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Ranking Factors Influencing Sustainable Marketing in the Caspian Sea Export Market Using Best-Worst Method

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History: Received 20 March 2021 Received in revised form 6 April 2021 Accepted 14 May 2021 Available online 4 June 2021</p>	<p>The significance of sustainability has increased to the extent that it has received special attention in the field of marketing. The objective of this research is to evaluate and rank the factors influencing sustainable marketing in the Caspian Sea export domain. In this regard, the most important criteria for each dimension of sustainable marketing were identified using existing articles, and the final ranking was done using the best-worst method. The results indicate that in the economic dimension of sustainable marketing, seven indicators including product price growth rate at the market level, sales profitability, discount level, product price ratio to the main competitor's product price, number of marketing communication tools, company's product differentiation ratio to the market average, and distribution level were ranked. In the social dimension of sustainable marketing, seven criteria including customer satisfaction ratio, customer loyalty coefficient, employee turnover coefficient, market research cost percentage, awareness level, complaint share, and customer-centric importance to employees were ranked. In the environmental dimension of sustainable marketing, six criteria including waste share for recycling, average equipment lifespan, biofuel resources, green production share in total company production, environmental innovations share in total company innovations, and asset depreciation coefficient were ranked.</p>
<p>Keywords: Sustainable Marketing, Sustainability, Best-Worst Method.</p>	

1. INTRODUCTION

Statistics and results indicate that environmental issues and environmental preservation have become one of the most important criteria considered by consumers when making purchases. Consequently, environmental issues have entered the marketing concepts, giving rise to the emergence of an approach called sustainable marketing [1]. Upon entering the new millennium, an evaluation report of the pre-millennial ecosystem showed that despite all efforts, many challenges still exist in overcoming the consequences of global poverty on a planet whose fertility has weakened and is in decline due to damage to systems and depleted natural resources [2]. These challenges have raised serious concerns among thinkers about the destruction of the environment by humans, a historical environment that has been influenced in all aspects [3]. These concerns, rooted in the industrial and technological development of humanity, have led to the emergence of a new paradigm known as the sustainability paradigm in various fields. This paradigm, aligned with meeting human needs in the post-industrial or post-modern era, follows

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the sustainability model [4]. The emergence of this paradigm was officially recognized in the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development), which emphasized the concept of sustainable development and clarified that existing global approaches to economic development, production systems, and consumption patterns are environmentally and socially unsustainable [5]. The development and widespread adoption of this paradigm has led many business sectors in the last two decades to feel the effects of sustainability in their specialized areas of activity [6].

The trend of developing the sustainability paradigm in business began with large industries, as concerns about pollution, environmental degradation, the depletion of natural resources, and population growth affected major industries such as oil, chemicals, and automotive. Subsequently, these concerns impacted other industries, including household appliances, personal care products, the tourism industry, and the food industry, accelerating sustainability in those areas. On the other hand, intensified competition in international markets has led various companies to face numerous challenges, some of which stem from the inability or weakness of companies to engage in marketing activities based on the new millennium paradigm [7]. These factors have led to the dominance of the sustainability concept as a millennium paradigm, and many companies and organizations have embraced social responsibility as a prerequisite for sustainability and incorporated it into their agenda. Thus, due to the prevalence of the sustainability concept as the millennium paradigm and the emergence of the green approach, companies and organizations in various sectors have become interested in improving their readiness for successful and effective participation in new conditions by changing their approach, strategies, reviewing processes and products, and value chains [8].

The examination of the dimensions and aspects of sustainable marketing shows that this concept is essentially a unified composite paradigm of marketing concepts and models that, if realized, can achieve sustainable marketing [9]. Witnessing this, the dimensions of sustainable marketing mean social, environmental, and economic dimensions or the customer, each of which has specialized marketing models and concepts in the marketing literature, explained by various models. In other words, achieving the concept of sustainable marketing occurs when some marketing models are placed in a unified framework and, through their implementation, provide the conditions for sustainable development in marketing or, in other words, sustainable marketing [10].

The concept of sustainable marketing is increasingly gaining popularity as it obliges companies to create a pattern for responsible consumption among consumers. Customers are becoming increasingly concerned about environmental issues and are moving towards producers of goods and services that adhere to environmental requirements in their products. This indicates that assessing the level of sustainable marketing development among different companies can be a reliable way to evaluate long-term competition among companies [11]. To achieve these goals, it is essential to first reach a final conclusion about the factors influencing the development of sustainable marketing in the framework of studies. In fact, identifying and correctly selecting these factors will enable the allocation of company resources and capital in the right direction, focusing on the most important issues. The presence of less important factors should not distract us from addressing the main and compelling issues of the company. Therefore, this research will focus on evaluating the factors influencing sustainable marketing in the export sector of the Caspian Sea region.

The evolution of sustainable marketing began in 1975 at the University of Pennsylvania with the concept of "Ecological Marketing," emphasizing environmental issues such as pollution, natural depletion, and the impact of pesticides on the environment. In the 1980s, "Environmental Marketing" emerged, focusing on the use of clean technology, understanding the green consumer, and incorporating environmental and social performance as the basis for competitive advantage in some studies. In general, the evolution of sustainable marketing strategies started with the concepts of marketing and social marketing. The concept of environmental marketing evolved into green and environmental marketing with the aim of sustainable marketing. Now, in the third phase of green marketing, "Sustainable Marketing" is introduced to promote economic and sustainable development. Ultimately, all concepts converge into sustainable marketing and its economic, social, and environmental dimensions [12].

It is evident from various sources and literature that significant transformations have occurred due to sustainable marketing. The key developments, referred to as characteristics of sustainable marketing, are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Some Features of Sustainable Marketing vs. Conventional Marketing (Khodadad Hosseini et al., 2014)

Conventional marketing features	Characteristics of sustainable marketing	row
Attention and focus on economic and financial issues	Attention to environmental-social issues along with economic issues	1
To meet the needs of customers	Alignment of environmental and social needs and requirements with customer needs	2
Establishing stable relationships with customers	Establishing sustainable relationships with customers, environment and society	3
Formation and development of customer database	Formation and development of databases related to environmental and social data in addition to the customer database	4
Focusing on economic issues and intra-organizational relations	Changing the focus of the trend from social issues to political and environmental issues and extra-organizational relations	5
Exploiting the present with a focus on the future	Continuous and long-term use of time	6

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Anwar and Albasuni (2020), in their study titled "Marketing and Sustainable Development Goals: An Investigation and Research Framework," delved into the role of businesses, particularly marketing, in achieving sustainable development. In addition, this research provided a framework for marketers on how to incorporate sustainable development goals into their business frameworks. The approach of this research is concept-oriented, emphasizing the evolution of intellectual marketing paradigms, sustainability, and marketing, with mutual references to sustainable development goals. The present study aligns its research statements with sustainable development goals [14]. Therefore, this research proves engaging for various audiences, including marketers, company managers, non-profit organizations, and the academic community. Kurtom and Mahrous (2020), in their study titled "Sustainable Marketing: A Marketing Revolution," demonstrate that while marketing and sustainability may seem different, evidence suggests that these two fields have much to offer to each other and the world. Considering this synergistic outcome, this research suggests that sustainable marketing, as an academic discipline and management practice, should be purposeful and meticulously directed to position itself as a prominent potential for a marketing revolution [15].

Certainly, a sustainable marketing revolution can shine and thrive, preventing its failure through various mechanisms of marketing research and managerial actions. Gubinova et al. (2019) in their research titled "Green Markets and Their Role in Sustainable Marketing Management" argue that in recent years, the principles of social responsibility have become a tool for distinguishing employment programs concerning the sustainable development of future societies [16]. One significant cultural trend on the eve of the third millennium is the shift in consumers' attitudes toward environmental issues. This trend is documented through numerous studies worldwide. In Slovakia, the examination of public attitudes toward addressing surrounding issues and its impact on consumer behavior and organizational behaviors has gradually become a fundamental concern. The objective of this research is a comparative indirect synthesis of the interests and attitudes of green market consumers regarding consumption. Vinzens et al. (2019), in their study titled "Sustainable Tourism Marketing: The Role of Value Orientation, Well-being, and Credibility," utilized data from 237 tourism companies. Using structural modeling, the necessary analysis was conducted [17]. The research results indicate that the value, well-being, and credibility of a tourism destination influence sustainable tourism marketing. The purpose of the research by Wafi et al. (2019) was to examine the "Impact of Perceived Sustainable Marketing Policies on Green Customer Satisfaction." Data analysis was conducted based on Pearson correlation coefficient and linear regression analysis using SPSS 21 software [17]. The results show that the correlation between perceived sustainable marketing policies and green customer satisfaction is more than 0.6. Additionally, regression analysis confirms that perceived sustainable marketing policies positively impact green customer satisfaction. Thus, sustainability is a crucial factor for companies to attract customer satisfaction and, consequently, gain a competitive advantage over competitors.

The research by Atwal et al. (2019), titled "Examining the State of Sustainable Luxury Research in Marketing and Consumer Behavior," critically evaluates scientific work in the field of sustainable luxury marketing. This research critically evaluates where, how, and by whom research on sustainable extravagance is conducted and

identifies gaps for future research. It scrutinizes research published between 2007 and 2018 in key English-language academic journals in business, marketing, ethics, fashion, food, and tourism using keywords like sustainable luxury, green luxury, environmentally friendly luxury, and organic luxury. Three main themes emerge from this review: (1) Consumer concerns and behaviors, (2) Organizational concerns and behaviors, and (3) International and cross-cultural issues. Finally, the research provides recommendations for enhancing sustainable marketing [18].

Alabbadi et al. (2019) aimed to investigate the "Integration of Strategic Well-being and Sustainable Marketing for Achieving Competitive Advantage in the Iraqi Tourism Industry." The data collected from 655 responses of tourism customers were considered. Findings indicate a positive correlation between sustainable marketing and the strategic well-being of Iraqi tourism customers and the components of customer well-being in tourism marketing strategies. These findings also demonstrate that the dimensions of companies' strategic well-being play a vital role in strengthening sustainable marketing in tourism businesses, affecting their competitive advantage and foreign investment in the Iraqi tourism sector [19].

Lam and Lee (2019) in their research titled "Green Marketing for Growth and Sustainable Development" analyze the state of green marketing in these ports through the lens of green marketing theories, reflecting their strategies, structures, and functions. A case analysis was performed to identify patterns and trends in different ports, leading to the orientation of green marketing. The results show that more than 30 ports are involved in green marketing. However, most ports focus on strategies and less on structures and functions, prompting the recommendation to address all three aspects [20].

Saravanan et al. (2018) in their study titled "Biofuel Policy in India: Examining Policy Barriers in Sustainable Biofuel Marketing" state that global warming due to the combustion of fossil fuels directs the world towards producing renewable and environmentally friendly fuels from sustainable raw materials. Various actions have been taken at different levels to reduce global warming, including clean energy from wind, solar, and biomass. The realization of these technologies has various aspects, including technological development, economic feasibility, environmental sustainability, and ultimately government support through effective policies and public awareness. In this context, this research initially addresses the current status of energy demand, advances in biofuel resources, and challenges in the production and commercialization of microalgae biofuels. While India is progressing, adopting a specific law to tackle challenges in sustainable biofuel marketing may be challenging [21].

5. Factors Affecting Sustainable Marketing

The most significant factors influencing sustainable marketing are outlined as follows (Table 2):

Table 2. Key Factors Affecting Sustainable Marketing

Agents	Marketing sustainability factors
The ratio of the company 's product to the average level of the market	Economic factors
Price growth index Product to the overall level of price growth in the market	
price ratio The product is at the same price as the original product	
Discount level	
Profitable sales	
The level of radiation	Social factors
The number of water market communication tools	
The percentage of water market research fees	
The cost of customer loyalty	
Your share of doubt	
Customer satisfaction ratio	
Level of recognition	Environmental factors
Aware of the importance of customer orientation in employees	
Cost of employee turnover	
Depreciation rate of fixed assets	
Average life of equipment	
d Green in the total production of the company	
The share of environmental innovations in the total innovation of the company	Environmental factors
Garbage share for the game	
Sources of biofuels	

3. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

In this study, we initially reviewed library resources and articles in the field of marketing, aligning them with sustainability concepts to formulate the most significant criteria (factors) influencing sustainable marketing. Subsequently, employing the Best-Worst Method (BWM) and with the assistance of 10 experts in the field of maritime exports, the final evaluation and ranking of criteria are conducted.

Best-Worst Method (BWM):

This research utilizes a novel decision-making method called the Best-Worst Method (BWM) to determine the superior criteria for sustainable marketing. This method, introduced by Rezaei (2015), is one of the latest multi-criteria decision-making approaches.

Steps of BWM:

1. Determination of Decision-Making Criteria
2. Identification of the Best and Worst Criteria In this step, experts choose the best and worst criteria. The best criterion represents the most desirable, while the worst criterion signifies the least desirable in terms of significance and importance.
3. Pairwise Comparisons between the Best Criteria and Other Criteria In this step, the degree of preference of the best criterion over other criteria is determined using numbers from 1 to 9, and the Best To Others (BTO) matrix is formed.
4. Pairwise Comparisons between Other Criteria and the Worst Criteria In this step, the degree of preference of other criteria compared to the worst criterion is established using numbers from 1 to 9, and the Others To Worst (OTW) matrix is formed.
5. Determination of Optimal Weights The weight of each criterion is calculated using the following formula:

Equation (1)

$$\min \max_j \left\{ \left| \frac{w_B}{w_j} - a_{Bj} \right|, \left| \frac{w_j}{w_w} - a_{jw} \right| \right\}, \text{ s. t. } \sum_j w_j = 1 \tag{1}$$

4. RESULTS

Determination of Decision-Making Criteria In this section, the most influential criteria on marketing are categorized using appropriate symbols (Table 3).

Table 3. Determination of Decision-Making Criteria

Agents	symbol	Marketing sustainability factors
Price growth index Product to the overall level of market price growth	C1	Economic factors
The ratio of the company 's product to the average level of the market	C 2	
price ratio The product is at the same price as the original product	C 3	
The level of radiation	C 4	
Profitable sales	C 5	
Discount level	C6	
The number of water market communication tools	C7	
The percentage of water market research fees	S1	Social factors
The importance of customer orientation in employees	S 2	
Your share of doubt	S 3	
Level of recognition	S 4	
Customer satisfaction ratio	S5	
The cost of customer loyalty	S6	
Cost of employee turnover	S7	

d Green in the total production of the company	E1	Environmental factors
Average life of equipment	E2	
Depreciation rate of fixed assets	E3	
The share of environmental innovations in the total innovation of the company	E4	
Sources of biofuels	E5	
Garbage share for the game	E6	

5. IDENTIFICATION OF THE BEST AND WORST CRITERIA

Through the consensus of experts, the best and worst criteria for each dimension of sustainability affecting marketing are determined (Table 4).

Table 4. Most Important and Least Important Criteria Influencing Sustainable Marketing

The least important criterion	The most important criterion	Dimensions of sustainability
The level of radiation	Product price growth index to the overall level of market price growth	Economic factors
The importance of customer orientation in employees	Customer satisfaction ratio	Social factors
Depreciation rate of fixed assets	The share of garbage for the game of fall	Environmental factors

7. PAIRWISE COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE BEST CRITERIA AND OTHER CRITERIA

In this stage, experts were asked to prioritize the best criterion for each dimension relative to other criteria (Table 5).

Table 5. Pairwise Comparisons between the Best Criteria and Other Criteria

C7	C6	C5	C4	C3	C2	C1	The most important = criterion C1	Economic factors
4	3	2	9	3	5	1	The most important = criterion S5	Social factors
S7	S6	S5	S4	S3	S2	S1		
4	3	1	2	9	3	5	The most important = criterion E6	Environmental factors
E6	E5	E4	E3	E2	E1			
1	6	3	5	9	2			

8. PAIRWISE COMPARISONS BETWEEN OTHER CRITERIA AND THE WORST CRITERIA

Similar to the previous stage, this time, the criteria for each dimension will be compared with the worst criterion of that dimension (Table 6).

Table 6. Pairwise Comparisons between Other Criteria and the Worst Criteria

Environmental factors = The worst environmental criterion E3		Social factors = Worst social measure S2		Economic factors = The worst economic criterion C4	
9	E1	9	S1	9	C1
8	E2	1	S2	4	C2
1	E3	8	S3	6	C3
6	E4	6	S4	1	C4
5	E5	5	S5	8	C5
4	E6	5	S6	6	C6
		4	S7	4	C7

9. DETERMINATION OF CRITERIA WEIGHTS

In this stage, using Equation (1), the weights for all criteria are determined (Table 7):

Table 7. Optimal Weights of Criteria

Environmental factors		Social factors		Economic factors	
0/068153	E ₁	0/1093507	S ₁	0.26404640	C₁
0/3091261	E ₂	0/0282828	S ₂	0/0822336	C₂
0/0316777	E ₃	0/0727682	S ₃	0/16141120	C₃
0/0537142	E ₄	0/1061177	S ₄	0/0249122	C₄
0/2280029	E ₅	0/2824878	S ₅	0/1978031	C₅
0/3093261	E ₆	0/2157405	S ₆	0/1696523	C₆
		0/1852523	S ₇	0/0999213	C₇

10. CONCLUSION

The purpose of conducting this research was to evaluate and rank the factors influencing sustainable marketing in the Caspian Sea export domain. In this regard, the most important criteria for each dimension of sustainable marketing were identified using existing articles in the field, and the final ranking was performed using the Best-Worst method.

The research results indicate that the most critical criterion in the economic dimension of sustainable marketing is the product price growth index at the overall market level. This underscores the significance of proper pricing policies in achieving the economic goals of companies. Profitability of sales holds the second position, influencing companies to experience fewer financial concerns. In the third rank, the discount level criterion, entirely influenced by the product price, impacts both profit and customer attraction positively. The fourth position is occupied by the ratio of the product price to the competitor's product price, drawing attention to competitor pricing. The fifth rank includes the number of marketing communication tools, emphasizing the establishment of better customer relationships and easier product distribution through effective communication. The sixth rank considers the differentiation of the company's product compared to the market average, highlighting the importance of the type of products offered. The seventh rank involves the distribution level, indicating the necessity of meeting market needs and presenting a specific volume of products.

In the social dimension of sustainable marketing, the customer satisfaction ratio criterion holds the highest rank, contributing to the company's credibility. Loyalty coefficient takes the second position, proving beneficial for the continued life of the company. The third rank is dedicated to the employee turnover ratio, emphasizing that attention to this criterion enhances employee morale. In the fourth position, the percentage of marketing research costs reminds us of the importance of proper marketing. The fifth rank considers the level of awareness, conveying the significance of stakeholder awareness. The sixth rank includes the share of complaints, placing importance on addressing criticisms to rectify shortcomings. Lastly, the importance of customer-centricity in employees is in the seventh position, emphasizing the need for emotional connection between customers and employees. Among the environmental dimensions, the share of waste for recycling holds the first position, reducing a significant volume of environmental pollution. The second rank involves the average equipment lifespan, highlighting the necessity of using the best facilities. The third rank focuses on biofuel resources, emphasizing the importance of biofuels and attention to their future scarcity. The fourth position is occupied by the share of green production in the company's total production, requiring the presentation of products with the least pollution to the market. The fifth rank includes the share of environmental innovations in the company's total innovation, which can reduce potential pollution. Finally, in the sixth position, the depreciation coefficient of fixed assets is considered, indicating the use of equipment with minimal breakdowns and pollution.

Transparency Statement

The data supporting this study are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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