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A Model for the Realization of Sustainable Marketing

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Abstract: Purpose: The present article aims at designing an integrated model for the realization of sustainable marketing in Iranian automotive industry. **Design/methodology/approach:** First of all, the existing literature was analyzed and the initial framework was designed for the realization of sustainable marketing. Then, using qualitative methodology tools such as open questionnaires and in-depth interviews with experts familiar with the subject, the initial model was developed and a comprehensive model was proposed for the realization of sustainable marketing. Then, through holding the focus group meetings, the final revised conceptual model was designed for the realization of sustainable marketing. As the last step, the model was extensively examined and confirmed through field survey. **Findings:** The results show that among the various marketing models, internal marketing, integrated cultural marketing, strategy-driven marketing, ethical marketing and altruistic marketing models are effective on the realization of sustainable marketing. **Originality/value:** Currently, the two concepts of sustainable development and process integration have greatly influenced the business environment. Both marketing as one of the business sciences and automotive industry as a key industry and one of the poles of production have also been affected by these developments.

Keywords: Sustainability; Integrated Marketing; Internal Marketing; Automotive Industry

1. Introduction

As we entered the new millennium, the Ecosystem Assessment Report for the previous millennium showed that, despite all efforts, there are still many challenges to overcome the plague of global poverty on a planet whose fertility capacity is weakened and declined due to damage to natural systems & resources (Belz & Pettie, 2012). These challenges are to the extent that – since last years of the last century - serious and contemplative concerns have attracted the views of many thinkers to the fact that humans are destroying their environment; the environment in which humans have historically lived and relied on in every aspect (Mahshavari, 1999). These concerns, rooted in the industrial and technological development of mankind, have led to the emergence of a new paradigm, called the sustainability

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paradigm, in various fields; a paradigm that is appropriate to meet human needs in the post-industrial or post-modern era, with its model being the sustainability model (Zahedi & Najafi, 2006). The emergence of this paradigm was recognized in Brundtland Commission Report (WCED).; a report that brought the concept of sustainable development to the forefront and made clear that the previously existing world approaches to economic development, production systems and consumption patterns are environmentally and socially unstable (Kalantar, 2006).

some developments also occurred in the marketing world. In Kotler and Armstrong's view, in the new millennium, as the level of customer awareness increased, the definition of marketing shifted from traditional interpretations to constructing and establishing lasting and profitable long-term relationships with customers. Since respect for the components of sustainable development and supplying them became one of the implicit needs of present-day customers, the concept called sustainable marketing became a necessity for all the new millennium companies (Jones et al., 2011). Sustainable Marketing seeks to create more value for its target customers by creating social and environmental values (Belz, 2006). This is why the number of companies that have recognized the necessity of the role of sustainability and considered it as an essential complementary component in their market strategies has currently increased (Jones et al, 2008; Abigail, 2011).

An examination of the dimensions and pillars of sustainable marketing shows that this concept is, in fact, an integrated hybrid paradigm of marketing concepts and models; in case these models and concepts are realized, sustainable marketing will also be possible (Belz, 2006). It is witnessed by the pillars of sustainable marketing, i.e. the social dimension, the environmental dimension, and the economic dimension or customer, each of which has its own models and concepts in the world of marketing literature and is explained by a set of models. In other words, the concept of sustainable marketing is realized when some marketing models are integrated into a single format and, by playing a role and being implemented, enable sustainable development to be achieved in marketing, or more exactly in sustainable marketing.

Therefore, given the importance of the automotive industry in the development of each country's economy and the enormous changes in the basic concepts of marketing in the new millennium as well as the need to monitor and guide sustainability plans in marketing, the present study – taking advantage of the qualitative and quantitative mixed methods and adopting the necessary steps – seeks to identify the types of marketing effective on the realization of sustainable marketing in an integrated format and to develop and validate an appropriate conceptual model for monitoring automotive marketing plans in this industry.

2. Research Methodology

Given the content and ontology of the research, the methodology of this research is a combined qualitative-quantitative one. Given the qualitative method in the first phase of the research, the statistical population of this study consisted of experts and university professors related to the area of sustainable marketing whose views were used in several steps such as in-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires (11 people) and focus groups (two 6-person sessions) in order to extract and validate the conceptual model of the research. In the second step and after some research, a closed questionnaire was used. According to the rule of sampling from an infinite population based on Morgan table and Cochran formula, the expected sample size is 386 persons. However, since the model analysis tool is the Structural Equation System and in order to obtain valid results when using this system, it is necessary to provide 5 -10 answers (or in some sources 20 answers) on the basis of various sources, and because

the final questionnaire of this research has 67 questions, so given the sizes of 5 to 10, a total of 335 to 670 automotive industry experts and specialists can normally be a desirable sample of this research (Hooman, 2005; Hanafizadeh & Zare Ravasan, 2012). After the consensus and finalization of the model in the qualitative phase of the research, the final model was drawn and the model testing process was quantitatively introduced in the automotive industry with a prescriptive approach. Out of 750 questionnaires distributed to different automobile companies in different provinces, 515 questionnaires were completed and returned. Given the sample size rule in the Structural Equation System, the return rate of the questionnaires is 7.68 per question, with an approximation of 8, which is a relatively good fit for the sample size, considering its proximity to number 10 and the available capacity in the target population.

From a process point of view, Figure 1 was used as the research process. In terms of validity and reliability, in the first phase which was done in a qualitative manner, the opinions of experts and the existing literature were relied on for confirming the validity of the work. In the quantitative phase, appropriate statistical methods including Cronbach's alpha (the value of which being 80% for this study) were used to confirm the reliability of the research questionnaire. Further, Content Validity was confirmed by taking advantage of experts' views, and the Structural Equation System and Path Analysis were used for confirming the Construct Validity, the results of which are provided below.

3. Identifying Effective Marketing Models on Sustainable Marketing Realization

For this purpose, first of all, sustainable marketing literature was extracted and collected. Given the novelty of the subject of sustainable marketing, it was not possible to access multiple sources in this field, and the searches by the researches provided only few sources that had investigated and analyzed sustainable marketing.

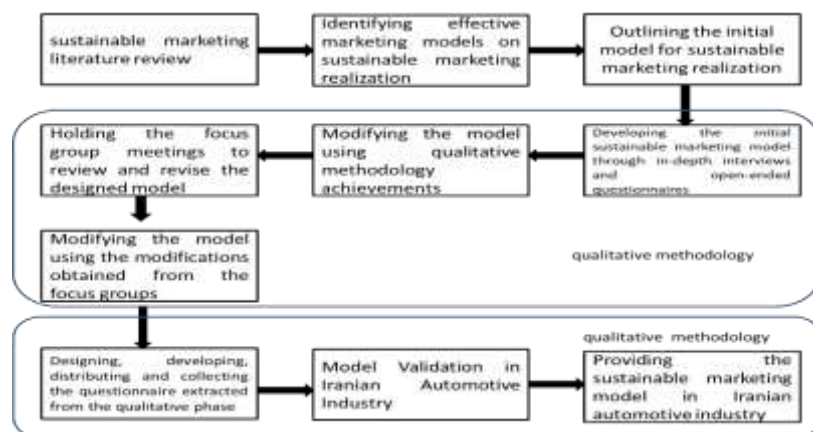


Figure 1. The Process of Designing a Model for the Realization of Sustainable Marketing

Accordingly, based on these collected sources, the models and factors affecting the realization of sustainable marketing from the researchers' point of view were identified and extracted. These studies show that the two models including “internal marketing” and “cultural marketing” are effective in achieving sustainable marketing. The sources that have examined and confirmed this effectiveness are as follows.

- The Impact of Internal Marketing on Sustainable Marketing (Jones et al., 2008; Mendleson & Polonsky, 1995; Fry & Polonsky, 2004; Polonsky & Ottman, 1998; Crane, 1998).
- The Impact of Internal Marketing on Cultural Marketing (Hogg et al., 1998; Gummesson, 1987)

- The Impact of Cultural Marketing on Sustainable Marketing (Pelham, 2011; Moisander &Valtonen, 2006; Moisander, 2001, Baumgartner, 2009; Dryzek, 2005; Strategic Direction, 2011; Charter, 2002). The Outlining the initial sustainable marketing model is presented in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Outlining the Initial Sustainable Marketing Model

4. Developing the Initial Sustainable Marketing Model through In-depth Interviews and Open-Ended Questionnaires

After analyzing the literature, in the second step, the qualitative phase was examined and analysis of the realization of sustainable marketing as well as the identification of the models affecting it were carried out through in - depth interviews and open - ended questionnaires. In this step, firstly all types of marketing models that somehow had the potential to influence sustainable marketing were identified and entered the interview process.

After conducting in-depth interviews and completing open-ended questionnaires, the impact of each marketing model on the realization of sustainable marketing was analyzed through analyzing and coding the collected data. From the viewpoint of the majority of the experts, of all the marketing models only 9 models were model-sized and homogeneous with internal and cultural marketing and had the capability to fit into the conceptual research model, and the remaining concepts were either the size of marketing techniques or were part of a particular field of marketing. In addition, analyzing the results show that from the experts' point of view, due to its nature and process, internal marketing is also effective on 9 marketing models including green, social, strategy-driven, innovative, ethical, humanitarian, lean, postmodern and chaos models and like sustainable and cultural marketing, it can be effective in realizing these models.

During two sessions, the focus groups held on the outlined model were presented and a detailed discussion was held on it. Also, the second achievement of the focus groups suggests that the concepts of postmodern marketing and chaos marketing go beyond a model and are in fact an approach. In other words, these two approaches are general to other models and somehow are closer to marketing paradigms than to marketing models. Accordingly, for model consistency, these two paradigms were also excluded from the model.

5. Designing a Model for the Realization of Sustainable Marketing Model in Automotive Industry

Accordingly, the modified conceptual model of the research and the final model were depicted in Figure 3 with the aim of achieving sustainable marketing in automotive industry.

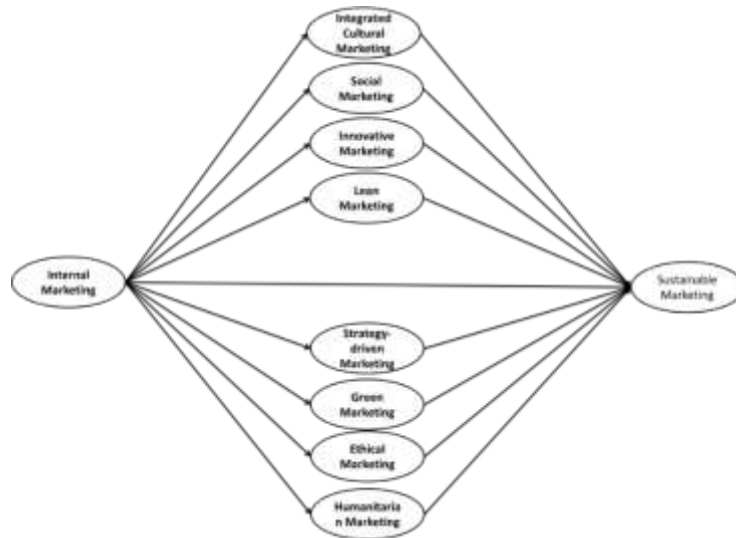


Figure 3. Conceptual Model of Sustainable Marketing in Automotive Industry

6. Model Validation through Field Survey

As mentioned in the qualitative phase of the study, sustainable marketing indicators and also models affecting sustainable marketing along with their indices extracted from the research literature and then the conceptual model of sustainable marketing was localized and approved by the experts. In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was designed based on the model, and field survey was carried out based on it among automakers in different cities. The questionnaire distribution and collection step took approximately one year. After completing this step, the results analysis phase was completed. At this stage, AMOS software was used to examine the relationships and analyze the model.

On a general basis, the analysis of a model in the structural equation system is such that the adequacy of the model is firstly analyzed using the proposed indexes such as model fit indices, model adaptation indices and model economy indices. The indices and statistics proposed by Klein (2005) are: chi square statistic (X^2), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and Standard Root Mean Square Residual (SPMR). The indices proposed by Sun (2005) are: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) or Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), comparative fit index (CFI), MC, and Standard Root Mean Square Residual (SPMR) (Kline, 2005). If the model is validated in terms of these general indices, it is time to consider the significance of the factor loadings of the paths presented in the model. If, from the standpoint of statistics, the value of P and C.R for each variable were significant, we move on to the size of that variable's factor loading. At this stage, each factor loading indicates the impact of the effective variable on the effected variable (Azar & Momeni, 2013). Accordingly, after collecting the questionnaires, the research model was implemented and validated using Structural Equation System.

Examining the significance status of factor loadings indicates that some associations are not significantly acceptable. These cases which are also distinguished in the table indicate that the assumed associations in the model are unacceptable despite their relatively appropriate fit. Accordingly, the schematic of the conceptual model is as described in Figure 4.

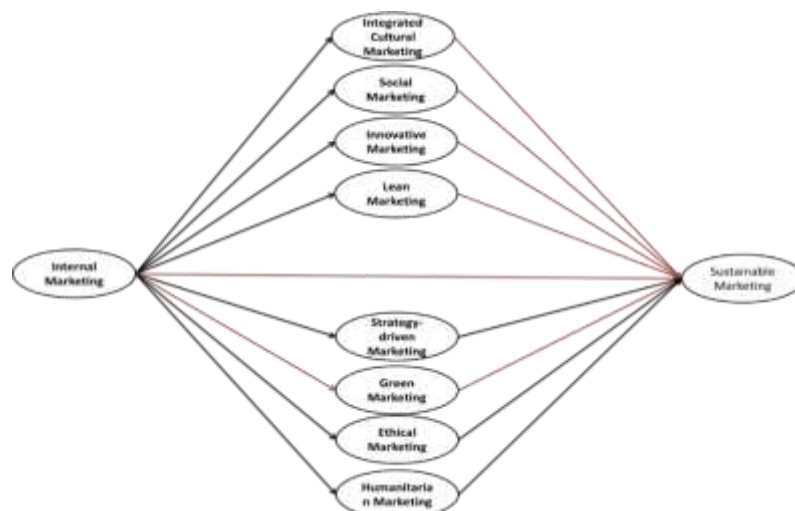


Figure 4. Conceptual Model of the Research after the first Phase through Structural Equations

The dotted lines indicate the insignificance of the associations. Even if one model has a perfect fit, there may be countless other models with which the data fit, and also there are always infinite models that have exactly the same fit (Hooman, 2005; Mir Ghafouri et al., 2013). An attempt was made to perform other analyses by modifying some associations and implement other modes of the model, so that the best model would be selected after comparing them.

Accordingly, different modes were tested, some of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Fit Indices of the Studied Models

Fit indices	Original model	The model after eliminating innovative marketing	The model after eliminating innovative and green marketing	The model after eliminating the direct relationship of internal marketing and sustainable marketing	The model after eliminating green, lean and innovative marketing	The model with three models including ethical, humanitarian and strategy-driven models	The model with three models including ethical, humanitarian and strategy-driven models, as well as integrated cultural marketing
RMSE	0.039	0.037	0.038	0.039	0.040	0.042	0.039
χ^2	3361	2790	2456	3374	1813	1111	1615
df	2124	1811	1580	2128	1117	659	1026
P	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
χ^2/df	1.583	1.541	1.55	1.58	1.624	1.687	1.575
NFI	0.387	0.399	0.399	0.384	0.42	0.450	0.421
CFI	0.621	0.644	0.640	0.619	0.643	0.656	0.655
TLI	0.606	0.628	0.623	0.604	0.624	0.633	0.637
GFI	*	*	*	*	0.844	0.871	0.853
AGFI	*	*	*	*	0.829	0.855	0.839
PGFI	*	*	*	*	0.769	0.755	0.776
RMR	*	*	*	*	0.071	0.073	0.071

As can be seen from the data in the above Table, all models have a relatively good fit; however, the best model should be selected and presented by comparing them. This has been done using the dotted line circles. These circles show the models with a better status with respect to each index. At the very beginning, it can be seen from the distribution of these circles that the three models have a better

condition than others in terms of the fitting statistic. Ho, as seen in the above circles, the first model that has only lost the dimension of innovative marketing is in a better condition than others with respect to RMSEA and χ^2/df indices. However, since it did not provide the main indices such as AGFI, GFI and RMR because of inadequate sample size, and also because in other comparative indices of the models such as NFI, TLI and CFI it was weaker than others, it was eliminated from the comparisons. Of the two remaining models, despite the slight differences, the results show that the five-component ethical, kind, and strategy-oriented marketing model that is the same as the model output after deleting insignificant lines is better in some components. Based on some other results, the six-component model that in addition to the previous components has the integrated cultural marketing which is confirmed by the literature is better than others. This model has a better condition in terms of the sensitive index “TLI” (TLI is used to compare models with an ideal model). Additionally, considering that the important fit indices such as RMSEA and χ^2 / df are in a better condition than the competitor model, and also as the AGFI and GFI indices are acceptable and close to 0.9, and of course given that PGFI and RMR indices of this model are also better than others, so this model is introduced as the validated model for the realization of sustainable marketing in sustainable automotive industry. Therefore, the model for the realization of sustainable marketing in sustainable automotive industry, along with the tables of factor loadings and their significance, is illustrated in Figure 5.

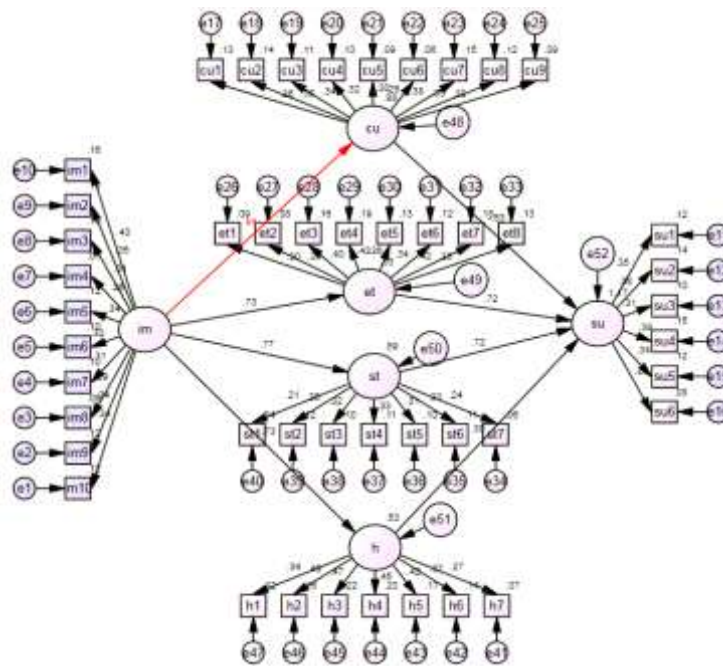


Figure 5. Conceptual Model Examination in Structural Equation System

Therefore, it can be concluded that according to the indices, the schematic of validation and confirmation of the realization of sustainable marketing in automotive industry is as described in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Final Conceptual Model of the Research

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Accordingly, as the first step, the body of literature and foundations in this field were first analyzed. In this phase, data analysis shows that the realization of sustainable marketing has been analyzed using various sources such as cultural and intra-organizational studies in an unstructured way. An interesting and noticeable point in analyzing the achievements of this phase is the placement of internal marketing as the research independent variable. This case which has been realized in other studies shows that internal marketing is the beginning of any change in the marketing system of today's organizations, indicating the importance of the role of human resources and the institutionalization of market-oriented behaviors in them. On the other hand, the congruity of culture with internal marketing and human resources is also interesting; since the study of literature shows that the realization of sustainability in the marketing environment requires cultural and human infrastructures and needs these principles to be institutionalized. After completing the literature review phase, the experts' point of view was used and with the help of qualitative methodology and the related tools such as open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews followed by focus group, the initial model extracted from the literature was completed, pre-validated and made ready for testing and validation in automotive industry. In the output achievements of this phase, the results were obtained, and consequently some interesting analyses were made, some of which are as follows. One of the highlights of this phase again refers to the topic of internal marketing, such that the achievements of this phase also confirm the independence and effectiveness of internal marketing on other marketing models and should be considered as binding for other marketing models. Therefore, it can be concluded from the context of the model obtained in this phase that in the country's automotive industry, manufacturers will not achieve sustainable marketing unless internal marketing is realized and established in the industry. Also, another achievement of this research is the comprehensive and multipurpose concept of sustainable marketing, as the study of the outlined model shows that sustainable marketing will not occur a variety of marketing models are realized in a set; put differently, sustainable marketing can be expected if these models are realized and established. This can be clearly understood from the schematic of the research conceptual model. However, other achievements are also visible, for example the qualitative phase output model shows that out of the 24 extracted models as candidates for affecting sustainable marketing in the first phase, 15 models were eliminated because they were partial or small. Also, the two chaos and postmodern marketing models were eliminated in the phase of examining the focus group because of being paradigm-type and macro. These exclusions made the output model of this phase refined and unified, and a clearer explanation is introduced to the quantitative phase in order to realize sustainable marketing

in automotive industry. Another interesting result obtained in this phase is the consensus of experts on the variables influencing the realization of sustainable marketing. So, in both the interview phase and the focus group phase, the output models were almost unanimously agreed upon by all the experts, and so did the exclusions. That is, of a total of 24 models, there was a significant consensus on rejecting 15 models and accepting the remaining nine models, which indicates the significant validity of the model. Next, in the last step of this research, the designed model was validated through field survey and quantitative methodology in an operational manner at the national auto industry level, and the validated model was proposed for the automotive industry. This step has various structural and statistical achievements due to extensive statistical computation and field testing of the model. One of the structural gains of the model is the insignificance of factor loadings or impact factors of 4 marketing models including lean, social, innovative, and green models for the realization of sustainable marketing in automotive industry. The reasons we can provide for the rejection of these dimensions at the operational level can be found in various contexts. Among these reasons are the lack of familiarity with and mastering in concepts such as lean marketing, innovative marketing, etc. in the automotive industry, and unfamiliarity of this complex with the emergence of this phenomenon in the country's industry. Given the approach of this concept and its holistic view, as some experts acknowledged during the interview, it covers some other marketing concepts such as green marketing, social marketing, etc. because of its dimensions and pervasiveness, and realizes them in its interior as its constituent pillars. Therefore, the insignificance of the impact factor can be attributed to the fact that the association has not been significantly proven. Of course, this is also the case in literature, as Belz, an expert in the field of sustainable marketing, believes that Sustainable marketing in practice encompasses a macro domain and also covers green marketing (Belz, 2006). Another analysis that can be presented in the discussion of model structure is the confirmed structural context in the final step. An examination of the remaining four models that are influenced by internal marketing and affect sustainable marketing shows that all four come from the backbone of human resource issues and internal relationships. This confirms that in fact the realization of a concept called sustainable marketing in the country's automotive industry depends on the will of the managers and human resources of this industry and if this concept is internalized into the context of human resources as well as the internal relationships, it can be realized in this industry.

Among the statistical achievements that the confirmed model has is the appropriate comparative and frugal fit statistics obtained for the model. The main indices that are always approved in modeling problems, such as RMSEA, CFI, GFI, χ^2 / df and TLI which are among the main fit indices of a model, are acceptable and desirable in this model. This indicates the validity and reliability of the model in the automotive industry. From the modeling and statistical point of view, only the p value of the model is weak, which is an optional index in the literature and is commonly dependent on the sample size and is resolved by increasing the sample size (Mo`meni et al., 2013)

Comparing the findings of the present study with other studies, the results can be compared and analyzed in two categories. Based on the findings of the first hypothesis, the results of this study are in line with Gummesson (1987) and Hogg et al. (1998) which indicate the association between internal marketing and its impact on cultural marketing (Hogg et al., 1998; Gummesson, 1987). Also, hypothesis testing results show that the results of the present study are consistent with Pelham (2011), Moisander & Valtonen (2006), Moisander (2001), Baumgartner (2009), Dryzek (2005), Charter et al. (2002), and Strategic Direction (2011), which indicate the association between cultural marketing and sustainable marketing and confirm the presence of this association in automotive industry (Pelham, 2011; Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Moisander, 2001; Baumgartner, 2009; Dryzek, 2005; Charter, 2002; Strategic Direction, 2011)

By the way, in addition to what was previously analyzed, comparisons were made at the end of the study with recent studies. For instance, the results of the present study are consistent with White (2009), Figge et al. (2002), Bonn & Fisher (2011), and Price & Pitt (2011). This means that the results of this study confirm the impact of strategy-driven marketing on sustainable marketing realization (White P, 2009; Figge et al., 2002; Bonn & Fisher, 2011, Price & Pitt, 2011).

In addition, the second hypothesis testing indicates that the results of this study are inconsistent with Jones et al. (2008), Mendleson & Polonsky (2004), Polonsky & Ottman (1998), Crane (1998), which indicates the association between internal marketing and sustainable marketing and shows that contrary to the cases cited in those studies, there is no significant direct association between internal marketing and sustainable marketing in the automotive industry (Jones et al., 2008; Mendleson & Polonsky, 1995; Fry & Polonsky, 2004; Polonsky & Ottman, 1998; Crane, 1998).

Also, other results obtained from testing the research hypotheses and examining the final validated model suggest that - unlike the association stated in Goworek (2011), Gordon (2011), Fokkema et al. (2005), and Porland & Paliwoda (2011) between social responsibilities of marketing or social marketing and sustainable marketing – such association cannot be verified in automotive industry (Goworek., 2011; Gordon., 2011; Fokkema et al., 2005; Borland & Paliwoda, 2011). In addition, these studies show that the association between green marketing and sustainable marketing which can be analyzed in Grant (2008) and Babin & Nicolson (2011), is not confirmed in the present study in the automotive industry (Grant, 2008; Babin & Nicholson, 2011). However, in relation to this disapproval, especially with respect to the two models of social marketing and green marketing, the experts` consensus shows that these marketing models should not be included separately from this concept because of the structure and dimensions of sustainable marketing. To put it simply, observing the principles of marketing such as green marketing, social marketing, and even conventional marketing will ensure the realization of sustainable marketing. Therefore, in terms of modeling, they cannot be considered separately and prove their effect, if any, on sustainability.

As noted above, based on the analysis of the achievements of this study as well as the obtained results, and considering the modeling and prescriptive approach of this study, some suggestions can be made and applied, the most important of which are as follows.

1. Given the discrepancy between the validated model in the qualitative phase and the validated model in the quantitative phase, it is suggested that the automotive industry adopt and implement necessary plans and actions in order to increase the awareness of its human resources, managers, and performance levels regarding the basics of marketing models and also prepare its platform for the realization of concepts such as lean marketing, innovative marketing, and etc. This can be done by promoting the level of awareness and training among employees and benchmarking from leading and similar industries in developed countries in terms of marketing behaviors. For example, we can mention the efforts of European companies and other automakers around the world to adopt environmental standards and use them in marketing and advertising programs. Another example is the Japanese Toyota's fundamental effort to systematically implement the concept of lean marketing in the industry, for which it has produced and published many evidences and results.

2. Another finding of this study which seems to have received insufficient attention is the confirmation of the concept of integrated marketing. Therefore, it is suggested that not only the automobile industry but also other industries take this marketing concept seriously and take it into account in all their market-oriented decision. The concept that has brought a new, synergistic view into today's world of marketing seeks to align and unify all marketing plans of companies - from interior and internal marketing to

exterior and what is considered sustainable marketing in this research; because in this industry, Marketing and Sales Department operates separately from internal units, especially human resources units. This is one of the reasons why this industry is away from the realization of sustainable marketing. The current process disruption has hampered the realization of internal marketing in this industry. The basic strategy for reforming and integrating processes is to develop the market-oriented behavior of this industry in organizational structure and processes. Considering the impact of this type of marketing on all types of marketing and consequently on sustainable marketing and also according to the value of the factor loadings obtained for the influence of this type of marketing on other types of marketing even those that have been eliminated from the final model, the results of the model confirmed in field studies show that Issues related to human, social and cultural resources have the greatest impact on the realization of sustainable marketing in the country's automotive industry. Therefore, it is recommended to pay more attention to this factor and its sub-domains in the automotive sector and to introduce scientific and principled plans to enhance the professionalism of human resources. Accordingly, realization of this issue can only be achieved and executed through reforming the vision and promoting the managers' attitude as well as establishing the concept of internal marketing with the purpose of exploiting it.

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