

MODELING DIMENSIONALITY OF SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN TOUR OPERATOR FIRMS IN KENYA

Maru, Loice, and Cheruiyot, Thomas K.

Department of Management Science, School of Business and Economics, Moi University,
P.O. Box 63056,00200, Nairobi, Kenya.

ABSTRACT: *For Kenya and other developing countries, Tourism contributes significantly to national revenue and Gross Domestic Product and hence National growth. Tour operation plays a key role in ensuring sustainability of this sector of the economy. This paper therefore examines the dimensions of sustainable entrepreneurship in Tour Operator (TO) firms. Data was drawn from 70 TO firms in the coastal region of Kenya. The study revealed the key dimensions of sustainable entrepreneurship practiced by the firms. The findings are invaluable in providing a basis for policies that regulate entrepreneurial behaviour for desired sustainable outcomes for firms.*

KEYWORDS: Sustainable Entrepreneurship, Dimensions of Sustainable-preneurship, Tour Operator Firms.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable entrepreneurship addresses triple benefits arising from human enterprise activities in all sectors of an economy. These benefits include: the positive impact on social wealth, the economic benefits of successful venturing and the social benefits stemming from environmental initiatives (such as reduction of pollution increased quality of life and population health). Hence, this paper explores the relative practice of sustainable entrepreneurship and hypothesize that it has significant dimensions as practiced by tour operator (TO) firms. A clear conceptualization of sustainable entrepreneurship with its unique characteristics in a contextualized, set up is not evident in extant literature (Dean and McMullen, 2007; Mitchell, Wooliscroft and Higham, 2010; Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011; Shepherd and Patzelt, 2011).

At firm level, the term “sustainability” still remains ambiguous and politically charged, particularly within the lexicon of business. However, when the term is limited to encompass environmental management and social equity, it is often perceived to be at odds with fiduciary responsibility that is linked to business strategy (France, 1997). Hence it is necessary to make a case for business for sustainability by adopting a broader view and linking it to expectations of the stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stakeholder theory begins with the assumption that values are necessarily and explicitly a part of doing business, and rejects the separation thesis (Freeman, 1994) which assumes that ethics and economics can be neatly and sharply separated. The theory explains and directs managerial behavior in markets. It claims that whatever the ultimate aim of the corporation or other form

of business activity, managers and entrepreneurs must take into account the legitimate interests of those groups and individuals who can affect (or be affected by) their activities (Freeman, 1994; Donaldson and Preston, 1995). The idea of value creation and trade is intimately connected to creating value for stakeholders. Business is about putting together a deal so that managers, suppliers, customers, employees, communities, and shareholders all win continuously over time.

A sustainable organization is one whose characteristics and actions are designed to lead to a desirable future state for all stakeholders (Funk, 2003). For investors, a desirable future state would include sustained revenue growth over the long term. For the talent market, it would include workforce diversity. Regulators and the community at large, value environmental stewardship and social responsibility. Consumers seek useful, reliable price-efficient products and services. From the view of employees of the company itself, a desirable future state includes maintaining viability and profitability as well as managing risks while promoting innovation. Companies that actively manage and respond to a wide range of sustainability indicators are better able to create value for all these stakeholders over the long term (Funk, 2003).

A firm-level sustainability model would encompass a broad suite of intangible value drivers configured as inputs to the models (Shepherd and Patzelt, 2011). The indicators would be derived from publicly available published information on the industry. For any business, a host of qualitative evidence, quantitative measures and the particulars of its industry context can be mined to create a hypothetical model of the relevant sustainable drivers such as innovation, risk management or environmental impact among others. Surveys of internal and external stakeholders as well as existing operational data can then be used to identify, for each driver, groups of measurable sustainability indicators that cut across all the business's functions such as procurement, supplier relations, product design, research and development investment, worker-safety statistics and accrued environmental liabilities among others (Funk, 2003). The resultant company-specific model can be tested empirically and quantified to establish the impact of indicators on drivers and, in turn, on overall sustainability. Changes in both indicators and drivers can be mapped to such performance factors as stock price, earnings, and market share and satisfaction levels of stakeholders. Although it may not be perfect science to identify leading indicators of sustainability, performance measurements should be linked to business objectives. Additionally, availability of both financial and intangible performance information and the ability to interpret them, can give decision makers a more comprehensive understanding of what is important for performance over the long term.

Such a model needs empirical validation in an industry such as tourism, whose main agenda for the future is growth and sustainable development. While tourism is considered one of the largest contributors to environmental degradation, it also has the potential to minimize its negative impact through the practice of ecotourism. Over the years, there has been a plethora of management initiatives, projects and programs for the greening of production and for improved environmental performance. In this field, according to Dean and McMullen (2007), opportunities for environmental entrepreneurs exist in discovering and implementing new product or process technologies that are more environmentally friendly. Moreover, there are opportunities for such entrepreneurs in discovering ecotourists to whom environmentally superior products and services appeal and motivate which leads to the elimination of subsidies and incentives, which cause environmental degradation.

Relevance of Sustainable Entrepreneurship in Tourism

Tourism is a classic ‘tragedy of the commons’ where many individuals, acting independently and in what they perceive to be their own interests, destroy a collective good (Hardin, 1968; Nicholson-Lord, 2002). Despite this, it is one of the world’s biggest and fastest growing industries. It is estimated by the World Tourism Organizations (WTO) that by 2020 there will be around 1.6 billion tourists visiting various tourism destinations in the world. Tourism is a complex industry, in economic and social terms, involving many people worldwide as users and providers of tourist services, and it is perceived to be a beneficial activity for the community where it takes place (WTO, 2004). This is due to its potential for employment opportunities and contribution to local incomes and at the same time increasing the opportunities for intercultural exchanges between different communities and countries. However, like all other industries, tourism uses resources, generates waste, and creates environmental, socio-cultural and economic costs and benefits in the process (Welford *et al.*, 2000).

Most tourism activities, comprising present and future interests of tourists and host populations, as well as of tourism organizations, place pressure on the use of natural resources (Cater and Lowman, 1994). The destructive effects of tourism activities have become manifested, and may be greater than anyone might suspect (Nicholson-Lord, 2002). This indicates that the relationships between tourism development, socio-economic development and the environment are circular and cumulative. The urgency of the situation has led to the need to address the sustainability issue through the implementation of sustainability guidelines and codes of practice (Cater and Lowman, 1994; UNEP, 1995; GRI, 2002). Honey (1999) criticizes the sustainable tourism development paradigm as too tourism-centric, parochial and therefore inherently flawed, claiming that it effectively condones planning, management, and policy decisions that are not consistent with the general aims and requirements of sustainable development. However, sustainable tourism development still remains a critical issue that needs to be addressed.

Contextualizing Sustainable Entrepreneurship in Tour Operation

In the organization and structure of the tourism industry, tour operator (TO) Firms are a central link between tourists and their holiday destinations and hence have the power to influence both sides: the demand (tourists) and, the supply (service providers) according to their interests. Inbound TO Firms are often contracted by outbound operators and non-profit organizations; and, hence are important components in ensuring high-quality sustainable tourism. They are responsible for arranging all details of the trip, including assembling networks of lodges close to or within the nature-viewing areas (Honey and Krantz, 2007). The role of TO Firms, as a broker who buys bulk to sell to tourists (directly or through a travel agency), is entrepreneurial in nature since engage in *new combinations* (Schumpeter, 1934) as they put together different parts of a tourism product to create a new, more complex product. In the process of developing a “tour package”, they assume some degree of risk. Their success depends on their ability to buy separate tourism products and services at a low price and to combine them in a profitable manner to benefit both the clients and themselves. To enhance competitiveness, TO Firms also try to differentiate their products and services from those of others by providing additional services such as insurance, visa services, travel newspapers, guides, travel consultants among others, to their package (Holloway, 1998). Cost savings and hence efficiency is attained by the TO Firms through integration of strategies that involve making alliances with companies with similar or complimentary activities. Further, TO Firms have to find tourists willing to use

tourism facilities during the off-season in order to cover for at least part of the expenses incurred during that period. Therefore, the decisions that they make and the actions they take in linking up supply and demand that provide opportunities for “new combinations” are entrepreneurial.

The greatest impact resulting from TO Firms operation is not direct, but consists of indirect influences on the supply and demand of tourism products. Firstly, TO Firms who specialize in mass tourism are responsible for the over-concentration of tourists in popular destinations, which in turn cause direct negative impacts on the environment. Secondly, by bringing tourists in large numbers, TO Firms stimulate irrational development of destinations within a very short time, which neglects environmental and social concerns and leads to a more uniform local culture. Consequently, TO Firms being central in all movements within the industry, in a way, influence the pressure on destinations by supplying tourists (Holloway, 1998; Budeanu, 1999). Positive impacts of tourism can hence be achieved when TO Firms adopt appropriate management practices that enhance benefits to all stakeholders. Tapper (2001) suggests that as the tourism industry increasingly becomes globalized, counter factors have also emerged that are leading tour operator firms to address broader environmental, socio-economic and cultural issues in the context of sustainable performance and to ensure equity in the benefits to stakeholders.

The Problem

Sustainable performance in the tourism industry involves planning, developing and delivering tourism products and services that cause positive tourists' satisfaction (experience) and provide value to other stakeholders by yielding minimum negative social, economic, and environmental impact to tourism destinations. The nature of the tourism products and services requires that all tourism actors namely; TO Firms and their employees, tourists, and local communities at tourist destinations, participate in its development, taking cognizance of sustainability principles. TO Firms being a crucial link in the tourism business, represent a central connection between tourists and suppliers of tourism products and services. They have the power to influence both the demand (tourists) and the supply (product and service owners and providers) sides of tourism to embrace and practice sustainability principles in their pursuits. They also have the potential to ensure high-quality sustainable tourism at destinations (Honey and Krantz, 2007). Further, in order to enhance the value of their products and service as well as remain profitable in a competitive market, TO Firms engage in innovation as a key element of entrepreneurship.

By nature, entrepreneurship is systemic and is built around the tour firms' operations, their products and services and this may take different dimensions (Sawhney, Wolcott and Arroniz, 2006). It is the creation of substantial new value for customers and the firm by creatively changing one or more dimensions of the business system (Sawhney *et al.*, 2006). It is about new value, not new things; comes in many flavors based on any dimension; and is systemic as it considers all aspects of a business. Based on this understanding, tour operation managers have opportunities to inject entrepreneurial ingenuity in the design of tour packages, marketing of the tour packages, tour operation processes, and management of tourism destinations, future orientation, and risk-taking propensity to cause desired performance of the firms. However, sustainable entrepreneurship in firm performance is a matter of limited research in the tourism industry.

This paper is motivated by the efforts towards sustainable development in tourism in Kenya (Government of Kenya, 1995; Ikiara, 2001) involving taking up and ensuring that all sustainability principles prescribed in Agenda 21 (UN, 1993; Haas, 2002) of which the Kenya Government is a signatory are adhered to. The Agenda specifically emphasizes development of tourism that respects the environment ensuring long-term conservation of natural and cultural resources that are socially and economically acceptable and equitable. Besides, in its Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS 2003-2007), in the Medium Term Plan Strategy 2008-2012 (Government of Kenya, 2008) and the Vision 2030, the Kenya government identified tourism as one of the growth engines for the country's economy. However, the fundamental rationale underlying this emphasis in respect to development of the sustainable tourism sector is to improve the quality of life for all Kenyans. Unlike in the past when tourism marketing was geared towards mass tourism, the current focus is on effective niche marketing targeting high yield markets to ensure that the tourism industry gains optimal returns in investment and also sustaining the environment (Government of Kenya, 2008).

This paper aims to answer two questions: first, what components of sustainability underlie the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship (*sustaino-preneurship*) in TO firms? To what extent do these dimensions vary across TO firms?

METHODOLOGY

The study was an explanatory survey of 70 tour operation Firms registered as members of the Mombasa and Coast Tourism Association (MCTA) to provide tour operations. With the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), both descriptive statistics such as, frequencies, percentages, means, mode and standard deviations and inferential tests such as Pearson Chi-Square, ANOVA, Pearson Correlation, Exploratory Factor Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis were performed.

The study investigated six dimensions of entrepreneurship in tour operations, namely: innovation of tour packages (10 items); innovation of marketing of tour packages (10 items); innovation of tour operation process (20 items); innovation of tourism destination (14 items); future orientation (10 items); and risk-taking propensity (17 items) using TOs in coastal Kenya (Table 1). Analyses of these dimensions were expected to reveal the underlying dimensions of sustainability in entrepreneurship evident in the extent of incorporation of social, economic and environmental concerns in tour operations.

Table 1: Operationalization of the Sustainability Components of Entrepreneurship

Innovation of Tour Packages :	Sustainability Pillars		
	Social	Economic	Environmental
Introduce new tour packages to suit customer demand		√	
Offer new tour packages that enhance satisfaction of our customer	√		
Provide have added features (such as discounts complementary prices)		√	
Offer similar tour packages to all our customers throughout the year		√	
Reorganize tour packages in new ways to reposition in the market		√	

Design new tour packages for our current target markets	√	
Introduce new tourism events and attractions to suit customer demand	√	
Environmental concerns are a priority when designing new tour packages		√
Introduce new varieties of tourism product and service in tour packages	√	
Offer new tour packages that minimize waste in use local resources		√

Innovation in Marketing of Tour Packages:	Sustainability Pillars		
	Social	Economic	Environmental
Design tour packages based on a clearly segmented tourists market		√	
Offer Tour packages are highly differentiated in composition		√	
Introduce current tour packages to new tourism markets		√	
Differentiate our prices based on the target market segment(s)		√	
Pursue new methods to promote that suit each market segment		√	
Introduce new ways of distributing tour packages		√	
Enter new co-operatives in marketing our tour packages	√		
Pursue new methods of establishing customer loyalty		√	
Environmental concerns is a priority new marketing approaches			√
Encourage new market networks	√		

Innovation of Tour Operations' Process:	Sustainability Pillars		
	Social	Economic	Environmental
Utilize computer-based systems to cater, analyze and store customer information		√	
Use information generated by information systems to develop tour packages		√	
Use computer-based reservation methods (on-line booking)		√	
Put in place new ways to control quality of tour operations		√	
Regularly update tourists records		√	
Employ new ways of cutting operation costs		√	
Carry out environmental impact assessment before introducing new tour packages			√
Trains employees to be efficient in tour operations		√	
Trained to operate in an environmental conscious manner			√
Train employees to advise clients effectively during the tours		√	
Train employees to guide clients effectively during the tours		√	
Reward employees who conduct tasks in an environmentally responsible manner			√
Involve employees in designing our tour packages	√		
Offer customers flexibility to reorganize tour packages to suit their needs	√		
Provide our employees with adequate freedom to perform their work	√		
Firms' rules and regulations are redefined regularly		√	
Openly discuss environmental conservation issues with employees			√
Discuss environmental conservation issues with clients			√

Discuss environmental conservation issues with suppliers	√
Discuss environmental conservation issues with members of local communities at destinations	√
Seasonality of tourism activities is always beyond firms' control	√

Innovation of Tourism Destinations (Source) :	Sustainability Pillars		
	Social	Economic	Environmental
Screen and select suppliers based on the quality of their products/services		√	
Selects environmentally certified suppliers of tourism products/services			√
Prefer suppliers who utilize natural resources with minimum wastage			√
Advise suppliers to minimize air, water and land pollution from their operations			√
Advise suppliers to minimize waste in use of natural resources			√
Advise suppliers to safely dispose all wastes without injury to the environment			√
Select local community-based suppliers at destination level	√		
Work with local communities on conservation issues at destinations			√
Take precaution to prevent irreversible environmental damage at destination			√
Consider members of respective local communities for employment	√		
Encourage local people to create new and exciting tourism products at destinations	√		
Offer our packages that provide business opportunities to community-based small businesses at destinations	√		
Supports community-based projects at destinations	√		
Make charitable donations to projects selected at the destinations	√		

Future Orientation:	Sustainability Pillars		
	Social	Economic	Environmental
Firms vision is to undertake tour operations responsibly to be sustainable		√	
Undertake research on the needs of our customer		√	
Actively seek for networks with other stakeholders in the industry		√	
Plan to participate in local community events at destinations	√		
Actively plan to reduce seasonality of our tour operations		√	
Purposively look for tourism opportunities to exploit		√	
Set clear environmental conservation goals			√
Plan programs necessary to achieve our environmental conservation goals			√
Seek for environmental certification voluntarily			√
Carry out research on environmental issues that relate to operations			√

Anticipate concerns (from Employee, clients, suppliers, community members) about potential hazards of our operations at destinations	√		
Offer packages that provide business opportunities to community-based small businesses at destinations	√		
Supports community-based projects at destinations	√		
Make charitable donations to projects selected at the destinations	√		
	Sustainability Pillars		
Risk-Taking Propensity	Social	Economic	Environmental
Invest on new tourism opportunities with little concern for making profits or losses		√	
Invest on new tourism opportunities with concern for environmental preservation			√
Invest on new tourism opportunities the enhances benefits to local communities	√		
Exploit new tourism opportunities that occur in the industry		√	
Firms' resource capacity is always not a hindrance to exploitation of new opportunities		√	
Invests on facilities that match prevailing tourism opportunities		√	
Firm is always ready to relocate where tourism opportunities exist		√	
Firm rarely provides opportunities to experiment with new ideas in tour operations		√	
Firm learn from successes and failures we encounter in tour operations			

RESULTS

The study revealed 12 statistically significant components with a varied mix of social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainability character (Table 2). Innovation of tour packages dimension revealed two significant factors labeled: Sustainable Product Innovation (SPI) and Economic Product Innovation (EPI). Innovation of Marketing of Tour Packages dimension indicated two factors namely; Economic Marketing Innovation (EMI) and Social Marketing Innovation (SMI). Innovation of Tour Operation Process dimension revealed four factors that included; Sustainable Tour Operation Process Innovation (STOPI), Eco-Environmental Tour Operation Innovation (EETOPI), Eco-Social Employee Concern Innovation (ESECI) and Eco-Social Employee Involvement Innovation (ESEII). Innovation of Tourism Destination dimension revealed one factor component namely; Sustainable Tourist Destination Innovation (STDI) while Future Orientation dimension also revealed one factor components labeled; Eco-Environmental Future Orientation Innovation (EEFOI). Finally Risk-Taking Propensity dimension revealed two significant factors namely; Economic High Risk Propensity (EHRP) and Economic Low Risk Propensity Innovation (ELRPI). Further, the study revealed significant but weak correlation between the sustainable entrepreneurship dimensions factors.

Table 2: Exploratory Components of Sustainability Entrepreneurship Dimensions

Dimension	KMO	Barlett's Test of Sphericity			Exploratory Factor Components	Factor Code	Eigen - values	% of Variance	% of Total Variance
		x^2	df	P					
Innovation of Tour Packages	0.585	29	28	0.001	Sustainable Product Innovation (SPI)	X ₁	3.18	39.73	64.73
					Economic Product Innovation (EPI)	X ₂	2.00	25.00	
Innovation of Marketing of Tour Packages	0.669	27	21	0.001	Economic Marketing Innovation (EMI)	X ₃	3.76	53.78	70.60
					Social Marketing Innovation (SMI)	X ₄	1.18	16.82	
Innovation of Tour Operation Process	0.655	59	66	0.001	Sustainable Tour Operations Innovation (STOPI)	X ₅	5.53	46.09	78.95
					Eco-Environmental Innovation of Tour Operations (EEITOP)	X ₆	1.63	13.54	
					Eco-Social Employee Concerns Innovation (ESECI)	X ₇	1.40	11.65	
					Eco-Social Employee Involvement Innovation (ESEII)	X ₈	1.04	8.67	
Innovation of Tourism Destination	0.859	57	28	0.001	Sustainable Tourism Destination Innovation of (STDI)	X ₉	5.46	68.33	68.33
Future Orientation of Tour Operator Firms	0.579	41	3	0.001	Eco-Environmental Focus Orientation Index (EEFO)	X ₁₀	1.82	60.58	60.58
Risk-Taking Propensity of Tour Operator Firm	0.686	10	15	0.001	Economic High-Risk Propensity (EHRP)	X ₁₁	2.63	43.84	63.09
					Economic-Low Risk Propensity (ELRP)	X ₁₂	1.16	19.25	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

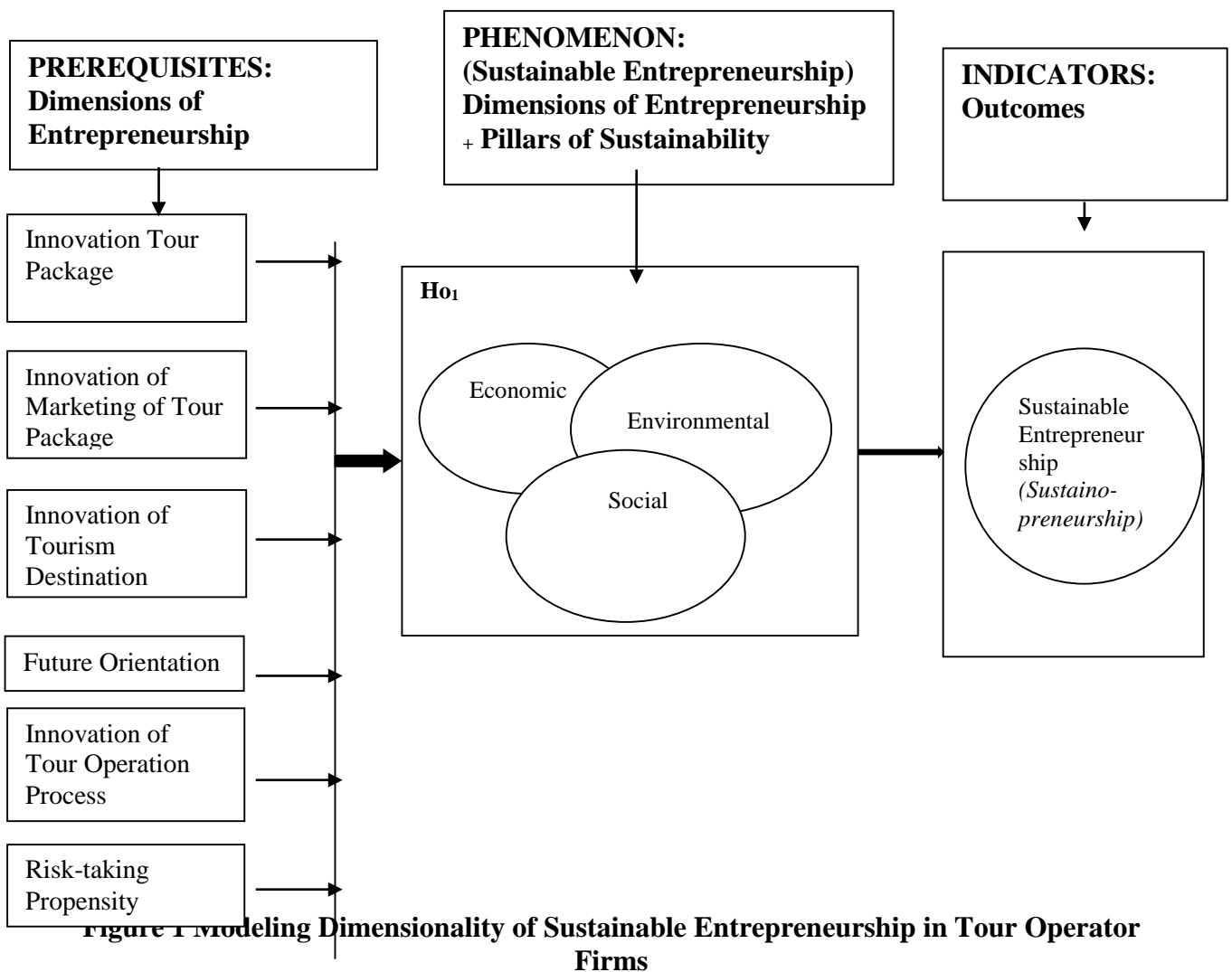
Orthogonal Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization Method

Significance: $p \leq 0.01$

Discussion of Findings

Firstly, the findings validate the conceptual framework developed for this study (Figure 1) as they shed light to the link between entrepreneurship and sustainability practices in the tourism industry. Existence of the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainability in the entrepreneurship dimensions reveal sustainability components and thus show the contributions that the TO firms make to sustainability efforts in the tourism industry in the Kenya Coast region. This knowledge provides a basis for making policy guidelines for tour operation as the Government of Kenya pursues strategies to strengthen sustainable revenue streams from tourism in its Vision 2030. Secondly, the study confirms the anticipation by Tapper (2001) that, as the tourism industry increasingly becomes globalized, counter factors have also emerged that lead TO firms to address broader environmental, socio-economic and cultural issues of sustainable development and to ensure equity in the benefits to stakeholders. Finally, the findings build on the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship (Dean and McMullen, 2007) and provide evidence that TO firms carry out operations that potentially contribute to the triple bottom line. These findings also provide evidence that innovation is systemic (Sawhney, Wolcott and Arroniz, 2006) and is built around the TO firms' operations, their products and services as a strategy to enhance competitiveness and sustainability.

The revelation that the sustainability components of entrepreneurship do not differ significantly across TO firms except for the Economic High Risk Propensity Innovation (EHRPI) and Economic Low Risk Propensity Innovation (ELRPI) that is insightful. Interpreting this from Kano *et al's* model (1984) lenses, the sustainability components incorporated in the entrepreneurship dimensions are basic characteristics of tour operations and are important to their value equation. This suggests that all TO firms practice undifferentiated sustainability components of entrepreneurship in order to exist and survive in the highly competitive tourism market. Firms that actively manage and respond to a wide range of sustainability components are better able to create value for all stakeholders over the long term (Funk, 2003). Further, as Upton (2001) asserts, the conventional accounting and financial metrics yield insight into a firm's market value and hence forward-looking sustainability indicators are becoming more relevant to business's overall value proposition. Concurrence in these findings provides a justification for TO firms to pursue sustainable business strategies aimed at increasing the expected value to shareholders. Hence, integration of sustainability components of entrepreneurship in all tour operations is seemingly a strategy to lead to better decision making for long-term growth and thus sustainable to firms.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In validating the conceptual model (Figure 1), the study has shown that sustainability components of entrepreneurship in tour operations can be categorized into three. Firstly, the operations comprise economic-related sustainability components of entrepreneurship such as quality of tour package and price which are considered as *delighters*. These are sustainability components not anticipated in tour operations but when provided often bring value to the stakeholders. Secondly, tour operations comprise a triple balance of sustainability components entrepreneurship comprising economic, social and environmental elements and are perceived as *satisfiers*. Stakeholders often want to experience these components and provision of more of these by TO firms enhances their satisfaction with tour operations. These components are characterized by tour operation services stakeholders want as opposed to expect. To achieve a triple bottom line, TO firms should undertake research to establish what their stakeholders want because they are more important to the value equation (satisfaction) and thus to sustainable performance of the firms, than the basic components.

Further, the balance of social and environmental sustainability component is considered as *fundamental* in tour operations. They are important to the value equation that stakeholders generally expect as basic features in a tour operation. However, no matter how well a TO firm delivers them, the stakeholder will never be more than neutral in terms of their satisfaction or their perceived value of the tour operations. However, failure to deliver one of these components will cause a great deal of expressed dissatisfaction as they are noticed only when absent. Therefore, as TO firms strive to meet the basic characteristics of sustainability in their operations they attract the right employees, more tourists to the destinations, and develop mutually-beneficial relationships with local community at tourists' destinations. These components are critical for TO firms to achieve the triple bottom line.

Sustainable entrepreneurship is a newer area of research and more so in the developing world and it is continuously accumulating knowledge for its clear construction. It is therefore recommended that the established dimensions of sustainable entrepreneurship be related to the stakeholder interests. Stakeholder perception and satisfaction with tour operations is the ultimate measure of sustainable entrepreneurship and thus development.

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