Article

Fusion of Sustainability in the Tourism Industry for Improved Competitiveness: Investigation of Five-Star Hotels in Kuwait

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Abstract: Examining the influence of adopting sustainability strategies on the competitiveness of five-star hotels operating in the State of Kuwait is the aim of this study. Sustainability strategies are represented by the responsibility towards four components, namely: the society, the employees, the environment, and the customers. The competitiveness variable is represented by hotels' competitive advantage (cost, quality, flexibility, delivery, and creativity). The study is applied to the population of five-star hotels in the state of Kuwait (19 registered at the time of the study), and the final sample consisted of 294 hotel employees, and 360 hotel guests and customers totalling 654 observations. Responses were collected between November 2021 and January 2022 using an electronic questionnaire that was sent by email to hotels' public relations managers for the hotel employees' sample; and it was posted on several social media platforms and tourism forums for the customers' sample. The findings indicate that five-star hotels in Kuwait are committed to sustainability implementation. The results of the regression model show a medium influential power of sustainability criteria in achieving a competitive advantage from both the employees' and customers' perspectives, indicating a statistical relationship between the variables. It is recommended that hotels should take advantage of the conclusions the study has reached in terms of the relationship between sustainability criteria and the achievement of a competitive advantage that would trigger favourable outcomes.

Keywords: sustainability; competitiveness; competitive advantage; hospitality; tourism; five-star hotels; the Middle East; Kuwait

1. Introduction

Sustainability has become a prominent subject in recent years. In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) has proposed 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) for the betterment of our world by 2030. SDGs have replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in 2000 which were the guide for action for global development until 2015. Businesses, industries, and marketplaces no longer retain the luxury of choosing not to be sustainable. Fierce competition, consumers' awareness, and governmental regulations are among the many factors that drive businesses around the world to adopt sustainable practices, and the tourism industry is not an exception (Qiu et al. 2019; Hassan et al. 2021; Han 2021).

Sustainability has emerged as a new trend in the management and marketing literature and practices, as it has formed a new standpoint for scholars and practitioners alike. For example, the marketing mix is now considering the responsibility for the environment, the society, as well as other stakeholders. Current product/service design activities pay growing attention that the product shall not be a source of harm to the society, or the environment during its life-cycle stages. This is evident in various Sustainability Management tools including: Green Marketing, Circular Economy, Corporate Citizenship, Corporate Sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility, Eco Design, Ecolabelling, and many others (Johnson and Schaltegger 2016; Dobrovič et al. 2019). Moreover, recent marketing research in the fields of Experiential Marketing, Brand Management, and Consumer Behaviour embed

sustainability as an important criterion in customer experience evaluation and its influence on positive organisation performance outcomes in the tourism sector as well as in other sectors such as banking, education, FMCGs, and fashion retailing (e.g., Huang et al. 2014; Cavaleri and Shabana 2018; Lee et al. 2019; Barnes et al. 2020; Elmo et al. 2020; Abdelkader and Hassan 2021). Other marketing mix components are also transforming to become more sustainability oriented. Pricing is aligned to different consumer types. The product being developed may add to the cost, but it aims to suit customer segments, the location, promotion, information, and policies. Competent staff are also employed and trained to raise their efficiency to adhere to sustainable responsibilities in their work and attitude (Turkistani 2008). Sustainability with its marketing perspective represents the most obvious task to marketing departments nowadays in their interaction with the surrounding environment. This is due to the significant social and environmental change that has obliged organisations to look at achieving the quality of life for individuals in a manner equal to, if not exceeding, their quest to offer successful products to the market. The modern views of business managers focus on the fact that the functions of their organisations extend to all parts of societies and are not just limited to the boundaries of a product or service (Bakri 2001).

The sustainable responsibility assumed by today's organisations lies within the society, customers, and the environment, given that the economic and profitability responsibility towards shareholders is inevitable (Lee et al. 2019; Han 2021). The responsibility for the society is to identify how much the organisation is oriented to purposeful social activities (cultural, educational, philanthropical, and recreational) through which it can build a society culture and develop and preserve skills and talents. This also extends to gender equality, and data protections and privacy which are among the seven societal problems stated by the UN, and which the UN's 17 SDGs aim to combat. The corporate responsibility for customers is to identify how much existing customers are engaged and the ability to attract and retain new customers. The corporate responsibility towards the environment is to identify how much the organisation has reached in raising awareness of care for the environment and the need to preserve it (Mokadam 2013).

Considering the way businesses have been performing their activities in the past, freely without concerns for their effects on the societies and environments in which they operate, one can argue that the tremendous technological and scientific development witnessed in the environmental and social transformations impose a new era in the so-called knowledge economy. This clearly signifies the important role that businesses play in developing and changing nations, societies, and communities at various levels by means of innovations and scientific discoveries, which demonstrates that business decisions need to be aligned to an ethical framework that limits their negative effects and maximises their positive impacts (Alhassan 2014).

The current study aims to examine the influence sustainability practices on the competitiveness of five-star hotels in the state of Kuwait. Hotels are important players in the hospitality and tourism sector, which in turn is seen as a significant economic catalyst in developed and developing economies alike. The state of Kuwait is where the author currently works, and where significant developments are taking place to diversify the country's economy to be less dependent on Oil and Gas. The services sector (including the tourism and hospitality sector) is deemed to play a major role in such transformation.

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have attempted to conceptualise and articulate competitiveness in various sectors and industries from marketing, human resources management, operations, and financial perspectives. For example, (Gunasekaran et al. 2011) in SMEs; (Anning-Dorson 2016) in services; (Saleh and Alkasabeh 2019; Adel 2018) in banking; (Shegrani 2019) in telecommunications; and (Marakova et al. 2021) in large enterprises. In terms of the tourism and hospitality sector, the literature is also vast (e.g., Crouch and Ritchie 1999; Hassan 2000; Heath 2002; Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto 2005; Gouka 2015; Seguí-

Amortegui et al. 2019; Nguyen et al. 2019; Goffi et al. 2019; Rodríguez-Díaz and Pulido-Fernández 2019; Simbine and Tukamushaba 2020; Streimikiene et al. 2021; Kim et al. 2022; Shariffuddin et al. 2022).

For example, (Saleh and Alkasabeh 2019) discussed social responsibility and its role in increasing competitiveness in relation of the brand image in the banking services sector in Jordan. They concluded that Jordanian banks apply social responsibility criteria, especially responsibility towards the society and the employees. However, there are shortcomings in applying environmental responsibility and customers' responsibility. This is blamed on the restrictions imposed on managers that limited their ability to comply with related sustainability criteria. The study also reported a mediation role for brand image on the dependent variable of bank competitiveness.

Similarly, the role of sustainable responsibility in achieving a competitive advantage in business organisations has been addressed by (Shegrani 2019). In the case study of Mobilis (The Algeria Telecom Mobile Co), Shegrani (2019) aimed to explore the role of sustainable responsibility dimensions (economic, legal, moral, and charitable responsibility) in achieving a competitive advantage (lower cost, reputation, creativity, responsiveness, and quality). The study surveyed the opinions of a sample of 100 employees from various departments, functions, and branches of Mobilis, and reported several results, the most important of which is the statistically significant correlation of the economic dimension, the legal dimension, the ethical dimension, and the charitable dimension in achieving a competitive advantage in Mobilis. The study also provided many suggestions and recommendations, the most important of which are:

- paying attention to developing sustainability to improve the organisation's competitive advantage and thus achieves its objectives,
- establishing a department within the organisational structure for embedding sustainability within the organisational culture,
- the communication of sustainable practices should be intensified in the media, and,
- establishing partnerships with social influencers to communicate the intended marketing and sustainability messages to target customers and the wider public.

Other studies emphasised the role of corporate social responsibility as a source of competitive advantage in large enterprises in Poland (Marakova et al. 2021). The scholars studied 253 large enterprises to find that marketing activities, innovation activities, and the application of corporate social responsibility are key sources of competitive advantage.

With regard to Tourism Destination Competitiveness (TDC), earlier scholars (e.g., Porter 1990; Crouch and Ritchie 1999; Ritchie and Crouch 2003; Hudson et al. 2004; Sigalas et al. 2013; Hanafiah et al. 2015; Crotti and Misrahi 2017; Goffi et al. 2019; Qiu et al. 2020) have attempted to conceptualise TDC for scholarly and practical implications, however, the literature still lacks a consensus on the definitive drivers and underpinnings of the concept. For example, Porter (1990) proposed the seminal 'diamond' model with national-level competitiveness indicators, i.e., factor situations; demand situations; linked and subsidiary industries; and firm tactic, structure, and competition.

On a rather micro-level, (Crouch and Ritchie 1999; Ritchie and Crouch 2003; Hudson et al. 2004; Hanafiah et al. 2015; and Shariffuddin et al. 2022) have focused on the destination competitiveness. In this regard, TDC is claimed to be underpinned by numerous factors including for example, productivity, economic factors, communications, innovations, efficiency, stability, technology, quality, satisfaction, and flexibility. (Goffi et al. 2019) have examined in their study whether sustainability influenced tourism destinations' competitive advantage in developing countries (Brazil). They found that sustainability factors are positively associated with competitiveness. They content that tourism activities are linked to several environmental and socioeconomic problems, and subsequently propose a model of cleaner tourism that favourably affects the economy, the society, and the environment. Goffi et al. (2019, p. 103) emphasise that "Tourist Destination Competitiveness (TDC) cannot be easily conceptualised". This is largely due to the multidimensionality and variety of perspectives to tackle TDC. Creating of value-added products and services

is one perspective as (D'hauteserre 2000) noted earlier. Other perspectives focus on the relationships between TDC, local well-being, preservation of sociocultural and natural capitals (Heath 2002; Dwyer and Kim 2003), environmental sustainability and the important role of partnerships among private and public sectors, NGOs, and citizens of tourist destinations (Hassan 2000). The integrated model suggested by Heath (2002) encompassed the competitiveness foundations, the key success drivers, the tourism strategic framework, and lastly, the key building blocks of marketing and sustainable development strategies. In this study, (Sigalas et al. 2013; Goffi et al. 2019; and Qiu et al. 2020) notions of TDC at a micro level are adopted where the criteria of cost, quality, flexibility, delivery, and innovation are used to capture hotels' competitiveness. It is beyond the capacity of the current study to examine TDC at a national level due to manpower, time, and cost limitations. In addition, all micro-level underpinnings of TDC are beyond examination by a single study due to their disparity.

Based on the above review of relevant literature, the author discusses the study's objectives, propositions, and conceptual model below.

2.1. Research Problem

Sustainability is important for developing relationships between organisations and societies, within the realization of the sustainable development goals. The process of evaluating corporate sustainability responsibility is one of the important topics that concern several stakeholders, whether employees or customers of the organisation. The quest of the study is accordingly centred on investigating the extent to which five-star hotels in Kuwait implement sustainability. This is achieved by surveying a sample of hotels' employees and customers to evaluate a hotel's sustainable responsibility towards the environment, the employees, and the society. Additionally, the influence of sustainability adoption on the hotels' competitive advantage is also sought after.

2.2. Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives to fulfil its quest:

1. To review the literature that deals with the concepts, criteria, and dimensions of sustainability and how much readiness to apply international criteria and its effect on hotels' competitive advantage.
2. To measure the effect of compliance with sustainability responsibility criteria in achieving a competitive advantage in the Kuwaiti five-star hotel sector.
3. To identify the nature of the relationship between applying the criterion of sustainability responsibility for the society, the employees, and the environment and achieving a competitive advantage from the employees' and customers' perspective.
4. To help managers take rational decisions with the least time, effort, and cost and with the highest quality that helps achieve a competitive advantage.

2.3. Hypotheses

In order to achieve the study's aims and to fulfil its quest, the author proposes 3 primary hypotheses, each includes a set of sub-hypotheses.

H1: *Applying sustainable responsibility from the employees' perspective would contribute to achieving a competitive advantage.*

H1.1: *Applying employees' responsibility from the employees' perspective would contribute to achieving a competitive advantage.*

H1.2: *Applying environmental responsibility from the employees' perspective would contribute to achieving a competitive advantage.*

H1.3: *Applying social responsibility from the employees' perspective would contribute to achieving a competitive advantage.*

H2: *Applying sustainable responsibility from the customers' perspective would contribute to achieving a competitive advantage.*

H2.1: *Applying environmental and social responsibility from the customers' perspective would contribute to achieving a competitive advantage.*

H2.2: *Applying customer responsibility from the customers' perspective would contribute to achieving a competitive advantage.*

H3: *No statistical differences between the perceptions of employees and customers regarding the application level of sustainable responsibility and the achievement of a competitive advantage.*

H3.1: *No statistical differences between the perceptions of employees and customers regarding the application of sustainable responsibility towards the environment and society.*

H3.2: *No statistical differences between the perceptions of employees and customers regarding the achievement level of competitive advantage.*

2.4. Conceptual Model

The author presents the study's conceptual model below in Figure 1 which depicts the study's variables and their hypothesized relationship.
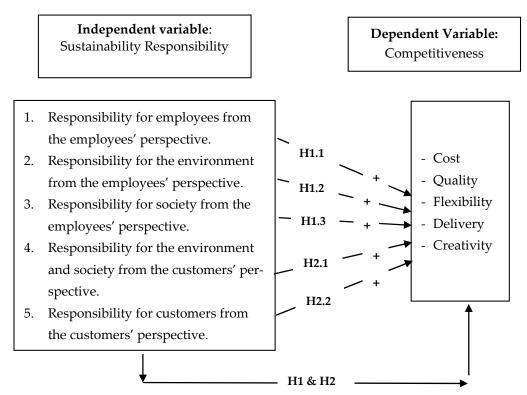

Figure 1. Research variables and hypotheses.

3. Methodology

To achieve the study's objectives, an analytical, descriptive, deductive approach is followed by theoretical examination of theories and concepts related to sustainability and competitive advantage. The theoretical framework is formulated following thorough review of scholarly research related to the topic of the study. The results and findings are based on sampling the perceptions of two main hotel stakeholder groups (i.e., employees and customers) using the convenient sampling technique. The collected data is analysed to explore the different views (internal, external) on the extent to which sustainability criteria are applied. In addition, the study used the inductive approach by referring to previous studies, of theses, journals, as well as Arab and foreign textbooks related to sustainability

and competitive advantage to induce the research hypotheses. According to the study methodology, the relationship between the role of sustainability dimensions/criteria and competitive advantage is tested by conducting the empirical investigation.

3.1. Questionnaire Design

This study is empirical, and it uses the survey technique to collect primary data that are used to test the study's hypotheses. A structured questionnaire was administered to examine respondents' perceptions of the study's theme, i.e., sustainability responsibility. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, the first of which included two main sections, one pertaining to measuring the independent variable (i.e., sustainability responsibility criteria: responsibility towards customers, employees, society, and the environment from the perspectives of both employees and customers). The second section encompassed statements pertaining to the dependent variable (i.e., competitiveness: cost, quality, flexibility, delivery, and innovation). All items in part 1 used the five-point Likert scale (e.g., 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Part 2 gathered the respondents' demographic data by asking questions about the respondent's age, education (pre-university, university, or postgraduate), gender, geographical location, average annual income, and purpose of stay at the hotel (business or leisure).

The 1st part of the questionnaire consisted of 32 statements, 20 of which addressed the 5 criteria of sustainability responsibility, and 12 addressed the competitiveness variable. The statements used were adopted from the relevant literature as illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1. Measurement items.

	Statement	Adopted From
	Sustainability Responsibility Criteria	
1	I am satisfied with my stay at this hotel	
2	The hotel strives to meet its promises	
3	I find the hotel staff honest and trustworthy	
4	The hotel is committed to the improvement of the welfare of local community	
5	The hotel considers stakeholders interest in its decision making	
6	Addressing societal problems (e.g., poverty, inequality, marginalized groups, data privacy) are main drivers of the hotel's policies	
7	The hotel communicates its environmental protection initiatives to its customers	
8	I find this hotel to be eco-friendly	
9	The hotel is committed to fair treatment of employees	
10	The hotel provides training & promotion opportunities to its staff	(Lee et al. 2019; Simbine and Tukamushaba 2020; Marakova et al. 2021)
11	The hotel keeps its promises to employees	
12	The hotel actively participates in social and cultural events	
13	The hotel contributes to society development beyond profit maximization	
14	The hotel helps in solving societal problems	
15	The hotel strives to satisfy customers	
16	The hotel collaborates with its stakeholders to ensure the protection of the environment	
17	The hotel strives to reduce natural resources consumption	
18	The hotel strives to recycle as much as possible of its wastes	
19	The hotel conducts regular environmental audits	
20	The hotel holds environmental certification(s)	

Table 1. *Cont.*

	Statement	Adopted From
	Competitiveness criteria:	
21	The hotel strives to obtain greater economic benefits	
22	The hotel ensures its survival in the long term by maintaining cost reductions	
23	The hotel adopts cost-benefit analyses in its decision making	
24	The hotel strives to provide excellent services	
25	The hotel always keeps its promises	
26	The hotel adequately responds to customers concerns	(Sigalas et al. 2013; Goffi et al. 2019; Qiu et al. 2020)
27	The hotel offers flexible arrangements to suit guest requirements (e.g., food & catering, check-ins & check-outs, room location)	
28	The hotel offers flexible packages to meet various customers' needs	
29	The hotel services are promptly delivered	
30	The hotel uses state-of-the-art technologies in various aspects of service delivery	
31	The hotel offers innovative services	
32	Innovation is integral to the hotel's strategies and plans	

3.2. Sample

The study population consisted of 5-star hotels operating in the state of Kuwait. By the end of 2021, there were 19 operational hotels registered with a 5-star rating across the state's 6 governorates. The convenient random sampling technique was adopted to ensure representation of all population members. A web-based questionnaire was used as the primary data collection method. The questionnaire was set to automatically terminate if the respondent did not meet the sample criteria (i.e., being an employee in one of the 5-star hotels in Kuwait; having stayed in a 5-star hotel in Kuwait in the past 12 months; or individuals who are younger than 18 years of age). A recent publication issued by Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau reported the number of 5-star hotel customers in 2020 at (25,023) down from (55,679) in 2019 (csb.gov.kw 2022). The decline is blamed on the outbreak of COVID-19. The number of employees at 5-star hotels in 2020 reached (4223), of which (177) were Kuwaiti citizens, and (4046) were expatriates (csb.gov.kw 2022).

The electronic questionnaire was shared with hotels' public relations departments accompanied by a cover letter describing the purpose of study and ensuring anonymity and privacy of responses. A total of 308 responses of hotel employees ware collected by the end of an 8-week data collection period, of which 294 were complete and valid. During the same period, the questionnaire was posted on 5 electronic portals and social media platforms including LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and SurveyCircle. An additional 360 completed and valid responses were submitted totalling the number of responses to 654.

3.3. Limitations of the Study

The following limitations should be considered based on the theoretical and the empirical contexts of the study:

1. The place limits: The study is applied to the 5-star hotels in the state of Kuwait.
2. The time limits: The duration of the field study was between November 2021 until January 2022 for a period of 8 weeks.
3. The human limits: The opinions of a sample of hotel employees and guests were measured to explore the dimensions related to sustainability responsibility towards the two groups, represented in the heads of departments and sectors, functional personnel (for example: reception, reservations, client relations, recreational activities, procurement, warehousing, catering, and maintenance personnel), and customers.

4. Results

This section discusses the results emerging from data analyses. Several statistical and descriptive analyses are employed to help evaluate the study's propositions and to attain its aims. In this regard, Table 2 shows the arithmetic means according to the respondents' opinions. The criterion related to the responsibility of hotels towards customers from the customers' perspective takes the first place, with a relative importance of 85.25%. This is because the hotel management cares about customers in the first place due to the nature of the service that largely depends on customer satisfaction. Then, the criterion related to responsibility towards employees from the employees' perspective take the second place, with a relative importance of 83.610%. The criterion of responsibility towards the society from the employees' perspective takes the third place, with a relative importance of 83.579%. Hotels are committed to the society welfare. The criterion of responsibility towards the environment takes the fourth place in order of importance from the employees' perspective, with a relative importance of 81.59%. The criterion of responsibility towards the environment and society from the customers' perspective is ranked fifth and last, with a relative importance of 81.29%. The customers believe that some hotels have committed to their responsibilities towards the environment and society.

Table 2. Ranking sustainability responsibility criteria by relative importance.

Criterion	M	SD	Order of Importance	Relative Importance
Sustainability responsibility towards customers from the customers' perspective	4.2533	1.6554	1	85.07%
Sustainability responsibility towards employees from the employees' perspective	4.1802	1.1028	2	83.610%
Sustainability responsibility towards society from the employees' perspective	4.1788	1.1820	3	83.57%
Sustainability responsibility towards the environment from the employees' perspective	4.0796	1.0739	4	81.59%
Sustainability responsibility towards the environment and the society from the customers' perspective	4.0643	1.13	5	81.29%

Based on the study methodology and to assess the proposed hypotheses, a test of statistical differences between employees' opinions and customers opinions' regarding the sustainability responsibility criteria to achieve a competitive advantage (H1; and H2) was conducted as Table 3 depicts. The table illustrates that no statistically significant differences between the opinions of hotels' employees and customers about the application of sustainability responsibility criteria towards the environment and the society, which supports hypotheses H3; H3.1; and H3.2. The value of statistical differences of *t*-test shows a level of differences (1.2677) with a significance level greater than 5% (0.254). The value of the variance test (F) has a coefficient of variation (variance) 0.53678, with a significance level greater than 5% (0.466).

Table 3. Test of statistical differences about the application of sustainability responsibility criteria for the environment and society from the employees' and customers' perspective.

Criterion	Category	M	SD	Differences, t-Value	Contrast, F Statistic	Sig.	
Sustainability responsibility towards the employees, the environment, and the society	employees	4.1292	1.1150	1.2677	0.53678	Differences	0.254
	Customers and guests	4.1477	1.1236			Variance	0.466

Accordingly, the statistical tests presented in Table 3 indicate no difference in opinion about the role of sustainability responsibility towards the environment and the society in the five-star hotels in the state of Kuwait, whether from the employees' perspective or from the customers' perspective. In addition, to verify the third hypothesis H3, a test of statistical differences between the employees' opinions and the customers' opinions regarding the test of differences about the level of achieving a competitive advantage in the hotels of the study sample, was conducted as depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. Test of statistical differences about achieving a competitive advantage from the employees', customers', and guests' perspective.

Criterion	Category	M	SD	Differences, t-Value	Contrast, F Statistic	Sig.	
Achievement level of competitive advantage	employees	4.2686	1.0739	0.20501	0.22537	Differences	0.843
	Customers and guests	4.2064	1.2588			Variance	0.648

Table 4 shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the opinions of hotel employees, customers and guests about the level of achieving a competitive advantage. The value of statistical differences of t-test shows a level of differences 0.20501 with a significance level greater than 5% (0.843). The value of the variance test (F) has a coefficient of variation (variance) 0.22537, with a significance level greater than 5% (0.648). Therefore, the statistical tests indicate that there is no difference in the level of achieving a competitive advantage in hotels, whether from the employees' perspective or from the customers' perspective.

Table 5 shows the results of the multiple linear regression test to measure the effect of the independent variable, sustainability responsibility, with its dimensions, on the dependent variable, the ability to achieve a competitive advantage.

Table 5. Results of the influential power test of the multiple regression model.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SE of Estimate	F	Durbin–Watson	Sig.
0.4308	0.1855	0.1736	0.0609	125.667	1.922	0.000 *

Predicators (Constant): Dimensions of sustainability responsibility criteria (for employees from employees' perspective, for the environment from the employees' perspective, for society from the employees' perspective, for the environment and society from the customers and guests' perspective, for customers from the customers' perspective).
Dependent Variable: Second Aspect: Achieving a competitive advantage (cost, quality, flexibility, delivery, creativity).

* The model is significant at a significance level less than 5%.

Table 5 illustrates that the multiple regression model is significant at a level less than 5% and a degree of confidence greater than 95%. The coefficient of variation is 125.667, while the correlation coefficient shows that the influential power of the independent variable (sustainability responsibility) on the dependent variable (achieving competitiveness) is 18.55% given that other influential factors remain constant. This is regarded as a relatively medium-low influence since sustainability responsibility is part of the competitiveness requirements among other predictors, but in general, the application of these criteria at a high level contributes to increasing the competitive advantage in hotels. Similarly, the adjusted correlation coefficient shows that the independent variable explains the variance in achieving competitiveness by 17.36%. The Durbin–Watson autocorrelation coefficient indicates that there is no autocorrelation problem between the independent variables.

Regarding the relatively low correlation coefficients observed in Table 5, statistical scholars note that in broad terms, higher R, R-squared, and adjusted R-squared values indicate a higher goodness-of-fit statistic (Field et al. 2012; Nau 2014; Malhotra et al. 2017;

Flatt and Jacobs 2019; Martin 2022). These values indicated the proportion of the variability in the dependent variable that is explained by the model. That is, an R-squared of, for example, 0.60 indicates that 60% of the variability in the dependent variable is explained by the model. Moreover, adjusted R-squared indicates the standard error of the regression, and is always smaller than R-squared.

Regression models with low R-squared values can be perfectly good models for several reasons (Nau 2014; Flatt and Jacobs 2019; Martin 2022). Some fields of study have an inherently greater amount of unexplainable variation. In these areas, R-squared values are bound to be lower (Martin 2022). For example, studies that try to explain human behaviour generally have R2 values less than 50%. People are just harder to predict than things such as physical processes. In addition, the number of variables in the model affects R values. The larger the number of variables included in the model, the higher the values of R, R-squared, and adjusted R-squared (Muenchen 2009; Lander 2014).

Furthermore, if a model shows a low R-squared value but the independent variables are statistically significant, we can still draw important conclusions about the relationships between the variables (Nau 2014). Statistically significant coefficients continue to represent the mean change in the dependent variable given a one-unit shift in the independent variable and allowing researchers to draw important conclusions in such cases (Field et al. 2012). In this regard, the *p*-value indicates if there is a significant relationship described by the model. If there is enough evidence that the model explains the data better than would a null model. It is therefore possible to get a significant *p*-value with a low R-squared value (Field et al. 2012; Nau 2014; Lander 2014; Flatt and Jacobs 2019). This often happens when there are enough data points to supply sufficient evidence that the model is better than the null model (significant *p*-value), but variability in the dependent variable is not explained too well by the model (low R-squared).

Accordingly, the relatively low R-squared (0.1855), and adjusted R-squared (0.1736) values depicted in Table 5 could be attributed to a number of reasons, given that the standard error estimates of (0.0609) is accepted, the Durbin–Watson statistic (1.922) suggesting no autocorrelation, and *p*-value of (0.000) indicating a significant relationship among variables. Possible reasons might include:

1. The small number of variables (one independent, and one dependent) in this study;
2. The dependent variable (hotel competitiveness) is influenced by other factors than the independent variable (sustainability responsibility) such as financial and non-financial variables, governmental regulations, economic variable, technological variables;
3. The regression model analyses data that capture human perceptions, opinions, views, and behaviours in which low R-squared values are not uncommon.

Finally, Table 6 shows the results of the regression equation between the independent variables and the dependent variable, where a result can be reached that helps to accept or reject the hypotheses of the study.

The results of the regression model indicate that there is a significant regression of the independent variables over the dependent variable, indicating the influential power of each criterion of sustainability responsibility represented in responsibility towards customers, responsibility towards employees, responsibility towards the society and responsibility towards the environment, respectively, as an amount of influential power to achieve competitiveness; and therefore, the regression equation can be stated as follows:

Achieving competitiveness = 1.2960 + (0.3597 * responsibility towards customers from the customers' perspective) + (0.3148 * responsibility towards employees from the employees' perspective) + (0.2970 * responsibility towards society from the employees' perspective) + (0.2821 * responsibility towards the environment from the employees' perspective) + (0.2593 * responsibility towards the environment and the society from the customers' perspective) + 0.0609

Table 6. Results of regression coefficients test of the study model.

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	*t*-Test	Sig.
		B	**SE**	**beta**		
	Constant	1.2960	0.1295		10.011	0.000
Independent variables	1st criterion: Responsibility towards the employees from employees' perspective	0.3148	0.0417	0.056	7.5566	0.000
	2nd criterion: Responsibility towards the environment from employees' perspective	0.2821	0.0527	0.032	5.3580	0.000
	3rd criterion: Responsibility towards the society from employees' perspective	0.2970	0.0477	0.026	6.2287	0.000
	4th criterion: Responsibility towards the environment and the society from customers' perspective	0.2593	0.0458	0.027	5.6608	0.000
	5th criterion: Responsibility towards customers from customers' perspective	0.3597	0.0372	0.027	9.6675	0.000

Dependent Variable: Second Aspect: Achieving competitiveness (cost, quality, flexibility, delivery, creativity).

5. Discussion

The results of the study conclude that there is an application of the sustainability responsibility criterion towards employees from the employees' perspective, with a relative importance of 83.61%. As the hotels provide the necessary training programmes, care, and follow-up to develop the employees' skills and protect their financial and non-financial rights, the hotels express a high tendency for implementing their responsibilities towards their employees. Hotels apply the criterion of sustainability responsibility towards the environment from the employees' perspective, with a relative importance of 81.59%. There is evidence that hotels' management respects environmental laws and regulations to limit environmental deterioration considering the global interest in preserving the environment. In addition, the results report that hotels are committed to applying the criterion of sustainability responsibility towards the society from the employees' perspective, with a relative importance of 83.57% considering the hotels' management providing contributions and donations to charitable societies such as child protection societies, elderly homes, centres for the disabled, and hospitals. Interacting with social crises and fulfilling part of their commitments to society to achieving social security and welfare is evident.

Similarly, hotels' management applies the criterion of sustainability responsibility towards customers from the customers' perspective, with a relative importance of 85.07%. The hotel management considers the customers' complaints and is interested in solving them in the first place, in addition to the importance of interacting with customers in their complaints about the problems or obstacles they face while in the hotel and then working to solve them. Thus, avoiding the mistakes and re-correcting them. Additionally, hotels' management is found to apply the criterion of sustainability responsibility towards the environment and the society from the customers' perspective, with a relative importance of 81.29%. This result agrees with the opinions of hotel employees on the importance of commitment to applying environmental and social criteria in achieving a competitive advantage in hotels. From the customers' perspective, the more the management cares about the environment and the society, the more this contributes to improving the hotel's reputation, and consequently its competitiveness.

The results conclude that a competitive advantage is achieved from the employees' perspective in terms of cost, quality, flexibility, delivery, and creativity with 84.75% relative importance. This reflects that hotels can provide their services at a reasonable cost and quality, in a flexible and creative manner. According to the results of the regression analysis, the field study outcomes indicate that the independent variables (sustainability responsibility towards the employees, the environment, the society, and customers) affect the dependent variable (achieving a competitive advantage). Increasing responsibility towards employees by one unit leads to improved competitive advantage by a 31.48%

dip. Increasing the responsibility towards the environment by one unit leads to improving the competitive advantage by a 28.21% dip. According to the statistical analysis results, hotels should strive to pay attention to the natural environment, as this criterion takes last place. Increasing the responsibility towards the society by one unit leads to an improved competitive advantage by a 29.70% dip. Lastly, increasing responsibility towards customers by one unit leads to improving the competitive advantage by a 35.97% dip.

The influential power of the independent variables (sustainability responsibility with its dimensions) on the dependent variable (achieving a competitive advantage) is 18.55% as other factors remain constant. It is a medium influence since sustainability responsibility is only a part of the competitiveness requirements. In general, the application of these criteria at a high level contributes to significant increase in the competitive advantage in hotels. Considering the exclusion of variance from the influential power, the sustainability responsibility criteria explain 17.36% of the change in achieving a competitive advantage.

Finally, the results report that there are no significant statistical differences between the perceptions of employees and customers regarding the contribution of commitment to applying sustainability responsibility criteria for the environment and the society. In addition, the opinions of employees and customers agree on the level of achieving a competitive advantage, according to the results of the statistical differences test and the coefficient of variation (variance) test. The opinions of hotels' employees match those of customers and guests on the existence of sustainability responsibility criteria.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Business organisations should commit to all their responsibilities towards different stakeholders in general, and for their human resources in particular, because this commitment is considered an investment in the organisation's performance and achieving a competitive advantage. Kuwaiti five-star hotels need to diversify their social responsibility-related programs and try to constantly develop and innovate to reach competitiveness. The sustainability responsibility policies and programs should be linked to the general policy pursued by hotels' management at all levels. These programs, if any, should not be mere marginal activities not characterized by regularity and development. Responsibility towards the environment needs to be focused on, as it is ranked last in terms of relative importance. Rather, programmes should be adopted to pay attention to this sustainability criterion. The results the study has reached have to be benefited from in terms of the degree of commitment to sustainability responsibility and observing the size of the effect on achieving a competitive advantage.

6.1. Importance and Contributions

Tackling the sustainability responsibility criteria is one of the important topics that address the role of the organisation towards society, employees, and customers. The study reviews the extent to which Kuwaiti hotels exercise sustainability responsibility criteria, which is of interest to several parties employed by and dealing with hotels. The study shows how much hotels are keen to be oriented towards sustainability and the effect of this orientation on their competitive advantage. Additionally, this study helps hotels in adopting the ways and methods that would increase the rating of the hotel in the event that the sustainability responsibility criteria mentioned in this study are applied. Moreover, the study contains literature and previous studies that show how much the sustainability responsibility criteria are developed and improved, which helps in achieving practical use from several aspects, whether obtaining more data about Kuwaiti hotels sector and making it available to those interested, or the practical use in identifying the development of sustainability responsibility criteria and its dimensions.

6.2. Practical Implications

Based on the findings of the study, the author presents the following implications for practitioners in the hotels and tourism sectors:

1. Tourist destinations including hotels should commit to their responsibilities for various stakeholders in general and for their human resources, the environment, and society in particular, because this commitment is considered an investment in the organisation's performance and achieving a competitive advantage.
2. Hotels need to diversify their sustainability responsibility-related programs and try to constantly develop and innovate to improve their competitiveness.
3. The sustainability responsibility programs should be linked to the policies pursued by hotels' management at all levels. These programs should not be mere marginal activities that are not supported by organisational culture.
4. Environmental sustainability responsibility needs to be emphasized, as it is ranked last in terms of relative importance.

6.3. Future Research

Researchers are encouraged to examine the sustainability aspects/criteria in other sectors/industries/regions. Sustainability is here to stay. It is not a trend or a fashion. Manufacturing, health care, education, SMEs, transportation, and supply chain are among the many sectors that could play a significant role in enriching our understanding of how sustainable responsibility towards stakeholders could impact multiple aspects of organisational performance, where a competitive advantage is only one aspect of such performance. Other aspects include various financial and non-financial performance indicators.

Future studies are encouraged to examine other underpinnings of TDC that are not tackled in the current research such as governmental policies and regulations; economic and technological factors; as well as other internal factors. Comparative studies are also encouraged to examine the differences among countries, markets, regions, and business sectors in terms of their sustainability responsibility and its influence on organisational performance.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study as it did not involve any particular institutions, and individual volunteers participated voluntarily based on their individual capacity and consent. Further, all ethical research practices were followed that protected the rights of the participants of this research.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available within the article.

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