



# Integration of strategic wellness and sustainable marketing to achieve competitive advantage in the Tourism Industry: An empirical study in a sample of Iraqi tourism agencies

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## Abstract

This paper sought to investigate the association between Iraqi tourism clients' strategic well-being and sustainable marketing in Iraqi tourism organizations, and how clients' strategic well-being can enhance the tourism agencies' sustainable marketing policy. This assessment revolved around the relationship between sustainable marketing and the six wellness components; social wellness (SOC), intellectual wellness (INT), physical wellness (PHY), emotional wellness (EMO), spiritual wellness (SPR), and professional wellness (OCP). The research embraced the model of multiple regression and introduced a semi-structured survey as an instrument for the main data collection. Ultimately, the data which was gathered from 655 tourism customer respondents was considered. The findings suggest a positive association between sustainable marketing and Iraqi tourism customers' strategic wellness and the components of client wellness influencing tourism business marketing policy. The findings also showed that the companies' strategic wellness dimensions play a significant part in enhancing the sustainable marketing in tourism businesses, thus affecting their competitive advantage and the quantity of foreign investment in Iraq's tourism sector. The findings offer management a good of the attitudes and perceptions of clients in different regions, wellness and different situations of the financial market. The findings for the tourism sector as a whole can enhance marketing efforts. Considering the limited literature about this topic, this research contributes to the literature and serves as a guide for hospitality business professionals. Moreover, the research adopted an attitude to guide clients by investigating the wellness of the customer rather than the wellness of the service which has been considered in most past studies.

**Keywords:** sustainable marketing, hospitality management, wellness, tourism agencies, competitive advantage.



## Introduction

In many nations, the tourism industry is rapidly became a significant component of economic growth and has gained more scrutiny from scientists in recent years (Liu & Chou, 2016). Given the globe's recent economic crisis, and particularly its impact in Iraq, the percentage of visitors wishing to travel all over the world has fallen drastically. Therefore, any tourism development plan needs to become more strategic in order to satisfy the tourists needs. Worldwide, tourism agencies are working in extremely complicated environments and they are becoming more competitive, with clients becoming more advanced in their wishes and demands because they are receiving higher competitive pressure (Ateke & Kalu, 2016; Ateke, Ogonu, Ishmael Officer & Harcourt, 2015; Braimah, 2016; Terblanche, Gerber, Erasmus & Schmidt, 2013; Van der Bank & van der Bank, 2014).

In this regard, a long-term marketing plan should be launched by the tourism agency taking into account the adverse implications of enhancing competition and focusing on inner and external variables influencing the tourism sector. Sustainable marketing has evolved as the primary consequence of growing client interest for environmental protection and agencies have therefore highlighted a target group of clients called green clients who feel they are interested in environmentally friendly items. In previous decades there has been a growing interest in creating sustainable marketing efforts in various companies (Ateke, 2016; Calu, Negrei, Calu & Viorel, 2016; Chhabra, 2019; Ochterski, 2012; Saravanan, Mathimani, Deviram, Rajendran & Pugazhendhi, 2018; Sun, Garrett, Phau & Zheng, 2018). For example, Ateke and Kalu (2016) investigate the connection of International Mobile Communication System (GSM) service providers in Nigeria between cooperative strategy and enterprise wellness. They observed that cooperative marketing is strongly correlated with company wellness through resource sharing and risk sharing, by sales development, market share, and revenue growth.

By way of contrast, excellent efforts have been made for several years to develop the company wellness and attitudes of rivals towards the competition of the company (e.g. (Aura, Ahonen & Ilmarinen, 2010; Costa, Quintela & Mendes, 2015; Didia & Nwukah, 2015; Hatch & Lusardi, 2010; Hsu & Tang, 2010). These efforts, indeed, only highlighted the well-being of the company itself and the society in which it works, and thus little attention is given to the perception and attitudes of the clients. The purpose of this research is to investigate the association between tourism firms ' sustainable marketing and the six components of strategic wellness (social, mental, physical, mental, spiritual, occupational). Therefore, the present research implements a client-oriented strategy directed at evaluating clients ' strategic wellness rather than agencies.

## Literature Review

### Strategic Wellness in Tourism Agencies

The growing significance of enhancing profitability measures forces companies to adapt their activities to the requirements of the client (Marković, Raspor & Komšić, 2012). Suppliers should, in this context, recognize who their clients are and comprehend their requirements and desires. Wellness has become an increasingly common idea in practice, especially in the context of tourism, leading in a growing rivalry between wellness service suppliers on the one side and a disparate client class on the other. The strategic wellness defines a firm's wellness as a consequence of leadership procedures evaluated against the firm's objectives or against the competitors' wellness. McMahan and Fleury (2012) indicate that corporate wellness reflects the outcomes of leadership procedures and organizational performance in terms of performance results with respect to the particular goals of the organization and other factors that are wider than

those usually identified by stakeholders in the corporation's evaluation and financial evaluation. The entity, if it can adapt, advance and make any progress, seems to have been in excellent health under competitive forces and industry requirements (Alexander & Fry, 2019). Companies operating in the field of tourism always need to adapt to market requirements and develop their competitive strategies to suit the needs of their customers. Moreover, the local tourism market may have distinctive characteristics that make it different from other countries, which is reflected in the behavior and desires of customers as well as in the quality of tourist destinations and places. These characteristics are undoubtedly influenced by several internal factors related to the level of social welfare of the society or the level of income and external may relate to the general situation of the country and the level of economic development in the country. Besides, the notion of wellness is also regarded from the client's viewpoint, as client wellness can impact their wishes and attitudes particularly in the context of the service industry. The notion of strategic wellness is vague and hard to explicitly assess. Some organizations consequently identify implicit indicators to disclose them. In this context, Kelley Ann Strout and Howard (2012) Invented a way for accurately measuring various wellness factors among older adults living in the community by undertaking a Rasch study<sup>1</sup> that reflects the level of wellness of older people and the level of wellness connected with the behavior.

The Strategic wellness can be studied through two inputs, the organization 's entrance and the customer' s entrance. In terms of strategic wellness from the entrance of the organization most of the previous studies dealt with the concept of strategic wellness in organizations and their impact on strategic performance, but few studies dealt with the concept of strategic wellness of the customer and its impact on the strategic performance of organizations. The customer in the tourism sector is the focus of the companies and therefore the changes that affect the individual customers in terms of the level of social welfare, income level as well as the general health situation have a direct impact on their preferences for tourist destinations. Overall, the strategic wellness of customers consists of six components shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Strategic Wellness Components

<sup>1</sup> Rasch study, is a family of psychometric designs for categorical information assessment. Such as answers to issues relating to a reading evaluation or questionnaire responses, as a function of a trade-off between (a) the abilities, attitudes or personality characteristics of the respondent and (b) the problem of the product (Rasch, 1960).



According to Dalton and Logomarsino (2014) the components of the strategic wellness consists of the following:

- Social wellness (SOC)

It illustrates the society and atmosphere of clients, attempting to enhance the world of clients by promoting healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, social wellness as the inner characteristic of a client aims to enhance private relations and construct a greater society (Kelley A Strout & Howard, 2015). This implies that people with social welfare appear to be careful about transport and leisure. Thus, clients ' social well-being is anticipated to relate favorably with the viable promotion of tourism businesses.

- Intellectual wellness (INT)

It promotes innovation, promoting mental activity, as individuals do, mind creativity and exercise. People who have high level of mental well-being have an effective mind to keep learning. To widen his understanding and enhance his abilities, somebody utilizes excellent intellectual capital. It is also essential to maintain up with present occurrences and participate in mind-raising operations. It means that travel and hospitality will be taken more seriously to clients with elevated intellectual wellness. Therefore, clients ' intellectual well-being is anticipated to be favorably associated with travel firms ' viable development.

- Physical wellness (PHY)

It relates to distinct kinds of health attitude, including appropriate practice, adequate feeding and withdrawal from damaging behaviors such as substance abuse and alcohol abuse. The growth of such healthy behaviors would not be linked to people's lives for decades, but will increase the quality and enjoyment of such decades, which then in turn will enhance the trend towards health tourism and leisure for clients. Therefore, clients ' physical well-being is anticipated to be favorably associated with tourism firms ' viable marketing. Thus, clients ' physical well-being is anticipated to be favorably associated with tourism firms ' sustainable marketing.

- Emotional wellness (EMO)

It is a changing variability condition that incorporates with all the other wellness elements. Strong emotional well-being is generally described as being capable of feeling and expressing human emotions like joy, sorrow and rage. This implies being capable of loving, loving and achieving a feeling of engagement in life. It involves enthusiasm, life-esteem, recognition of oneself and the capacity to share emotions. The emotional well-being of clients is therefore anticipated to correlate favorably with the sustainable promotion of tourist industry firms. Therefore, clients ' emotional well-being is anticipated to be favorably associated with tourist enterprises ' sustainable development.

- Spiritual wellness (SPR)

It includes a set of convictions, values and principles that promote each individual's existence. It is also the willingness in human life to trawl for connotation and goals, to question anything, to understand things which cannot be readily understood or interpreted. Real spiritual well-being means that the individual wants balance between the inner and the outer powers. Therefore, clients ' spiritual well-being is anticipated to be favorably associated with tourist industry firms ' sustainable public relations. Therefore, clients ' spiritual wellness is anticipated to relate favorably with the sustainable marketing of tourist industry firms.

- Occupational wellness (OCP)

It includes the preparing and use of donations, abilities and skills to achieve your life's objective, joy and enjoyment. Occupational health implies achievement in incorporating your dedication to your profession into an extensive, fulfilling and satisfying lifestyle that enables to attain work stability, enabling individuals to pay close attention to luxury and amusement. Therefore, clients ' occupational wellness is anticipated to be favorably associated with tourist industry firms ' viable



advertising. Thus, clients' occupational wellness is assumed to be favorably associated with tourist industry firms' viable marketing.

Obviously, strategic wellness is evidently a multi-indicator notion which can be used between service suppliers and service recipients in distinct situations. In this research, however, the measurements of strategic wellness are regarded from a client-oriented view and are evaluated using a semi-structured survey with 24 indices. This survey was directed mainly to customers to determine the level of strategic wellness of the study population first, based on a sample of regular or frequent customers to prominent Iraqi tourism agencies. In addition, customers' preferences, desires and frequency of these preferences or any changes in the long term will be determined by the changes in strategic wellness in its six dimensions.

### **Marketing Sustainability (MS)**

Nowadays, the effect of sustainable development is at the forefront and individuals are so conscious that they are using the goods that are safe and beneficial to them (Rastogi & Khan, 2015). Marketing Sustainability is a holistic strategy aimed at satisfying customers' wishes and demands while placing equal focus on social and environmental concerns and producing an accountable manner of generating revenue. marketing Sustainability still aims at adding value to the client and meeting the requirements and requirements of the client, but in a sustainable situation (Bridges & Wilhelm, 2008). Consumer preferences, expectations and utilization trends need to be re-assessed in order to be effective in sustainable marketing. Human psychology is extremely complicated and consumption is becoming more unsustainable over the years with the growth of public relations.

As shown by Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) food, accommodation and personal transportation usage accounts for more than 70% of environmental effects. Taking into account that each agency's primary goal is to produce profit, in the traditional advertising strategy, the emphasis has been placed on fulfilling the requirements of clients and thus on enhancing the service efforts (Calu et al., 2016; Dabbas & Muhemmed, 2019). The enhancement of financial activity has two factors: the standard technical advancement and the client's private features, which subsequently influence the economic growth and social protection to each nation. The Global Reporting Initiative Guidelines (GRI, 2013) regarded reporting of helpful data for developing an efficient sustainable marketing approach. Preparing sustainability portion of the business practice is an endeavor of the firm itself, but also a response to customer stress or modifications in the policies of rivals. Firms are anticipated to be compelled to modify their conduct in the future as a result of client wishes, climate change or upcoming shortfalls of raw resources. Sustainable marketing usually includes social, economic and environmental aspects:

- The social dimension is about fairness, and then workers should be handled fairly and equally without taking into account ethnicity, sexuality, or ideology. The health and safety of employees throughout the manufacturing phase is also crucial, as the commodity can carry health or safety hazards to consumers during procurement.
- The concentration is on the production cycle, given that the major effect of the surroundings could be perhaps during the supply, manufacture and sale of the product. The environmental element is related to reducing the negative environmental impact of manufacturing operations.
- The economic dimension is about profits. Ecologically sustainable firms are those firms that are using the funds available in a manner that enables them to function on a long-term basis whilst also producing revenue.

Thus, all agencies should understand the social, economic and environmental elements of company operations in order to guarantee sustainable marketing. In this regard, Calu et al. (2016) detected 30 sustainable marketing predictors taking into account only the agency's relevant predictors for





sustainable business model. Then, depending on the sustainable marketing approach, they categorized these predictors into three classifications are:

- 1) Supply 8 items.
- 2) Production 9 items
- 3) Distribution 13 items

1. Each of these indices highlight resource efficiency in company operations. Sustainable public relations were seen as a means of affecting people's behavior to be much more renewable consumption due to the manufacturing being one of the major causes to damage the ecosystem. Based on the above discussion, this study aims to test the relationship between the components of strategic wellness of Iraqi tourism customers and the sustainable marketing of tourism companies operating in Iraq in order to identify the role and importance of strategic wellness at the level of customers in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage and enhance the competitive position of companies. This can be achieved through a key assumption that the six-dimensional strategic wellness aspects have a positive correlation with sustainable marketing. Theoretically, (social wellness, intellectual wellness, physical wellness, emotional wellness, spiritual wellness and professional wellness) are directly related to the components of sustainable settlement (supply, production and distribution). A separate hypothesis was formulated for each component of the dependent variable (strategic wellness). Six hypotheses were therefore created for the correlation analysis as follows:

"H1: There is a significant correlation between customer SOC and the sustainable marketing of tourist industry firms. "

"H2: There is a significant correlation between customer INT and the sustainable marketing of tourist industry firms. "

"H3: There is a significant correlation between customer PHY and the sustainable marketing of tourist industry firms. "

"H4: There is a significant correlation between customer EMO and the sustainable marketing of tourist industry firms. "

"H5: There is a significant correlation between customer SPR and the sustainable marketing of tourist industry firms. "

"H6: There is a significant correlation between customer OCP and the sustainable marketing of tourist industry firms. "

The below multiple regression method was implemented to define the joint effect of travel client strategic wellness aspects on the sustainable marketing of tourist businesses:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1x_1 + \beta_2x_2 + \beta_3x_3 + \beta_4x_4 + \beta_5x_5 + \beta_6x_6 + \varepsilon$$

"Where:"

"Y = the dependent variable: sustainable Marketing (SM)."

" $\alpha$  = a constant"

" $\beta_1$  to  $\beta_6$  = regression coefficients for independent variables  $x_1$  to  $x_6$  respectively. "

" $x_1$  to  $x_6$  = Strategic wellness dimensions;

SOC= Social wellness

INT= Intellectual wellness

PHY= Physical wellness

EMO=Emotional wellness

SPR=Spiritual wellness

OCP=Occupational wellness"

" $\varepsilon$  = error term



Therefore, the following hypothesis is produced for the model of multiple regression:

H7: there is a significant correlation between SOC, INT, PHY, EMO, SPR, and OCP and sustainable marketing of tourist industry firms (SM). ”

## Methodology

The aim of this study is to investigate the connection between sustainable marketing and the strategic well-being of tourism business clients in Iraq. As a research methodology, the study implemented a quantitative methodology that allowed a survey to be used as the primary tool for information gathering. A semi-structured survey was conceived as an investigation tool. The tool needed participants to tick on a Likert scale from 1-5, where 1= quite low grade; 2= low grade 3= mild grade; 4= high grade; 5= very high grade. A total of (655) participants were involved in this research, making up about 10 percent of the daily clients of the four (4) large tourism businesses in Iraq. Even so, from the final analysis, the research overlooked (99) participants as the surveys collected were not adequately finished.

Specialist jury viewpoints, including university employees and professionals with sufficient knowledge of tourist industry operations, have affirmed the relevance of the research tool as to the clarification of the phrases, the validity of the items and the suitability of the paragraphs. The internal validity of the survey products was determined by Nunnally's Cronbach Alpha consistency test with a limit of 0.70. Table 1 shows the Cronbach Alpha test outcomes:

**Table 1.** Cronbach's Alpha Results

	Variables	Items	Cronbach's alpha
"Strategic wellness"	SOC	4	0.786
	INT	4	0.784
	PHY	4	0.842
	EMO	4	0.813
	SPR	4	0.842
	OCP	4	0.861
Strategic wellness Items			24.1
"Sustainable Marketing"	"Supply "	8	0.845
	"Production "	9	0.891
	"Distribution "	13	0.922
<b>"Sustainable Marketing "</b>		<b>30</b>	
<b>"Total "</b>		<b>54</b>	

As can be seen in Table 1, the survey comprises of 54 elements, 24 elements are the independent variables (six wellness measures are obtained from the literary works) and 30 elements are the dependent variable of sustainable marketing. According to Ateke and Kalu (2016) supply, production and distribution components are the dependent variable separated into three components.

## Results

Table 2 shows the outcomes of hypotheses 1 to 6 aimed at examining the connection between sustainable marketing and six components of tourism clients ' strategic well-being.



**Table 2.** Correlation Coefficients Matrix

Independent Variable	Dependent Variables	SOC	INT	PHY	EMO	SPR	OCP	SW
<b>Supply</b>	Pearson Correlation	.708	.721	.769	.617	.846	.667	.788
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	654	654	654	654	654	654	654
<b>Production</b>	Pearson Correlation	.522	.635	.651	.646	.789	.574	.649
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	654	654	654	654	654	654	654
<b>Distribution</b>	Pearson Correlation	.621	.681	.732	.823	.491	.581	.711
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	654	654	654	654	654	654	654
<b>Sustainable Marketing</b>	Pearson Correlation	.869	.834	.591	.613	.689	.756	.752
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	654	654	654	654	654	654	654

As indicated in above table, the findings show that all hypotheses of the study are accepted. These findings indicate that sustainability marketing (SM) has a positive correlation with social well-being (.869), intellectual well-being (.834), physical well-being (.591), emotional well-being (.613), spiritual well-being (.689), and occupational well-being (.756), and SM has been strongly associated with strategic wellness (.752). in addition, the sustainability components (supply, production, and distribution) are also strongly associated with the clients ' strategic well-being in the tourism sector. The findings show that as an autonomous variable, strategic wellness was strongly associated with supply (.689), production (.646) and distribution (.711) respectively.

The second section of this research is the analysis of multiple regression, which examines the mutual effect on the dependent variable of independent variables. Using the multiple regression model; H7 is analyzed.

**Table 3.** Summary of regression Model

Model Summary b				
Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error
1	.756a	.572	.374	8.41285
a. Predictors: (Constant), SOC, INT, PHY, EMO, SPR, OCP				
b. Dependent Variable: SM				

The R2 score in Table 1 is 0.57, then the outcome implies that the autonomous factors (dimensions Strategic Wellness) can explain 57 percent of the deviation in the dependent variable (SM) together (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2013; Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016).





**Table 4.** ANOVA Results of H:7

ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1228.912	6	204.818	2.983	.021b
	Residual	920.088	13	70.777		
	Total	2148.000	19			
a. Dependent Variable: SM						
b. Predictors: (Constant), SOC, INT, PHY, EMO, SPR, OCP						

This model examines the hypothesis 7 which is as illustrated: Table 5 demonstrates the outcomes of the multiple regression model:

H0: there is no a significant correlation between SOC, INT, PHY, EMO, SPR, and OCP and sustainable marketing of tourist industry firms (SM).

**Table 5.** Correlation coefficients of H:7

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	18.873	23.277		.812	.433
	SOC	-.091	.176	-.182	-.512	.119
	INT	.268	.164	.638	1.632	.125
	PHY	-.073	.107	-.138	-.678	.108
	EMO	.067	.081	.161	.842	.414
	SPR	.013	.111	.026	.125	.102
	OCP	-.048	.168	-.086	-.288	.076

Given that  $p < .05$ , H7 is accepted, which indicate that there is a significant correlations between the Social wellness (SOC), Intellectual wellness (INT), Physical wellness (PHY), Emotional wellness (EMO), Spiritual wellness (SPR), and Occupational wellness (OCP) and sustainable marketing (SM).,  $F(6,13) = 2.984$ ,  $p < .05$ , where the F statistic (2.984) is larger than the critical F value(2.915)". Thus, we dismiss the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis at a meaning point of 0.05 because F should be equal to or lower than the critical F value. The multiple regression analysis performed on the data set from 655 Iraqi healthcare customers clearly the following empirical findings as presented in tables 1, 2, and 3. The results indicate that there is a relationship between the Social wellness (SOC), Intellectual wellness (INT), Physical wellness (PHY), Emotional wellness (EMO), Spiritual wellness (SPR), and Occupational wellness (OCP) and sustainable marketing (SM)". We can therefore conclude that there is a beneficial connection between the healthcare sector's strategic wellness and sustainable marketing in Iraq. Therefore, finding a important joint connection between the strategic wellness dimension as a whole and the dependent variable (SM) is logical.

## Conclusion

The psychological well-being is an integral part of health and is defined as "a state of wellness in which an individual achieves his or her own abilities, can cope with the stresses of normal life, be able to work positively and fruitfully, and can contribute to society." Psychological wellness provides a basis for feelings, thoughts, impressions, knowledge, communication relationships and positive



behaviors. Therefore, psychological wellness is not only desirable in itself, but also a source of bringing, protecting and accumulating human, physical, natural and social capital. The primary goal of this research was to investigate the connection between sustainable marketing and clients' strategic well-being in the tourism sector. Thus, social, mental, physical, mental, spiritual and occupational components have been examined as an autonomous variable, the relationship between viable advertising as a dependent variable and six components of wellness. This research took a client-oriented stance in the research of strategic health, whereby the customer's private attributes were considered rather than the service suppliers, and consumers.

In order to reach the research goals, a semi-structured survey was prepared on the basis of the prior literary works on the major variables. The survey was allocated to 655 of the regular clients of the large four tourist industry firms in Iraq. The findings showed a beneficial connection between tourism firms' viable marketing approach and the clients' strategic well-being. The research shows that the six components (social, mental, physical, mental, spiritual, and occupational components of strategic wellness) were positively associated with sustainable marketing. These findings indicate that the components of Iraqi clients' personal health play a significant part in enhancing the sustainable marketing of tourist businesses, thus affecting the competitive advantage of such businesses and the extent of foreign direct investment throughout the tourist sector.

This research has a number of contributions in advance of the notion of sustainable marketing policy in the tourism sector and the creation of destination strategic policy for local and international tourism businesses. The first conclusion was that the findings demonstrate that the amount and destination of visitors are significant predictors of client wellness and an efficiently sustainable marketing policy. Furthermore, as far as the results of strategic wellness assessment are concerned, the six components of wellness influence marketing strategies and may disclose the visitor journey desire, as the views and expectations of visitors impact their decision-making mechanisms concerning the target. Thus, tourism firms' leadership should recognize and comprehend the tourists' primary characteristics and must therefore undertake a more attentive and thorough assessment of those characteristics in order to attract visitors. In addition, due to the high significance of clients' strategic well-being in the tourism context as uncovered in this research, tourist destination designers must acknowledge the significance of tourists' multi-dimensional well-being when designing destination policies.

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