

The Role of Marketing in Tourism Planning: Increasing, Decreasing, or Interaction

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Abstract

Tourism plays an important role in achieving the economic development of countries, through the many advantages and benefits it achieves that benefit society, as many countries in the Western world and other developing countries, including many Arab countries, depend on tourism activity as an important source of income. Hence, this paper aims to evaluate the role of marketing in tourism planning. In this research article, semi-structured interviews were utilized as a research instrument. Four participants from different divisions and marketing departments were interviewed, and the variables resulting from the study's hypotheses and model were measured as well as the questions posed in the study. The findings of the study showed that marketing is an essential component of tourism planning and has a major impact on the success of the tourism industry. Through effective marketing campaigns, tourist organizations can reach a wider audience, promote the unique features and attractions of their destination, and increase demand for their destination.

Keywords: *Marketing, Tourism planning, Marketing Strategies, Najaf.*

1. Introduction

The tourism sector is considered one of the important sectors within the field of services, which comes among the priorities that both developed and underdeveloped countries care about, conscious of the role that this sector plays within the economies of those countries in advancing economic development. Some economists expect that the field of tourism at the present time, in addition to the fields of informatics and communications, will be among the important sectors (Ketter, 2016). Tourism constitutes one of the easy and quick ways to obtain foreign exchange in exchange for the services that are offered to foreign tourists. In addition, it works to provide national and local cash for the public treasury to be spent in areas of public benefit. It also contributes to the development of other related sectors such as industry, transport, communications, and others. It also has a significant impact on the balance of payments, employment, income redistribution, hence the vital role of the tourism sector within the global economy and the current trends of the business world. Therefore, attention is required to this sector through the application of various good organization and management techniques on this sector. As well as the processes of providing services and developing tourism programs and presenting them at home and abroad, which remains limited unless those efforts are supported by marketing efforts based on the entrance of tourism marketing in order to provide services, programs and policies as desired by the tourist and which are consistent with the image of the desired service, as well as the study of tourism markets (May & Ali, 2018).

An estimated 6% of the world's economic activity comes from the largest and fastest-growing economic sector, which is international tourism. 982 million tourists from other countries visited in 2011; this resulted in export revenues of US\$1.03 trillion (UNWTO, 2012A). Over 5 billion tourists traveled within their own countries in 2012, while over 1 billion tourists traveled across international borders. In 2012, tourism contributed 9% to global GDP, 8% to employment, and exported goods worth US\$1.2 trillion (UNWTO, 2012B). Tourist arrivals are predicted to exceed 1.6 billion by the year 2020 (UNWTO, 2011A). In addition to its economic impact, tourism is essential for local development, employment, economic growth, the development of infrastructure, the alleviation of poverty, and can also help preserve cultural and natural resources (Blakely and Leigh, 2010). Due to these numerous benefits, nations, tourist hotspots, and travel locations all over the world are now vying for both local and foreign travelers' hearts and wallets. Two sets of elements are involved in the planning and development of tourism: first, there are physical development aspects, which primarily comprise transportation, services, and attractions. The second set adds additional elements like information and marketing (Gunn and Var, 2002). The literature on tourism planning often places more focus on the first group of variables, highlighting internal physical development (Murphy and Murphy, 2004; Morrison, 2002 ; Ketter, 2013).

Creating a high-quality tourism product and maximizing the potential to draw tourists and visitors are the two main objectives of the common process of tourism planning and development (Gunn and Var, 2002). According to this perspective, the planning process first focuses on physical development, with marketing becoming a secondary consideration during the later stages of planning. The marketing literature offers an alternative viewpoint on tourism planning and development, where marketing is seen as a collaborative management method that steers planning and development by adopting a market-focused approach (Kozak and Baloglu, 2010; Fyall and Garrod,

2004). For the administration and growth of tourism destinations, strategic tourism marketing provides a competitive strategy, a commercial structure, and direction (Middleton and Clarke, 2001). According to this perspective, the marketing process directs the planning and development of the tourism product with the goals of creating a positive image, creating a distinct competitive identity, and increasing demand (Anholt, 2007). The global tourism market is becoming more and more competitive on a macro level as more and more locations enter the fray (UNWTO, 2011A; Ratten and Tsiotsou, 2010; Godfrey and Clarke, 2000). Tourism marketing is a crucial instrument for preserving market share, creating a competitive advantage, and luring travelers and visitors in this fiercely competitive climate (UNWTO, 2011B; Kozak and Baloglu, 2010; ETC and UNWTO, 2008; Minghetti, 2001) (Ketter, 2016).

On a smaller scale, tourist locations may benefit from the use of tourism marketing tools like market research and consumer behavior analysis to create attractions, services, and modes of transportation that are specific to the demands and expectations of its guests. By using market-guided planning, the development process can be improved, boosting the destination's value proposition and the visitor experience (Liao, Chen and Deng, 2010; Cooper and Hall, 2008). Because of these and other reasons, marketing is an important part in developing and planning tourism (Henderson, 2006; Minghetti, 2001; Clarke, 2000) (Ketter, 2013).

The gap between these two viewpoints prompts a discussion about the practical application of marketing in tourism planning. The current research will investigate the function of marketing in regional tourism planning in order to address this query. This research will examine regional tourism plans using a qualitative analysis to learn more about the function of marketing within the plans and the extent to which marketing is integrated into the planning documents.

1.1 Research problem:

Nowadays, the world is moving towards what is known as digital business. These businesses depend mainly on the extensive use of information and communication technology based on modern means of communication and technologies such as the Internet (websites), e-mail, mobile phones, interactive television, catalogs, direct dialogue, and others. . There is no doubt that the massive and rapid technological and technical development in the field of information and communication technologies and technologies has become crystal clear to everyone in our world today. Although countries possess a wide range of tourism elements, such as natural tourism elements, historical and archaeological elements, therapeutic tourism elements, heritage elements, religious tourism elements, and others, in spite of the great marketing importance of marketing in our present era called the era of globalization, due to its reliance on employing the creation of various electronic technologies in display. However, there is weakness in the process of attracting tourists and tourism planning, in addition to the absence of any scientific study or serious real evaluation by establishments related to tourism activity or any academic body or study centers for the role of direct marketing in influencing tourism and attracting tourists to countries, which prompted the researcher to feel this problem, considering that studying it and showing it to whom it may concern may contribute to the development of tourism.

Tourism plays an important role in achieving the economic development of countries, through the many advantages and benefits it achieves that benefit society, as many countries in the Western world and other developing countries, including many Arab countries, depend on tourism activity as an important source of income. National and earn foreign currency. Direct marketing is considered as the link between the needs and desires of tourists and the products of tourist establishments, as it works continuously in developing tourism presentation methods to comply with the continuous changes that occur in the needs and desires of tourists, as well as plays a

prominent, important and strategic role in arousing desires that represent the main driver for individuals to pursue tourism. In this context, and due to the lack of studies in the field of marketing and its role in tourism planning, and the absence of such a study in the researcher's home country, for this reason, the researcher formulated his research problem in the following questions:

1. What is the role of marketing in tourism planning, Is it underplayed, overplayed or rather equally played??
2. What are the marketing efforts exerted within the tourism sector by presenting the marketing schemes and programs established in the countries?
3. What are the reality of marketing practices in the tourism sector, and the extent of perceived satisfaction and loyalty of tourists?
4. What are the issues and obstacles facing national and local tourism organizations in planning and implementing tourism planning and marketing programs for the local community?

1.2 Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is: **"To evaluate the role of marketing in tourism planning: increase, decrease or interaction."**

This main objective is subdivided into the following sub-objectives:

1. To present a set of theoretical concepts related to clarifying the concept of marketing, as well as its stages of development, its various means, and other related topics.
2. To highlight the role or contribution of marketing means in tourism planning by addressing the importance and effects of marketing in the field of tourism services.

3. To examine key theoretical constructs of both community-based tourism planning and consumer-driven marketing approaches in order to demonstrate their relevance, applicability, and potential for integration.
4. To identify the issues and obstacles facing national and local tourism organizations in planning and implementing tourism planning and marketing programs for the local community.
5. To recommend paths towards integrated participatory tourism planning and marketing.

1.3 Research Significance

The importance of this study comes from the significance of marketing in tourism planning is one of the topics that has received much attention, research and actual practice by marketing men, governments and various organizations active in European countries, the United States of America and some developing countries, but in return it has not received sufficient attention from most governments and various organizations in developing countries. Studies of marketing in tourism planning are scarce, both from an increasing, decreasing, or interaction. Therefore, conducting such a research regarding this topic is expected to have a high positive reflections and significance that can be summarized as in the following:

- 1) The scientific importance of this research lies in the scarcity of studies that specifically dealt with the role of marketing in tourism planning, which makes this study a new scientific attempt to identify the nature of the relationship between the two variables, and to develop appropriate scientific recommendations.
- 2) This research represents a positive contribution to shed light on this important area. Its importance also comes from the fact that it is one of the new researches on this subject, and it can contribute to providing an information

- base and submitting proposals that can contribute to activating the marketing process in the tourism field.
- 3) This research may provide a theoretical information base that other establishments that practice various non-tourist activities can benefit from. The results of this research may be a starting point for other research in this field.
 - 4) The study of marketing and its impact on tourism planning helps in presenting proposals that may increase the demand for the tourism sector and find marketing opportunities that can be taken advantage of, on the basis that there are unsatisfied needs and desires among the targeted tourists in multiple countries, which helps tourism establishments in the public sectors. Private and mixed in achieving its specific goals, such as the goal of survival and continuity, achieving the maximum possible income.
 - 5) The tourism sector is also associated with many other economic sectors, and this means that tourism can generate job opportunities for the unemployed, so that it exceeds the borders of the tourism sector and extends to reach the borders of other sectors that are directly and indirectly related to tourism activity. Tourism also contributes to providing part of the foreign exchange. To implement the comprehensive development plan of the country.
 - 6) This research would represent a good reference for the future studies as long as it would provide the subsequent researchers and interested scholars in the field of tourism with valued literature, recommendations and suggestions that are important for their proposed studies.

1.4 Research Borders

They are represented in the following:

Scientific boundaries: Scientific boundaries include addressing the issue of the role of marketing in tourism planning.

Temporal boundaries: The time period for the research started from the time the decision to register the subject of the research was issued on 10/01/2023 until the completion of writing it.

Spatial boundaries: The spatial boundaries of the search are located within Najaf city in Iraq.

Academic boundaries: It includes topics related to marketing as well as topics related to tourism and tourism planning, which are available in electronic and non-electronic libraries.

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction to Tourism Planning

Planning is a management process that involves determining desired goals and establishing strategies and goals to attain them (Talwar, 2006). Large corporations were the first to systematically implement strategic planning, and small businesses, organizations, and other enterprises have gradually caught on. Strategic planning, in contrast to earlier techniques, is concerned with long-term, continuous, and comprehensive organizational growth processes (Hall, 2014). Strategic planning, according to Bryson (2004), serves a number of important purposes, including achieving the organization's goals, directing decision-making regarding the management and operation of the organization, putting the organization's policy into practice through a work plan, and bringing together the workforce, assets, and commercial activities for a single goal. In addition to this commercial perspective, Hosmer (2007) stresses the value of ethics in the planning process. According to this

viewpoint, ethical planning also considers the overall effects on society and the environment and can encourage confidence, adherence, and participation among the various stakeholders. The first step in managing tourism communities is preparing for tourism (Murphy and Murphy, 2004). It's a complex process that takes into account resources, stakeholders, target markets, rivals, considerations for sustainable development, as well as other internal and external elements.

Hall (2014) asserts that the extensive complexity of the development process and the desire to minimize the harm caused by irresponsible development are the driving forces for the use of systematic planning to direct tourism growth. In this way, the commercial nature of the tourism business, the quick pace of tourism development, and the engagement of numerous stakeholders necessitate a methodical and well-structured planning process. Enhancing the visitor experience, generating revenue for the local tourism sector, limiting and monitoring the use of the destination's resources, and improving the quality of life for the local inhabitants are the four main objectives of the tourism planning process (Murphy and Murphy, 2004; Gunn and Var, 2002). Planning for tourism is a management tool in addition to a tool for development. Tourism planning can assist local stakeholders in decision-making processes and throughout the many phases of the destination's life cycle by offering an orderly framework. Tourism planning must provide a long-term view, balance the interests of different stakeholders, include useful indicators for follow-up, and be regularly updated in response to changes in the macro environment in order to function as a continuous and dynamic management tool. The approach of the planner also influences the features of the planning process and the harmony between the interests of the stakeholders (Ketter, 2016).

2.2 Tourism planning and its spatial dimensions

Tourism planning is a thorough process that takes into account the characteristics of the area, the development strategy, the competitive advantages, the resources, the performance of the industry, the interests of stakeholders, target markets, rivals, considerations for sustainable development, and other external and internal factors (Cooper & Hall, 2008). According to Hall (2008), the complexity of the growth process and the need to prevent harm from thoughtless expansion of tourist areas are what drive the need for systematic planning to direct tourism development. As a result, the commercialization of the tourism sector, the rapid pace of tourism development, and the engagement of numerous stakeholders all necessitate systematic and planned planning methods (Lew, 2014).

Destination, region, and country are the three main geographical layers that the tourist planning process may be related to (Gunn & Var, 2002; Hall, 2008). The level of regional planning is the most prevalent and is recognized as the most effective planning unit. Regional planning is a "offspring" of the macro-national system (Hall & Page, 2014). Numerous attempts have been made to define a region, but no appropriate description has been developed, claim Ndivo, Waudu, and Waswa (2013). An accepted working definition, however, defines tourist regions as priori areas with established boundaries, which are a part of a geographical region, interact internally, and can be packaged and identified as a single tourism product. Regional tourism planning offers the following major benefits: The first is that regional planning is better aware of local requirements and has the ability to more fairly disperse tourism and its advantages throughout the region. The second is that regional planning enhances community and business sector participation in the planning process (Marzuki & Hay, 2013). The third benefit is that regional information is crucial for making decisions about tourism because it may not be applicable to the unique requirements of every region if it is at the national level. The final benefit may differ

from those based on a national perspective due to variances in stakeholders' perspectives, regional tourist goals, and vision. Between industrialized and developing countries, there is a further significant spatial distinction. A rising number of emerging nations have entered the international tourism market in recent decades (Marzuki & Hay, 2013). Tourism has the "magic potential" to significantly advance developing regions by launching new businesses and industries, boosting consumer demand for regional products, and opening up new markets for agricultural goods (Ndivo et al., 2013). While most nations strive to get the most out of tourism, different nations at different stages of development have different planning procedures. This dynamic planning process is influenced by regional concerns including local identity, community, tradition, class, and/or race, as well as by national contexts of politics, economy, society, technology, and ecology (Reid, 2003). As a result, when comparing locations with varying levels of development, tourism planning and development should be evaluated differently.

2.3 Tourism planning and the role of marketing

Four crucial phases of the tourism planning process are listed by Gunn and Var (2002). To create a balance between economic, social, ecological, and other interests, representatives of the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors first formulate goals. Consequently, doing a thorough analysis of local and regional tourist resources includes looking at the market, target consumers, infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources. The third step involves designing, analyzing, and evaluating a number of planning options in order to find the best development strategy. This approach is anticipated to strike a balance between the first-stage development aims and the second-stage recognized tourism resources. Anything in the middle is a regional tourism planning technique that apparently balances and starts the desired interaction between physically-driven planning and market-driven planning while accommodating marketing aspects with the physical and functional ones. According

to Mill and Morrison (2012), the development of tourist destinations should comprise five key components: attractions, amenities, infrastructure, transportation, and hospitality. This approach to development is physically and functionally oriented. The selection of these components highlights the development's physical features and lays the groundwork for accommodating the anticipated tourists and visitors.

Gunn and Var (2002) present a little more nuanced perspective, contending that the tourism supply system is made up of five main parts: attractions, services, transportation, information, and promotion. In their opinion, the physical characteristics are divided into three main parts and two additional factors. These other components have to do with informing the tourists while they are there or marketing to them before they arrive. Mason (2008) offers a further balanced perspective, claiming that there are six main components in the planning and development of the tourism industry: three are physical, such as transportation, services, and attractions; the other three are local community, tourist market, and information and promotion.

In addition to the host people and culture, this perspective also takes into account the tourist market. Two patterns can be found after screening the various levels of marketing integration using a physically and functionally-driven development methodology. The first is that the physical features of attractions, services (facilities), and transportation are the fundamental elements that are repeated in all the other approaches. This highlights the crucial part that internal physical development plays in tourism. The components are presented in a very balanced way, giving each one equal weight, which is the second discernible pattern. Thus, the different elements cooperate rather than pointing to a single dominant element that might guide the growth process. Combining these two tendencies results in a focus on physical development rather than marketing, despite the fact that marketing can better direct

development that increases competitiveness, stimulates demand, raises value, and increases revenues (e.g., Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Kozak & Baloglu, 2010). According to Murphy and Murphy (2004), the tourism planning process takes place in three hierarchical environments: the internal environment, the task environment, and the broader environment. These patterns are consistent with their assertion. This strategy serves as an example of an "inside-out" viewpoint, where the audience and market are addressed after the destination and tourism items. As a result, tourism planning and development are proactive, offering the consumer a selection of "prefabricated" tourist goods (Ketter, 2016).

2.4 Challenges faced while developing tourism marketing and planning

Tourism is a crucial sector for many countries and local communities, contributing significantly to the economy and providing employment opportunities. However, national and local tourist organizations face various challenges while developing tourism marketing and planning. In this paper, we will explore some of the common issues that these organizations face and the impact they have on the success of tourism marketing and planning efforts (Al-Saadi, 2014).

1. Competition: One of the biggest challenges that tourist organizations face is the intense competition from other destinations and tourist organizations. In a highly competitive market, it can be challenging to attract tourists and differentiate a destination from others. Tourist organizations must find ways to promote their destinations effectively and stand out from the crowd.
2. Limited budget: National and local tourist organizations often have a limited budget to market and promote their destinations effectively. This constraint can limit their ability to invest in marketing campaigns, digital advertising, and other initiatives that can help attract tourists. The limited budget can also

limit their ability to conduct market research and collect data to make informed decisions.

3. Limited resources: Another challenge that tourist organizations face is a shortage of manpower, expertise, and technology to market their destinations effectively. Without sufficient resources, organizations may struggle to implement marketing campaigns, manage social media accounts, and maintain a website. This can make it difficult to reach a wider audience and engage with potential tourists.
4. Changing consumer behavior: Tourist organizations must keep pace with changing consumer behavior and preferences. With advances in technology, tourists are more informed and have more options than ever before. Tourist organizations must stay up to date with changing consumer trends and preferences, and adapt their marketing strategies accordingly.
5. Lack of coordination: Another challenge that tourist organizations face is the lack of coordination between various departments and stakeholders involved in tourism. This can lead to inefficiencies and miscommunication, making it difficult to achieve marketing and planning objectives. Organizations must find ways to work together and coordinate their efforts to achieve success.
6. Destination image: Maintaining a positive destination image is crucial for attracting tourists. Tourist organizations must address any negative perceptions and work to promote their destinations in a positive light. This may involve managing negative reviews, promoting the destination's unique features and attractions, and addressing any issues that may impact the destination's image.

7. Sustainability: Balancing economic, social, and environmental sustainability in tourism development and marketing is a significant challenge for tourist organizations. Organizations must ensure that their marketing efforts promote responsible and sustainable tourism practices, while also maximizing the economic benefits for the local community.
8. Measuring impact: Tourist organizations face difficulty in measuring the impact of their marketing and promotion efforts and making data-driven decisions. Without adequate data and analytics, it can be challenging to determine the success of marketing campaigns and make adjustments as needed.
9. Technological advancements: Keeping pace with rapidly changing technology and digital marketing trends can be challenging for tourist organizations. Organizations must stay up to date with new tools and platforms and find ways to integrate them into their marketing strategies to reach a wider audience.
10. Political and regulatory environment: The political and regulatory environment can also impact tourism marketing and planning. Uncertainty and fluctuations in the political and regulatory environment can make it challenging for tourist organizations to plan and implement their marketing efforts effectively. Organizations must be able to adapt to changes in the political and regulatory environment to ensure the success of their marketing campaigns.

In conclusion, national and local tourist organizations face several challenges while developing tourism marketing and planning. From competition and limited resources to changing consumer behavior and political and regulatory uncertainties,

organizations must find ways to overcome these challenges to achieve success. By staying up to date with new technologies and trends, collaborating with stakeholders, and promoting sustainable tourism practices, tourist.

3. Research Methodology

Research methodology is considered as a systematic approach, which mainly focused on finding answers for all research inquiries and to produce effective results of a specific study (Cresswell, 2008) The research emphasizes three primary hypotheses; the first hypothesis (H1) relates to the relationship between a country's level of development and the relative importance of marketing in tourism planning as indicated in the theoretical section. It is suggested that a country's level of development and the degree of marketing integration in the reviewed tourism plans have a strong relationship. As a result, the level of marketing involvement in planning will increase the higher the country's ranking on the Human Development Index. This theory is based on Gunn and Var's (2002) suggestion that the level of infrastructure now in place, the accessibility of resources, and the general level of development are some elements that influence tourism planning processes. The second hypothesis (H2) contends that experience running a tourist location raises perceptions of the significance of tourism marketing and its relative place in travel itinerary creation. As a result, it is hypothesized that the extent of marketing involvement in planning will positively connect with a country's tourism performance measures (tourist arrivals, tourism receipts, and the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index). This claim is supported by extensive research on the social, cultural, and other effects of tourism on host communities (Murphy, 2013). The third hypothesis (H3) examines the temporal aspect of planning for tourism and the effects of escalating competition over time (UNWTO, 2014). It is hypothesized that the extent of marketing involvement in

planning correlates with the year the tourism plan was issued, with newer tourism plans emphasizing marketing more. This theory is supported by research demonstrating that marketing is becoming more involved in the planning process (e.g., Li & Petrick, 2008; Cox & Wray, 2011).

The current study aims to evaluate the role of marketing in tourism planning: increase, decrease or interaction, therefore, the interview was used as a tool for this study, with reference to a group of literature and previous studies, to measure the variables arising from the hypotheses and model of the study and to answer their questions. The interview is considered one of the best means of collecting information about the study community and for its relevance to the nature of this study in terms of effort and capabilities and the spread of the study community members in far and different places. In pursuit of empirical evidence on the level of integration of marketing into tourism planning, the study analyzed regional tourism master plans from around the world. As a qualitative study, the research included 4-5 interviews with relevant persons.

4- Data analysis

4.1 Introduction

The primary data gathering technique used in this study was a semi-structured interview. The use of semi-structured interviews helps the researcher to get rich and in-depth data in a more engaging and conversational setting. Afterwards, the content analysis method is used to analyse the qualitative data that was gathered. To cover all-important elements connected to the main theme, the researcher first carefully planned the interview questions. The researcher then specified the instrument that would be used to gather and record data, either by recording audio to be listened to afterwards

or by taking intermediate notes and observations from respondents during the interview.

Interviews have been made with four experts from different divisions and departments, who have a broad knowledge regarding the role of marketing in tourism planning. The total number of interviews was four interviews. The main reason behind choosing the interview approach specifically is to generate an in-depth understanding for the research topic as mentioned before, and to realise the essential aims and motivations of this research study in a non-statistical manner. The following sections will aim to analyze the collected data, which has been gained from the interviews.

4.2 Background information

The participants were asked to determine their level of education, their position, and their work of experience in their position. Regarding their qualifications, two of the participants hold a doctorate degree (PhD) (participant 1, participant 4). While one participant (participant 2) have a Master's degree and the last participant have a bachelor's degree (BSc) (participant 3).

Regarding to the their work experience, the duration of their post ranged between 10 months -8 years; participant 1 for 8 years, participant 2 for 4 years, participant 3 for 10 months, participant4 for 5 and a half years. The following table shows the participants profile.

Table 1: The participants profile

Participant No.	Level of education	Job	Work experience
P1	PhD	Senior officer in the Marketing division	8 years
P2	MBA	Officer in the project planning division	4 years
P3	BSc	Officer in the environmental organization section	10 months
P4	PhD	Senior officer in the services development division	5 and a half years

4.3 Tourism planning

Relating to the seventh question, which aimed to explain the definition of tourism planning, the participants showed a broad knowledge of the concept of tourism planning. They agreed that Tourism planning is the process of arranging and laying the groundwork for the growth and development of the local tourism business. This include locating and evaluating tourist resources, selecting a target audience,

estimating the demand for tourism services, and creating strategies and policies to control and sustain the growth of tourism in a prudent and effective manner. Tourism planning aims to optimize the positive effects of travel while reducing its negative effects. Participant 1 pointed out that the term involves the identification of tourist resources, market analysis, forecasting demand, developing strategies, and implementing policies and programs aimed at maximizing the positive impacts and minimizing the negative impacts of tourism activities. Participant 2 states that the overall objective of tourism planning is to create a balanced and mutually beneficial relationship between the tourism industry and the local community. She said; "*When I consider the concept of tourism planning, it is a systematic process of defining and developing a comprehensive and sustainable approach for the management and growth of the tourism industry in a specific geographic area*".

Participants 3 and 4 also agreed that tourism planning is a comprehensive process that takes into account local characteristics, the development strategy, competitive advantages, resources, industry performance, stakeholder interests, target markets, competitors, considerations for sustainable development, as well as other internal and external factors. Participant 3 said; "*Tourism planning is a comprehensive and dynamic process that considers a wide range of factors, both internal and external, to develop a sustainable approach to the growth and management of the tourism industry*". The following table shows the participants' answers regarding the seventh question of the interview.

Table 2: Definition of Tourism planning

Participant No.	Definition of tourism planning
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<p>P1</p>	<p>The process of organizing and laying the foundation for the expansion and development of the local tourism industry is known as tourism planning. This entails identifying and assessing tourist resources, choosing a target market, calculating the demand for tourism services, and developing plans and policies to prudently and effectively control and sustain the expansion of tourism.</p>
<p>P2</p>	<p>When I consider the concept of tourism planning, it is a systematic process of defining and developing a comprehensive and sustainable approach for the management and growth of the tourism industry in a specific geographic area.</p>
<p>P3</p>	<p>Tourism planning is a comprehensive and dynamic process that considers a wide range of factors, both internal and external, to develop a sustainable approach to the growth and management of the tourism industry</p>
<p>P4</p>	<p>It involves the systematic assessment of local conditions, the development of a vision and strategy, the identification of target markets and competitors, the analysis of stakeholder interests, and the consideration of sustainable development principles.</p>

4.4 Role of marketing in tourism planning in Najaf

The eighth question aimed to find out the role or contribution of marketing in tourism planning. The participants agreed that marketing plays a crucial role in tourism planning by helping to identify target markets and promoting the destinations and tourist resources to those markets. In addition, marketing activities help to generate demand for tourism services and support the development of the tourism industry. Participant 1 said: "*Marketing plays a crucial role in tourism planning as it helps to generate demand for tourism services and supports the development of the tourism industry. The goal of tourism marketing is to promote the destination and its tourist resources to target markets, creating awareness and interest in visiting the area. Marketing activities help to create a unique and recognizable brand identity for the destination and differentiate it from competing destinations. This is important as it helps to build a loyal customer base and attract repeat visitors*".

While participant 2 argued that market research is the key function of marketing in tourism planning, she said; "*One of the key functions of marketing in tourism planning is market research. This involves conducting surveys, focus groups, and other research activities to understand the needs, preferences, and behaviors of target markets. Market research provides valuable insights into the characteristics of potential tourists, which can inform the development of marketing strategies and plans. For example, if market research shows that particular target market values environmentally friendly tourism activities, the destination can focus its marketing efforts on promoting eco-tourism opportunities*". While participant 3 and 4 agreed that marketing plays an important role in tourism product development.

Table 3: Role of marketing in tourism planning in Najaf

Participant No.	Role of marketing in tourism planning in Najaf
P1	<p>Marketing plays a crucial role in tourism planning as it helps to generate demand for tourism services and supports the development of the tourism industry. The goal of tourism marketing is to promote the destination and its tourist resources to target markets, creating awareness and interest in visiting the area. Marketing activities help to create a unique and recognizable brand identity for the destination and differentiate it from competing destinations. This is important as it helps to build a loyal customer base and attract repeat visitors.</p>
P2	<p>One of the key functions of marketing in tourism planning is market research. This involves conducting surveys, focus groups, and other research activities to understand the needs, preferences, and behaviors of target markets. Market research provides valuable insights into the characteristics of potential tourists, which can inform the development of marketing strategies and plans. For example, if market research shows that particular target market values environmentally friendly tourism activities, the destination can focus its marketing efforts on promoting eco-tourism opportunities.</p>

<p>P3</p>	<p>An important role of marketing in tourism planning is product development. This involves working with tourism providers to develop new and innovative tourism products that meet the needs of target markets. This could include developing new tourism packages, experiences, or activities that are specifically designed to appeal to specific target markets. Marketing can also help to promote these new products to target markets, creating awareness and demand for them.</p>
<p>P4</p>	<p>Marketing is involved in the distribution of tourism products to target markets. This involves working with travel agents, tour operators, and other intermediaries to distribute the destination and its products to target markets. By working closely with these intermediaries, the destination can ensure that its products are widely available to target markets and that they are being promoted effectively. This can help to increase demand for tourism services and support the overall growth and development of the tourism industry.</p>

4.5 Marketing efforts being made in Najaf's travel and tourism sector

The ninth question aimed to reveal the efforts made by travel and travel and tourism sector in Najaf. Each participant gave a unique effort made to achieve marketing

goals. Participant 1 stated that travel fairs and exhibitions both domestically and internationally. While participant 2 mentioned that Najaf city improved the infrastructure to cater to the growing number of tourists. She said that; *"The city's infrastructure is being improved as part of another marketing initiative to accommodate the increasing number of tourists. To improve the entire visitor experience, the government is making investments in modernizing the transportation network, hotels, and other tourism facilities. This will not only draw more visitors to Najaf, but it will also persuade them to stay longer and spend more money there"*.

Participant 4 declared the tourism board is also promoting Najaf as a destination for spiritual and religious tourism. He said; *"The city is home to the holy shrine of Imam Ali, which attracts millions of pilgrims from all over the world. The board is working to make the pilgrimage experience more comfortable and memorable for visitors by providing better facilities and services at the shrine. They are also encouraging the development of religious-themed tours and packages that will allow tourists to delve deeper into the city's spiritual heritage"*. Participant 3 also stressed the efforts done by the authorities using social media platforms to reach a younger community.

Table 4: Role of marketing in tourism planning in Najaf

Participant No.	Role of marketing in tourism planning in Najaf
P1	<p>The Najaf travel and tourism sector has been focusing on several national marketing goals and initiatives to promote the city as a tourist destination. One of the primary goals is to increase awareness of Najaf among international tourists. To achieve this goal, the tourism board has been</p>

	<p>actively participating in travel fairs and exhibitions both domestically and internationally. These events provide an opportunity for the board to display the rich cultural heritage, historical sites, and religious importance of Najaf to a wider audience.</p>
P2	<p>The city's infrastructure is being improved as part of another marketing initiative to accommodate the increasing number of tourists. To improve the entire visitor experience, the government is making investments in modernizing the transportation network, hotels, and other tourism facilities. This will not only draw more visitors to Najaf, but it will also persuade them to stay longer and spend more money there</p>
P3	<p>The tourism board is also collaborating with local tour operators, travel agents, and other stakeholders to promote Najaf as a tourist destination. This collaboration will help to create comprehensive and integrated marketing strategy that will reach a wider audience. The board is also leveraging social media and other digital platforms to reach a younger, tech-savvy demographic</p>
P4	<p>The city is home to the holy shrine of Imam Ali, which attracts millions of pilgrims from all over the world. The board is working to make the pilgrimage experience more</p>

	<p>comfortable and memorable for visitors by providing better facilities and services at the shrine. They are also encouraging the development of religious-themed tours and packages that will allow tourists to delve deeper into the city's spiritual heritage.</p>
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4.6 Satisfaction of tourists in Najaf

Regarding the tenth & eleventh question of the interview, all of the four participants in the interview agreed that it is difficult to determine the overall level of satisfaction among tourists in Najaf without conducting surveys or research to gather data and feedback. However, factors such as the quality of infrastructure, services, and attractions, cultural experiences, safety and security, and the behavior of local residents can all affect a tourist's level of satisfaction. Participant 1 said; *"The overall state of the tourism industry in Najaf can be impacted by various factors, such as the security situation, the quality of infrastructure and services, and the level of investment in the tourism sector. In recent years, there have been efforts to improve the tourism industry in Najaf, including investments in infrastructure and services, as well as marketing and promotion efforts"*.

While participant 2 said, *"The quality of infrastructure and services in Najaf can impact the overall state of the tourism industry. For example, poor road networks, inadequate public transportation, and insufficient tourist facilities and services can create an unpleasant experience for tourists, reducing their overall satisfaction and potentially leading them to choose other destinations"*.

Table 5: Satisfaction of tourists in Najaf

Participant No.	Satisfaction of tourists in Najaf
P1	<p>The overall state of the tourism industry in Najaf can be impacted by various factors, such as the security situation, the quality of infrastructure and services, and the level of investment in the tourism sector. In recent years, there have been efforts to improve the tourism industry in Najaf, including investments in infrastructure and services, as well as marketing and promotion efforts.</p>
P2	<p>The quality of infrastructure and services in Najaf can affect the overall state of the tourism industry. For example, poor road networks, inadequate public transportation, and insufficient tourist facilities and services can create an unpleasant experience for tourists, reducing their overall satisfaction and potentially leading them to choose other destinations.</p>
P3	<p>Tourists' satisfaction in Najaf can be influenced by various factors, including the quality of infrastructure and services, cultural experiences, safety and security, and the behavior of local residents. Visitors expect to have a comfortable and safe experience while in Najaf, with access to high-quality facilities and services, such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation. The availability of cultural and historical sites, as well as local experiences,</p>

	such as cultural tours and local food, can also greatly influence tourists' satisfaction.
P4	The standard of the infrastructure and services, cultural experiences, safety and security, and the conduct of locals can all have an impact on how satisfied tourists are in Najaf. Visitors anticipate a pleasant and secure stay in Najaf with access to first-rate facilities and services, including lodging, dining, and transportation.

4.7 Marketing strategies used in the travel industry within Najaf

Different marketing strategies used in the travel industry are indicated by the participants, participant 1 said; *"In recent years, digital marketing has become a crucial tool for travel brands to reach their target audience. This includes tactics such as search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, and email marketing. By creating targeted campaigns and utilizing data-driven insights, travel brands can effectively reach potential travelers and encourage them to book a trip to Iraq."* While participant 2 stated that destination, marketing is one of the most important strategies used in Najaf. Participants 3 and 4 indicated that collaboration with local businesses and promoting events and festivals could be an effective way to attract tourists.

Table 6: Marketing strategies used in the travel industry within Najaf

Participant No.	Marketing strategies used in the travel industry within Najaf
P1	In recent years, digital marketing has become a crucial tool for travel brands to reach their target audience. This includes tactics such as search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, and email marketing. By creating targeted campaigns and utilizing data-driven insights, travel brands can effectively reach potential travelers and encourage them to book a trip to Iraq.
P2	Destination Marketing which involves promoting Iraq as a travel destination to the world. This can be done through various channels including social media, travel trade shows, and media partnerships. By displaying the rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and unique experiences available in Iraq, the tourism industry can attract more visitors.
P3	Collaborating with local businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and tour operators, can help travel brands to promote their offerings. By working together, they can create comprehensive travel packages that offer a well-rounded experience for visitors to Iraq.

<p>P4</p>	<p>Promoting events and festivals in Iraq can be an effective way to attract travelers. This can include cultural events, food festivals, and religious celebrations. By highlighting these unique experiences, the tourism industry can highlight the country's rich cultural heritage and encourage visitors to book a trip.</p>
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4.8 Problems and challenges that national and local tourist organizations face while developing tourism marketing and planning

Regarding the thirteenth question, which sought to identify the major difficulties and obstacles that international and local tourist organizations encounter when creating and putting into practice tourism marketing and planning methods, half of the participants agreed that lack of funding and competition from other destinations are the main challenges in developing tourism in Najaf. While the rest stated that lack of infrastructure and facilities as well as limited access to information can be major problem too.

Participant 2 said: " *Developing and implementing effective tourism marketing campaigns can be expensive, and many tourist organizations in Najaf struggle to secure adequate funding for their initiatives. This can limit their ability to reach a large audience and promote their offerings effectively*". While participant 4 said: " *In order to develop effective marketing campaigns, tourist organizations need access to accurate and up-to-date information about their destination. This can include information about tourist attractions, cultural experiences, and the local population.*

In Najaf, however, limited access to this information can make it difficult for tourist organizations to promote the destination effectively".

Table 7: Problems and challenges that national and local tourist organizations face while developing tourism marketing and planning

Participant No.	Challenges facing national and local tourists organizations
P1	In recent years, digital marketing has become a crucial tool for travel brands to reach their target audience. This includes tactics such as search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, and email marketing. By creating targeted campaigns and utilizing data-driven insights, travel brands can effectively reach potential travelers and encourage them to book a trip to Iraq.
P2	Najaf faces stiff competition from other destinations, both within Iraq and abroad, for tourism dollars. Tourist organizations must find a way to differentiate Najaf and promote its unique offerings in order to attract travelers.
P3	Despite its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, Najaf may lack the necessary infrastructure and facilities to accommodate large numbers of visitors. This can be a major challenge for tourist organizations trying to promote the destination, as travelers may be hesitant to visit if they

	are concerned about their comfort and safety.
P4	In order to develop effective marketing campaigns, tourist organizations need access to accurate and up-to-date information about their destination. This can include information about tourist attractions, cultural experiences, and the local population. In Najaf, however, limited access to this information can make it difficult for tourist organizations to promote the destination effectively.

4.9 Recommendations towards integrated participatory tourism planning and marketing

Different recommendations were posed by each participant, for instant participant1 recommended that all necessary parties, such as local communities, tour operators, governmental organizations, and other tourism-related businesses, must be included in effective participatory tourism planning and marketing. While participant 3 suggested implementing diversification of Tourism Offerings through offering a range of different tourist activities and experiences.

On the other hand, participant2 said; "*Sustainable tourism development is essential for ensuring that Najaf continues to be a desirable tourist destination in the long term. This includes minimizing the negative impact of tourism on the environment and local communities, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably among all stakeholders. By promoting sustainable tourism, Najaf can ensure that its natural and cultural assets are*

preserved for future generations and that the local community continues to benefit from tourism development". Participant4 also suggested conducting a comprehensive marketing and promotion strategy through highlighting the city's rich cultural heritage.

Table 8: Recommendations towards integrated participatory tourism planning and marketing

Participant No.	Recommendations towards integrated participatory tourism planning and marketing
P1	Effective participatory tourism planning and marketing requires the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including local communities, tour operators, government agencies, and other tourism-related businesses. By engaging these stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process, their interests and needs can be considered, and their support for the tourism development effort can be gained. This can also help to ensure that the community benefits from tourism development and that the negative impacts of tourism are minimized.
P2	Sustainable tourism development is essential for ensuring that Najaf continues to be a desirable tourist destination in the long term. This includes minimizing the negative impact of tourism on the environment and local communities, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and ensuring that the benefits of

	<p>tourism are distributed equitably among all stakeholders. By promoting sustainable tourism, Najaf can ensure that its natural and cultural assets are preserved for future generations and that the local community continues to benefit from tourism development.</p>
P3	<p>Offering a range of tourist activities and experiences that cater to different interests and preferences to attract a wider range of visitors, such as cultural and heritage tours, adventure and outdoor activities, food tours, arts and crafts tours and sports and fitness activities.</p>
P4	<p>A comprehensive marketing and promotion strategy should effectively communicate the unique and appealing aspects of Najaf to potential visitors. This could include highlighting the city's rich cultural heritage, diverse range of tourist activities and experiences, and the warmth and hospitality of its people. Additionally, marketing and promotion efforts should target a wide range of potential visitors, including families, cultural tourists, adventure seekers, and others. By effectively promoting Najaf as a tourist destination, the city can attract a larger number of visitors, which can help to generate economic benefits for the local community.</p>

4.10 Successful procedures to improve the level of marketing in tourism planning within Najaf

Regarding the last question in the interview, which aimed to find out the successful procedures that can be taken to improve the level of marketing in tourism planning, participant1 stated that developing a comprehension-marketing plan is essential in Najaf. While participant2 argued that they key factor is in strengthen branding and promotion. Participant3 on the other hand said;" *Effective marketing in tourism planning requires collaboration with stakeholders, including local communities, tour operators, government agencies, and other tourism-related businesses. By working together, these stakeholders can leverage their resources and expertise to develop and implement effective marketing strategies that promote Iraq as a tourist destination*".

Participant4 stated that monitoring and evaluating of marketing efforts is important, such as tracking the performance of marketing campaigns and analyzing visitor data.

Table 9: Successful procedures to improve the level of marketing in tourism planning within Najaf

Participant No.	Successful procedures to improve the level of marketing in tourism planning within Najaf
P1	A comprehensive marketing plan is essential for improving the level of marketing in tourism planning within Iraq. This plan should outline the target market, marketing objectives, strategies, and budget. It should be based on thorough research and analysis of the current tourism market in Iraq and the target market

	segments.
P2	Strengthening the branding and promotion of Iraq as a tourist destination is key to increasing its visibility and appeal. This could include creating a strong brand identity, developing a comprehensive website and social media presence, and implementing a targeted marketing and advertising campaign. The marketing and promotion efforts should focus on highlighting the unique cultural, historical, and natural assets of Iraq and emphasizing the country's hospitality and safety.
P3	Effective marketing in tourism planning requires collaboration with stakeholders, including local communities, tour operators, government agencies, and other tourism-related businesses. By working together, these stakeholders can leverage their resources and expertise to develop and implement effective marketing strategies that promote Iraq as a tourist destination.
P4	Regular monitoring and evaluation of marketing efforts is important for ensuring their effectiveness and making necessary adjustments. This can include tracking the performance of marketing campaigns, analyzing visitor data, and conducting customer satisfaction surveys.

5- Conclusion

In conclusion, marketing is an essential component of tourism planning and has a major impact on the success of the tourism industry. Through effective marketing campaigns, tourist organizations can reach a wider audience, promote the unique features and attractions of their destination, and increase demand for their destination. By utilizing various marketing channels, such as digital advertising, social media, email marketing, and influencer marketing, tourist organizations can tailor their messages to specific segments of the tourist market and create a strong brand image for their destination.

However, the role of marketing in tourism planning is constantly evolving, and tourist organizations must be flexible and adaptable to keep pace with changing consumer behavior and technological advancements. A comprehensive and well-executed marketing strategy is critical for the success of the tourism industry, and tourist organizations must allocate the necessary resources and budget to support their marketing efforts. Additionally, they must continuously monitor and evaluate their marketing results and make data-driven decisions to ensure the success of their tourism planning initiatives. Overall, the role of marketing in tourism planning is crucial and must be given the attention and resources it deserves.

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