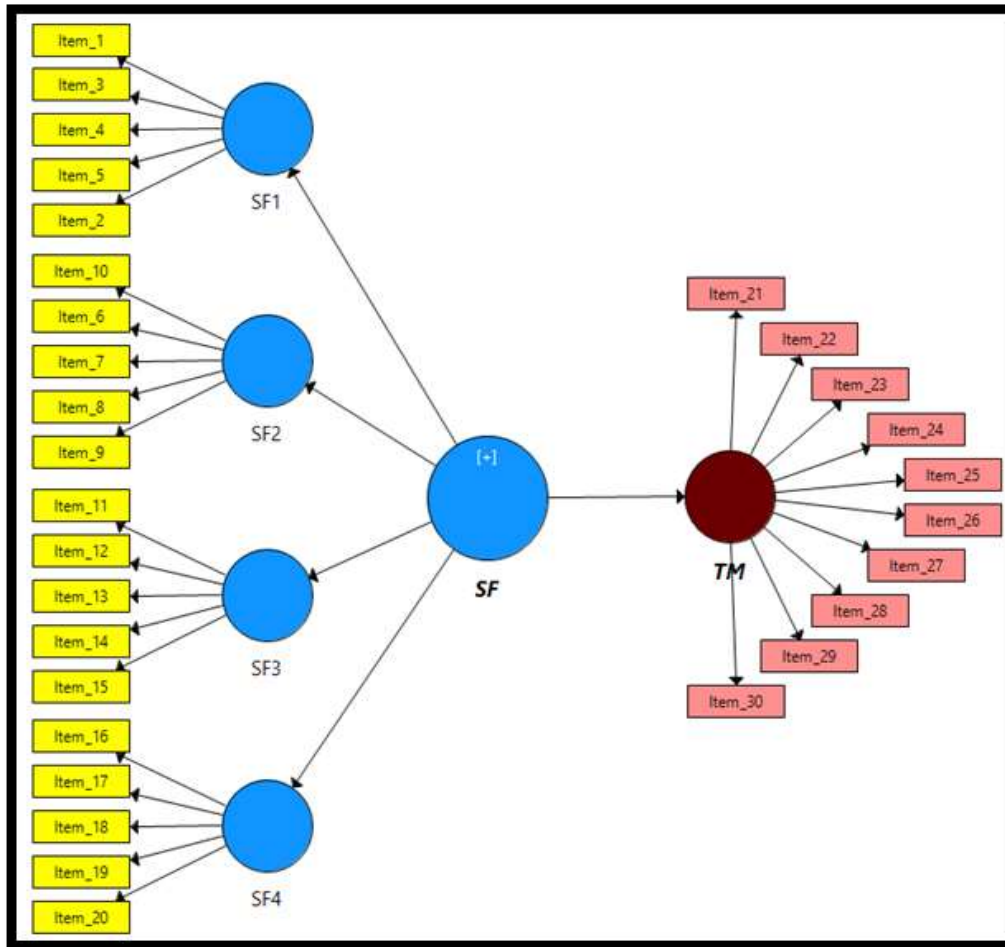


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

## Modeling

In order to test how dimensions and paragraphs are measured, factor analysis was adopted in order to identify the scale's ability to measure relationships, and also so that the conditions of goodness fit index are met and that the indicators are acceptable if they achieve the condition, as it is required that (GFI>0.90, AGFI>0.90, CFI>0.95, TLI>0.90, Ratio <5, and RMSEA <0.08). The results of Figure 4 indicate that the models are acceptable, as acceptable values are recorded, for SF the indicators in Figure 5 refer to (GFI= 0.913, AGFI= 0.903, CFI = 0.956, NFI = 0.923, Ratio = 2.542, and RMSEA =0.076 ).

Regarding the TM Figure 3 indicates that (GFI= 0.934, AGFI= 0.917, CFI = 0.978, NFI = 0.951, Ratio = 3.959, and RMSEA =0.064). These results indicate the acceptance of models and the ability to explain causal relationships.



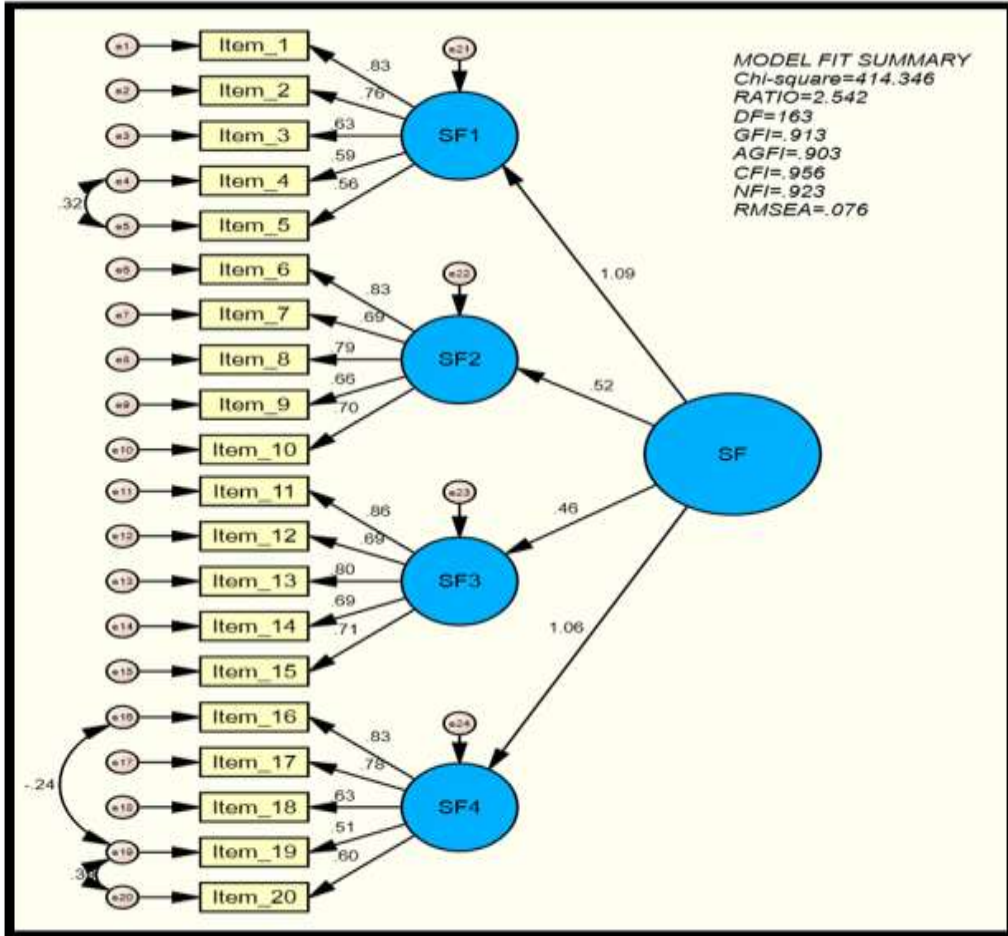


Figure 4. SF Modeling

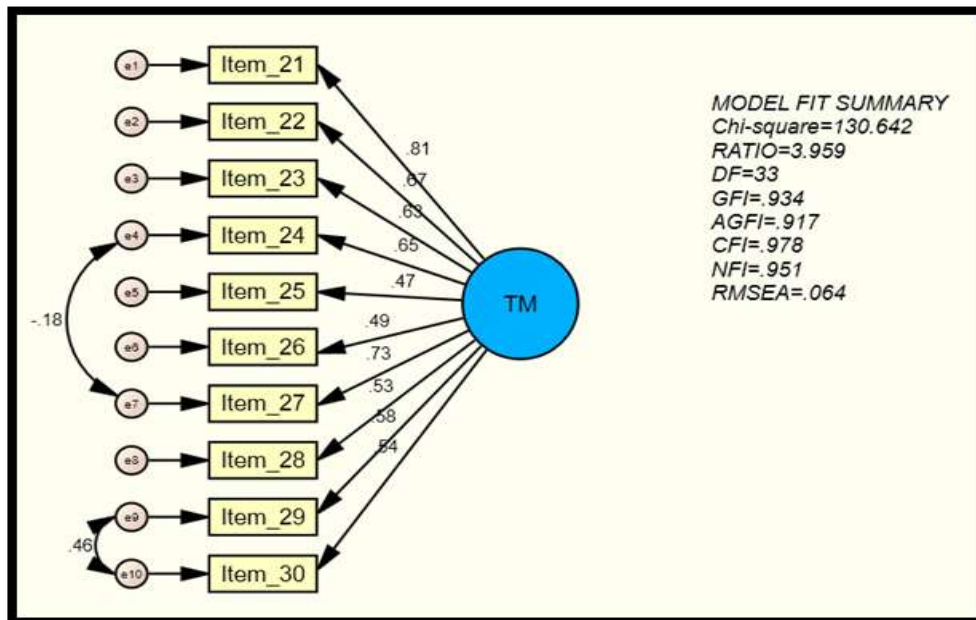


Figure 5 TM Modeling



## Results

Table 3 indicates the results of correlations between the variables reflected by the correlation matrix, and it is clear that there is a correlation between variables between SF and TM and it is (0.670), and this correlation is significant because the level of significance (sig.) is accepted because its value was less than 0.05.

Concerning SF1, there is a significant correlation between SF1 and TM with (0.518), and the level of significance was less than 0.05. Also, the correlation between SF2 and TM is positive and high (0.518) , and the level of significance was less than 0.05, and there are positive relationships between SF3 and TM with a correlation coefficient of (0.629), and the level of significance was less than 0.05. Finally, the correlation between SF4 and TM is positive and high (0.585) , and the level of significance was less than 0.05.

Table 3. Correlation Coefficient between Variables

V.	SF1	SF2	SF3	SF4	SF	TM
SF1	1	.505**	.401**	.946**	.851**	.518**
Sig.		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	107	107	107	107	107	107
SF2	.505**	1	.889**	.444**	.843**	.518**
Sig.	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
N	107	107	107	107	107	107
SF3	.401**	.889**	1	.455**	.816**	.629**
Sig.	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
N	107	107	107	107	107	107
SF4	.946**	.444**	.455**	1	.849**	.585**
Sig.	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
N	107	107	107	107	107	107
SF	.851**	.843**	.816**	.849**	1	.670**
Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
N	107	107	107	107	107	107
TM	.518**	.518**	.629**	.585**	.670**	1
Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
N	107	107	107	107	107	107

Concerning the effect between variables, Table 4 and Figure 6 indicate that there is a positive effect for SF1 on TM , with indicators of (0.847), with (sig<0.05). Regarding SF2, there is a significant effect of SF2 on TM , with indicators of (0.855), with (sig<0.05) .Also, the results indicate that there is a positive effect for SF3 on TM , with indicators of (0.833), with (sig<0.05). regarding SF4, there is a significant effect of SF4 on TM , with indicators of (0.844), with (sig<0.05).

Table 4. Path Analysis for Study Variables

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV)	P-Values
SF -> SF1	0.847	0.845	0.037	22.839	0.000
SF -> SF2	0.855	0.860	0.027	31.563	0.000
SF -> SF3	0.833	0.838	0.036	23.229	0.000
SF -> SF4	0.844	0.842	0.039	21.778	0.000
SF -> TM	0.692	0.693	0.079	8.779	0.000

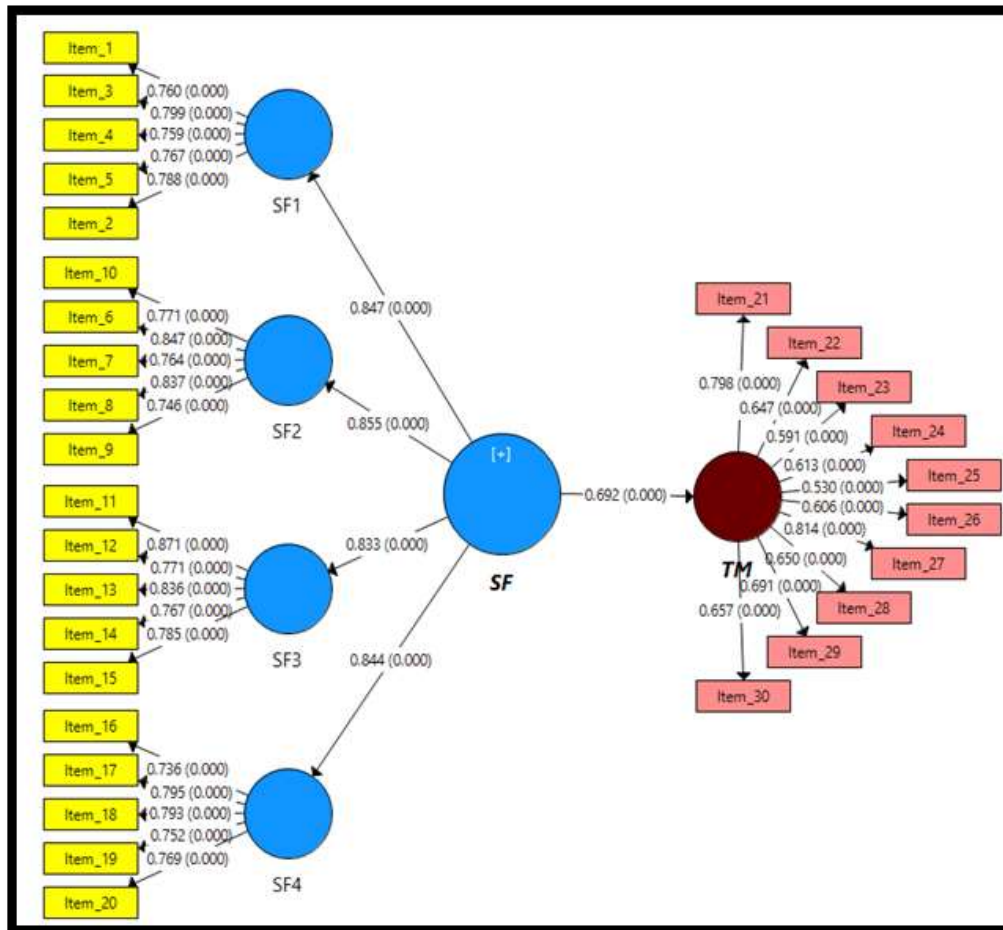


Figure 5. Relationships Model

## Discussion

It is obvious that the novel coronavirus pandemic has affected the entire global economy. But in Iraq where the tourism sector is still in its infancy and recovering from decades of war, the impact is worse. Therefore, even after the COVID-19 pandemic, it will still take some time before this industry matures into a popular global destination. The country still has to deal with internal politics as well as security issues. Therefore, it needs strategic tools for the success of tourism marketing, such as strategic foresight which involves planning approaches for the future. It is an action-oriented framework to reopen up the tourism sector after the coronavirus. It





is aimed at ensuring returning the normalcy in its operations.

The study proved from an academic point of view, that strategic foresight is an effective tool in tourism marketing, and that the four tools of strategic foresight have proven effective results. Customer foresight is an essential element of tourism marketing and greatly dictates its success. Before the government had ordered for the closure of the business by March 7, the crowded places such as malls, restaurants, and cafes were experiencing lower customer visits. The usually crowded tourist hotels in the cities in Najaf and Karbala, where Shiite Muslims visit the Shrines, became deserted as visitors feared for their lives (Kana, 2011).

The market foresight is an important factor in the tourism sector, and its impact on the success of tourism marketing appears when the future exploration of the market is employed and it needs identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and potential threats, and this result comes in line with Carlisle et al., (2016). There is equally a need to for greatly enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty (Rai & Anirvinna, 2019; Tefera & Govender, 2017; Nicolaidis, 2015; 2008). This indicates that the factors of market analysis and exploration are effective factors for successful marketing initiatives.

The competitive foresight of the country indicates that the nation can still not effectively compete with other popular destinations within the Middle East that experience greater political stability. These include countries such as Egypt, Iran, Kuwait, etc. as such; there is a serious need for the government to enhance political stability as well as the country's general security, and looking for successful factors is imperative. In terms of technology, Iraq is still recovering from the massive destruction caused by a decade's worth of war. For this reason, tourists might experience problems in mobile telecommunications in some regions as well as small towns. Internet access is still relatively limited compared to other neighboring countries that are more stable. Therefore, it needs efforts before the nation becomes a major player in the tourism industry. It is important to win the hearts and minds of tourists (Nicolaidis, 2008).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, strategic foresight for tourism after the coronavirus relies on a carefully crafted planning approach to revamp the key components that determine the operation and success of the sector. These components include the customer, market, competitive, and technological foresight. The Coronavirus pandemic has altered every aspect of these components and presented a new way of life globally. As the medical experts and scientists grapple with the search for a vaccine for the disease, reopening of the tourism sector requires an action-oriented planning process due to the assessment of the components to ensure normalcy in the future. A critical in-depth analysis of the aspects that affect tourism marketing will provide vital information and understanding needed to rebuild the sector once the economy reopens after the coronavirus pandemic. The strategic foresight is a plan or approach to be taken in the sector to revive the once vibrant sector in the country.

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