



## The Role of Sustainable Human Resource Management Typologies in Marketing: A Case Study of Hospitals in Tehran

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** In recent years, organizations have attempted in pursuit of preserving and supporting their talents and human resources and have also increasingly enhanced their human resource (HR) productivity to maintain their sustainability in HR and marketing through the facilitation of different aspects such as work and life balance. Therefore, the main challenge of the companies is maintaining the long-term customer relationships.

**Methods:** This is an applied research which used a descriptive correlational study in terms of purpose. The statistical population comprised nearly all hospitals in Tehran. The sample size was 115 interviewees. The data collection tool was a standard questionnaire, the reliability of which was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.842. SmartPLS 3 software was used for data analysis.

**Results:** The results suggested that socially responsible Human Resource Management, green HRM, triple bottom line HRM, and common good HRM all had positive and significant effects on sustainable marketing. Also, sustainable marketing had a positive and significant effect on customer equity.

**Conclusion:** The research results can be used to build brand equity in pursuance of a sustainable HRM implementation and sustainable marketing, leading to a basis for the progression and development of other hospital brands.

**Keywords:** Human resources, Equity, Marketing

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### Introduction

In today's dynamic and competitive markets, companies are required to increase customer equity to create a suitable competitive advantage as it results in the attraction of new customers, maintaining existing customers, promoting customer awareness, and building emotional relationships which lead to customer's loyalty to the company (1). On the other hand, global trade has rapidly and dramatically changed over 10 to 15 years. As a result, several companies and organizations are catching up on rivalry in pursuit of distinctive goals, such as social, environmental, and economic goals (2). Sustainability is a fundamental affair with which many businesses are encountered these days, allowing marketing professionals and researchers to explore new and related goals (3). However, sustainable marketing derived from the corporate social responsibility (CSR) concept comprises three

dimensions: environmental, economic, and social which all concentrate on customers (4). Sustainable marketing can result in customer perception improvement of the brand.

On the other hand, achieving systematically sustainable corporate marketing is inseparably in connection with sustainable HRM due to the fact that HR is the initial issue of any change in the marketing systems. Also, the critical role of HR and the institutionalization of market-oriented behaviors can never be neglected. The literature review also revealed that achieving sustainability in the marketing environment demanded cultural and human infrastructure, and the other principles must be institutionalized (5). Over the past decade, HRM scholars have increasingly developed sustainable HR systems to advance organizational sustainability goals. Sustainable HR pursues the achievement of the sustainability goals of the

organization and the development of HR activities, systems, and processes (2). In addition, sustainable HRM enables the employees to fulfil organizational partner's expectations (managers, co-workers, and subordinates), external partners (customers), and beyond (family and community) (6). Studies indicate that sustainable HR affects the employees and all environmental and social aspects of the organization. Also, employees are crucially and undeniably acting on the effectiveness and success of the sustainability strategies of a company (7).

The business responsibility in HRM goes beyond the current paradigm of organizational and timeline boundaries. In other words, corporations are responsible for the employees they employ, such as the communities in which they are functioning and also those who are employed in supply chains indirectly. The socially responsible HRM pursues the minimization of the negative impact on business and business risks reduction (2). Green recruitment and selection are defined as employing the applicants for jobs requiring a green attitude comprising green tasks as well. Green training includes the attendance of employees in courses developing environmental awareness. Green compensation is also defined as the connection between rewards and fulfilled environmental goals (8).

However, similar to socially responsible HRM, green HRM continues to be driven by economic goals. Therefore, the organizational perspective is still internalized (2). Contrary to the first and second types, the third type, called triple bottom line HRM, simultaneously concentrates on economic, environmental, and social goals. It indicates that sustainable HRM is accomplished while it simultaneously concentrates on employee-centered activities (welfare and job involvement) and environmental and social elements (resource regeneration). In comparison with the first and second types, triple bottom line HRM is seeking a win-win performance provision (9).

Nonetheless, a multipurpose focus can also create organizational-level conflict, inter-departmental rivalry for limited resources motivating divergent expectations (10). All three typologies, as mentioned above, are attempting to change the degrees related to traditional business goals and economic benefits involving external pressures for greater social and environmental responsibility. However, the fourth type, common good HRM, is considered upon the hypothesis that the main aim of the organization is to help to effectively address the sustainability challenges encountering communities and the organization's

long-term concern (11). Thus, this typology prioritizes collective interests to the individual or organizational interests, requiring organizations to review their functional practices and functions under regulations to examine their traditional profit-based perspective. Instead, they concentrate more on environmental and social impacts alongside human factors. As a result, it leads to the changes of the business perspective from an inside-out paradigm to an outside-in one (2).

sustainability, HR may ignore the investment of the organizations in sustainable marketing strategies. The problem originates from the fact that HR systems have little or no insight into the sustainable marketing strategies and practices of a company, leading to the lack of efficiency of sustainable marketing activities. The question, then, is how different HRM practices affect sustainable marketing. Given the above, the present study pursues the response to the following question: *How do sustainable HRM typologies affect customer equity and sustainable marketing?*

The long-term value primarily results from the value of the company's customer relationship leading to "customer equity." Rust et al. (12) define the term as "total discounted lifetime values of all customers". In other words, the authors consider customer equity as the current profitability of that customer and as a net discounted cash flow that the company will receive from the customer over time (2). Abdullah et al. (13) indicated that customer equity theory could be elaborated as the potential future value produced by the customers of a firm throughout its lifetime. The customer equity paradigm recognizes the customers as the primary source of present and future cash flows. Therefore, customer equity states the value that existing and future potential customers provide to a company during their lifetime (14). This criterion is commonly referred to as CLV, which is equal to the net present value of the lifetime cash flow created by the customer (13). Customer equity is an essential criterion for companies because it characterizes business value in the market and customers' minds. A company that is benefiting from high customer equity is valued at a higher rate than a company suffering from low customer equity in the market (15).

The study of brand equity through the context of customer equity has recently been carried out. Brand equity is the part of customer equity which is inseparably in connection with the customer's perception of the brand. It is elaborated as the mental and intangible evaluation of the customer of the brand far further than its objective value. (16).

The term sustainable HRM has been conceptualized by various researchers and referred

to in various countries and the HR literature. The sustainable HR literature has evolved over the past decade and reflects the growing interest of researchers and organizations in HRM outcomes beyond the economic implications (17).

- Khanpour and Mahboudi (18) evaluated the role of organizational marketing efforts taking a sustainable marketing strategies approach with a positive attitude towards sustainable products and promoting purchasing intentions. Alternatively, the results indicated that the consumers' attitudes toward green products significantly impact their purchases among all aspects of green marketing strategies.

- Vafaie (19) examined the relationship between green customer satisfaction and understanding of sustainable marketing policies. This research is based on a questionnaire that considers various cultural issues. Regression analysis proves that perceived sustainable marketing policies positively affect green customer satisfaction. Therefore, sustainability is essential for companies to satisfy the customers and thus have a competitive advantage over competitors.

- Aust et al. (2) reviewed the sustainable HRM typology in a library study. To this end, they reviewed critical articles in the literature on sustainable HRM and found how the purpose of HRM has changed in the pursuit of sustainability. The study also explains how HRM can effectively solve today's "grand" sustainability challenges by applying the common good HRM perspective.

- Bombiak et al. (20) examined the relationship between socially responsible human resource management methods and the sustainable development of organizations. Furthermore, research has shown a correlation between evaluating the relationship between socially responsible human resource management methods and the sustainable

development of organizations and their practical implementation.

- Bush (21) examined the impact of sustainable HRM on sustainability development and employee outcomes. In addition, perceived organizational support, leader initiating structure, leader consideration, and type-A behavioral pattern were identified as potential boundary conditions that may enhance understanding of these relationships. Finally, the results showed that synergies between triple bottom line goals reduced the potential conflicts and ambiguities and improved sustainable HRM functions.

- Guerci et al. (22) studied the impact of sustainable HRM on corporate performance. According to 176 questionnaires collected through a cross-country survey, this study was prepared in collaboration with the researchers and a leading European association of HR managers and practitioners. Furthermore, when HRM professionals and managers are involved in sustainable HRM, they realize that their job becomes more meaningful because it has a broader scope that is not just focused on economic performance, resulting in greater job satisfaction and lower turnover intention. Finally, the conceptual model of the research is shown in Figure 1.

## Materials and Methods

Regarding the purpose, the present study is applied research, and methodologically, it is a descriptive-analytical study based on partial least squares - structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. The reason for choosing the mentioned method and software is that this type of modelling is considered a robust method when the number of samples and items is limited, and the distribution of variables may not be normalized.

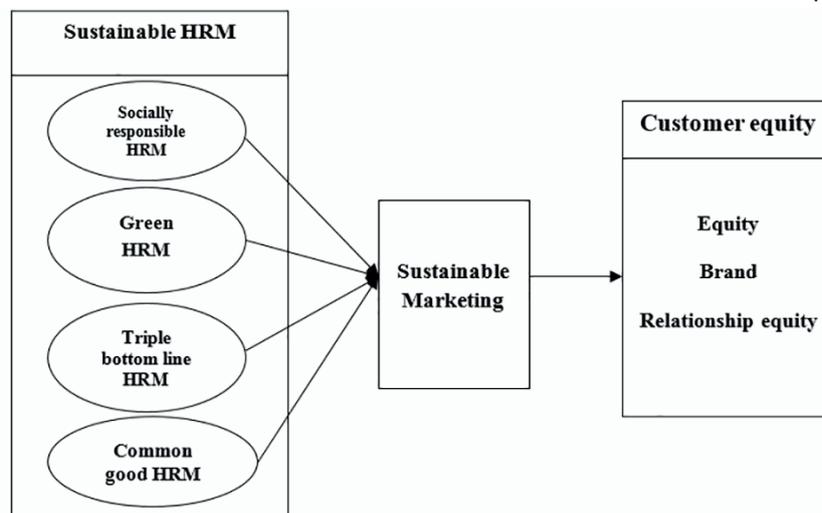


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Model

The statistical population consists of all hospitals in Tehran (n=164). Based on Cochran’s formula, the statistical sample size was 115.

We utilized a simple random sampling method. Data were collected through a questionnaire scored based on a Likert scale. The validity of the questionnaire was verified using the content and face validity method (by professors and other available experts), and Cronbach’s alpha coefficient determined the reliability. Thus, after a pilot study on a sample of 20 people and returning the questionnaires, the collected data were entered into SPSS software. Table 1 presents the distribution of the questionnaire items and their Cronbach’s alpha coefficients.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) in SmartPLS software was used for the inferential analysis of research data and to investigate the interaction effect of several independent variables on the dependent variable.

### Results

Factor loading is a numerical value that determines the power of the relationship between a latent variable

and the corresponding observed variable during the path analysis process.

The acceptable criterion for factor loading coefficients was 0.7. In the present study, as shown in Table 2, all coefficients indicated the acceptability of this criterion. According to the results displayed in Table 3, because all constructs had AVE higher than 0.5, the convergent validity was established at the level of all constructs.

The overall model included both parts of the measurement and structural models, and by confirming its fit, the model’s fit was thoroughly tested. For testing the overall model’s fit, it is sufficient to measure the GOF criterion.

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{Communalities} \times R^2}$$

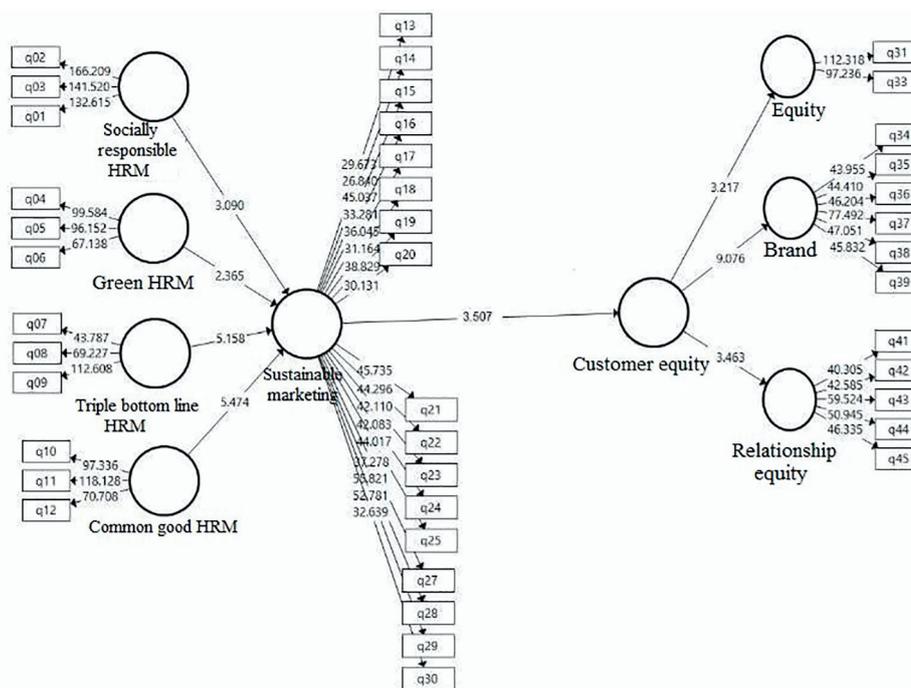
The amount of *Communalities* was obtained from the average of the communalities given in Table 4. Therefore, the GOF criterion was equal to:

$$GOF = \sqrt{0.859 \times 0.793} = 0.926$$

Given the three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 as the weak, medium, and strong values for GOF, obtaining

**Table 1:** Relationship between variables and questionnaire items

Variable	Cronbach's alpha coefficient	Sources
Socially responsible Human Resource Management	0.868	(2)
Green Human Resource Management	0.837	(2)
Triple bottom line Human Resource Management	0.817	(2)
Common good Human Resource Management	0.985	(2)
Sustainable marketing	0.727	(1)
Customer equity	0.822	(1)



**Figure 2:** T-Statistic

**Table 2:** Composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, convergent validity, and commonalities

Variable	Item	Factor loading of the initial model	Factor loading of the modified model	Cronbach's alpha reliability test	Composite reliability	rho-A	AVE	$\overline{R^2}$	
Socially responsible Human Resource Management	q01	0.960	0.960	0.956	0.972	0.956	0.919	0	
	q02	0.965	0.965						
	q03	0.952	0.952						
Green Human Resource Management	q04	0.929	0.929	0.921	0.950	0.921	0.863	0	
	q05	0.940	0.940						
	q06	0.917	0.917						
Triple bottom line Human Resource Management	q07	0.848	0.848	0.880	0.926	0.881	0.808	0	
	q08	0.911	0.912						
	q09	0.934	0.934						
Common good Human Resource Management	q10	0.911	0.911	0.912	0.945	0.913	0.851	0	
	q11	0.938	0.938						
	q12	0.917	0.917						
Sustainable marketing	q13	0.790	0.790	0.969	0.972	0.969	0.669	0.858	
	q14	0.792	0.791						
	q15	0.819	0.819						
	q16	0.803	0.803						
	q17	0.807	0.807						
	q18	0.786	0.786						
	q19	0.801	0.801						
	q20	0.793	0.793						
	q21	0.842	0.842						
	q22	0.844	0.845						
	q23	0.830	0.830						
	q24	0.801	0.802						
	q25	0.828	0.828						
	q27	-0.143	Removed						
	q28	0.822	0.823						
	q29	0.857	0.858						
	q30	0.866	0.865						
Customer equity	Equity	q31	0.941	0.943	0.871	0.939	0.872	0.885	0.697
		q32	0.065	Removed					
		q33	0.940	0.938					
	Brand	q34	0.827	0.825	0.929	0.944	0.929	0.737	0.940
		q35	0.852	0.850					
		q36	0.855	0.856					
		q37	0.887	0.888					
		q38	0.873	0.874					
		q39	0.856	0.857					
	Relationship equity	Q40	0.069	Removed	0.906	0.930	0.907	0.728	0.917
		Q41	0.834	0.834					
		Q42	0.837	0.837					
		Q43	0.879	0.881					
		Q44	0.864	0.864					
		Q45	0.849	0.848					

0.926 for this criterion indicates a strong fit of the overall research model.

The results of SmartPLS software output in the above tables showed that the measurement models had a good validity (convergent and discriminant) and reliability (factor loading, composite reliability,

and Cronbach's alpha coefficient). The structural model's fit using t-statistics indicated that these coefficients must be greater than 1.96 to confirm their significance at the 95% confidence level.

Figure 2 shows that the whole ways among model variables are validated and significant. The second

**Table 3:** Discriminant validity measurement matrix

	Equity	Customer equity	Sustainable marketing	Brand	Relationship equity	Common good HRM	Green HRM	Triple bottom line HRM	Socially responsible HRM
Equity	0.941								
Customer equity	0.815	0.823							
Sustainable marketing	0.814	0.741	0.818						
Brand	0.776	0.669	0.807	0.859					
Relationship equity	0.770	0.777	0.700	0.766	0.853				
Common good Human Resource Management	0.754	0.781	0.678	0.650	0.746	0.922			
Green Human Resource Management	0.712	0.653	0.742	0.724	0.817	0.797	0.929		
Triple bottom line Human Resource Management	0.775	0.757	0.676	0.626	0.815	0.670	0.797	0.899	
Socially responsible Human Resource Management	0.766	0.556	0.654	0.735	0.803	0.621	0.691	0.798	0.959

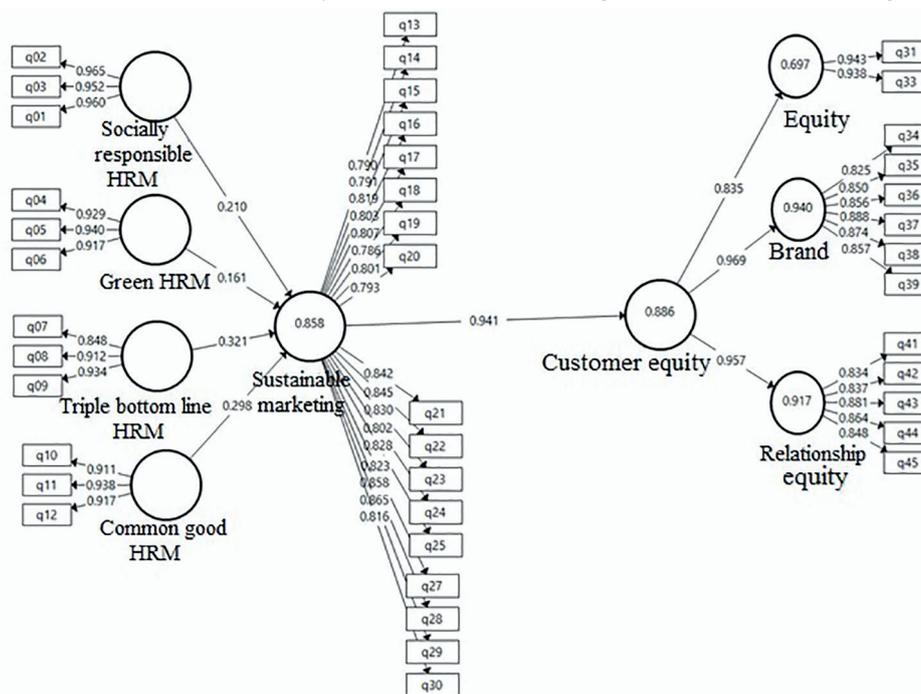
**Table 4:** Regression coefficients and t-test statistics

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t-statistic	Testing result
1 Socially responsible Human Resource Management → Sustainable marketing	0.210	3.090	Supported
2 Green Human Resource Management → Sustainable marketing	0.161	2.365	Supported
3 Triple bottom line Human Resource Management → Sustainable marketing	0.321	5.158	Supported
4 Common good Human Resource Management → Sustainable marketing	0.298	5.474	Supported
5 Sustainable marketing → Customer equity	0.941	3.507	Supported

critterion for testing a structural model’s fit is the R<sup>2</sup> coefficients connected to the model’s endogenous (dependent) latent variables. R<sup>2</sup> state the effect of exogenous variables on an endogenous variable, and 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 are pondered for weak, medium, and strong values of R<sup>2</sup>. Consider that only one or

two exogenous constructs influence an endogenous construct in a model. In that case, R<sup>2</sup> greater than 0.33 indicates the power of the relationship between that construct and the endogenous construct.

Figure 3 shows that in this study, both criteria were higher than 0.67 (strong values criterion).



**Figure 3:** The model based on standardized factor loading coefficients

Therefore, the structural model also had a good fit regarding this criterion.

## Discussion

**Hypothesis 1:** *Socially responsible HRM significantly affects sustainable marketing.* Since the t-statistic (3.090) is more than 1.96, we conclude that it is significant at the 99% confidence level. Therefore, it is predicted that the hypothesis will be supported if the model is repeated in a larger sample of the same population. Since the standard coefficient is 0.210, it has a weak effect. Achieving corporate sustainability depends on HR. The relationship between sustainability and HRM is regarded as an innovative and emerging approach and a relevant gap to be filled. Wikhamn (23) concluded that the relationship between innovation and customer satisfaction depended on sustainable HR practices, and sustainable HR practices also enhanced the innovation capability and customer satisfaction. The idea of socially responsible HRM emphasizes the need to develop employee performance goals in a broader way - not only in the economic category, but also in the social and environmental categories.

Socially responsible HR practices bring direct benefits. The socially responsible HRM positively affects domestic and foreign brands (20). The most critical factor affecting the reputation of an organization is how it deals with its employees (24). Research conducted on 100 reputable Spanish institutions showed that labor social responsibility practices directly and positively affect corporate reputation (25). The literature emphasizes that this type of sustainable HRM impacts recruiting, retaining, and motivating the employees and corporate loyalty, improving financial performance (26). Applying socially responsible practices to developing working conditions and labor relations may also directly reduce the employee absenteeism and turnover (27). Implementing the socially responsible HRM concept can also be a panacea for enhancing the employees' loyalty to their companies, reducing work stress levels, increasing employee satisfaction, and gaining a competitive advantage (20). According to Shen and Benson (28), socially responsible HRM is recognized as an essential part of corporate sustainability or CSR strategy and as an implementation tool. Based on the previous studies, it is argued that companies use socially responsible HRM to institutionalize socially responsible behaviors, functions, strategies, and culture in the organization, thereby improving the ability of the company to operate in three sustainable marketing dimensions. This finding is in

agreement with those of Khanpour and Mahboudi (18), Hamidianpour et al. (29), and Sun et al. (1).

**Hypothesis 2:** *Green HRM significantly affects sustainable marketing.* According to the t-statistic (2.365), which is above 1.96, we conclude that it is significant at the 99% confidence level. Therefore, it is predicted that if the model is repeated in a larger sample of the same population, the hypothesis will be supported. As the standard coefficient is 0.161, it has a weak influence. The green HRM concept can reflect the ecological dimension of sustainable development. As a new approach, green HRM is based on various aspects, such as environmental compatibility and the creation of green HR (2). The implementation of green HRM policies and practices may contribute to the overall workforce development by increasing the demand for green employees. Green HRM may also encourage the improvement of an environmentally responsible corporate image by attracting and retaining potential employees with vital pro-environmental perspectives (20). This issue paves the way for employing and strengthening sustainable marketing activities in the organization. This finding is consistent with those of Hamidianpour et al. (29), Bush et al. (21), Guerci et al. (22).

**Hypothesis 3:** *HRM significantly affects sustainable marketing by triple bottom line (economic, social, and environmental).* Since the t-statistic (5.158) is greater than 1.96, we conclude that it is significant at the 99% confidence level. Therefore, it is predicted that the hypothesis will be supported if the model is repeated in a larger sample of the same population. Given that the path coefficient is 0.321, it has a moderate effect. An increasing majority of companies (68% of the top 50 Fortune 500 companies) have accepted the triple bottom line public report. Companies with improved environmental and social performance are better positioned than competitors. Production process innovation requires heavy investment, but the efficiency of sustainable processes is much better. Triple bottom line HR sustainability uses HRM competencies, skills, knowledge, and attitudes to create win-win-win situations, provide social well-being, and improve the employees' self-esteem (2). This approach also enhances the capabilities of the company in the three dimensions of sustainable marketing. This finding is consistent with those of Bombiak et al. (20).

**Hypothesis 4:** *Common good HRM significantly affects sustainable marketing.* Since the t-statistic (5.474) is greater than 1.96, we conclude that it is significant at the 99% confidence level. Therefore, it is predicted that the hypothesis will be supported if the model is repeated in a larger sample of the same

population. Given that the path coefficient is 0.298, it has a weak influence. The common good HRM is an underlying change in understanding the business goal and human resource contributions. All three previous types of sustainable HRM preferred the economic dimension to the social and ecological dimensions. However, the common good HRM approach assumes that “making an effective contribution to addressing the sustainable challenges we face collectively” is a core business responsibility. There is growing evidence that the common good HRM approach can effectively bridge the current gap between corporate sustainability business operations and their influence. Therefore, it is argued that the use of common good HRM in the organization can be broadly consistent with sustainable marketing goals in all the three dimensions. This finding is in the same line with those of Shafiee Roodposhti et al. (5) and Aust et al. (2).

**Hypothesis 5:** *Sustainable marketing significantly affects customer equity.* Since the t-statistic (3.507) is greater than 1.96, we conclude it is significant at the 99% confidence level. Therefore, it is predicted that the hypothesis will be supported if the model is repeated in a larger sample of the same population. Given that the path coefficient is 0.941, it has a strong influence. When companies turn to ethical marketing, the customer perceives value and develops brand loyalty.

## Conclusion

The corporate concern for society and the environment changes the consumer behavior and increases equity. Consumers choose the product based on the available information. Evidence shows that consumers are willing to pay more for a product and service when they realize the importance of sustainable products and services. According to the present study which aimed to investigate the role of sustainable HRM in customer equity and sustainable marketing, it can be concluded that all research hypotheses are supported. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be made available to corporate managers by providing feedback and can also add to the scientific richness of the literature under study. Finally, the researcher could test the claims made by investigating and analyzing the extracted data and reaching a definite conclusion. In addition, the results of this study can pave the way for the organizations to reduce wasting of time and money, improve workforce errors, increase satisfaction with the services provided, and achieve the desired performance goals.

**Hypothesis 1:** Socially responsible HRM significantly affects sustainable marketing.

According to this hypothesis, it is suggested that

we should:

- increase social responsibility in the hospitals by applying HRM practices and strategies and building a sustainable culture

- raise awareness of the impact of hospital activities on the employees across hospital borders

**Hypothesis 2:** Green HRM significantly affects sustainable marketing.

It is suggested that we should:

- apply HRM practices to embed green values in a hospital

- place environmental goals at the forefront, so as not to harm the economic goals

**Hypothesis 3:** HRM significantly affects sustainable marketing by triple bottom line (economic, social, and environmental).

According to this hypothesis, it is suggested that we should:

- align behaviors, strategies, and cultures with social and environmental goals simultaneously

- utilize HR competencies, skills, knowledge, and attitudes to create win-win situations

- pursue social and environmental goals, as long as they do not damage the economic goals of the hospitals

**Hypothesis 4:** Common good HRM significantly affects sustainable marketing.

According to this hypothesis, it is suggested that we should:

- strengthen common good values, for example reliable working relationships

- apply HR competencies, skills, knowledge, and attitudes to contribute to shared interests and resolve macro-societal problems.

- pursue social and environmental goals, regardless of economic interests

**Hypothesis 5:** Sustainable marketing significantly affects customer equity.

According to this hypothesis, it is suggested that:

- environmental goals must go beyond economic goals.

- environmental goals should make a significant contribution to marketing plans.

- we should use ecological factors in service design

- we should have a plan to join the customer clubs

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## Authors' Contribution

Abolfazl Khosravi: Conceptualization, data curation, supervision. Mohammad Reza Fathi:

Conceptualization, data curation, supervision, drafting the manuscript. Mohammad Javad Habibi: Conceptualization, data curation, drafting, reviewing and editing. Seyed Mohammad Sobhani: Supervision, writing, reviewing, editing, and finalizing original draft. Ali Younessi: Data curation, supervision, review, and editing.

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