Applying Principles Of Sustainable Marketing To Heritage Tourism As Defined In Saudi Vision 2030

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Article Info	Abstract
	The Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is described as the blueprint of development for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In this national plan, tourism plays a vital part for moving from an oil-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. However, the plan still remains under-investigated for sustainability tourism practice, and particularly for marketing aspects of sustaining growth within this sector, given the complexity of cultural aspects between the country and its targeted western tourists. This investigation sought to determine to what extent KSA can use the principles of sustainable marketing to develop its tourism sector as it is presented in the Vision 2030 project. A qualitative methodology was employed to investigate these aspects. This study concludes that KSA has a high authenticity factor that sustains country branding and that integrates with notions of sustainable practice. Moreover, most of cultural clash concerns cited in the literature seem to form part of this authenticity.

Introduction

As per a statement from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA, 2016a), a complex development plan targeting multiple economy sectors, with the aim of reducing the country's dependence on oil as a GDP source. As a consequence, multiple public service sectors, such as health, infrastructure, education or tourism, have been targeted since April 2016, for improvement and development, in order to become sustainable sources of income for Saudi Arabia by the year 2030, diminishing the country's reliance on oil. This is also known as the Vision 2030 project, and the aim of this research is to understand to what extent the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) can use principles of sustainable marketing in order to develop its tourism sector in the manner in which it is presented in this initiative.

According to the official website (KSA, 2016b), Vision 2030 is described as a blueprint of development for the nation of Saudi Arabia. One of the main pillars of development is considered to be tourism, which is thought to be an underdeveloped area for this country. However, this approach was often criticised (Johnson, 2010; Beaumont, 2019), other consider that Saudi Arabia can be an attractive tourism site precisely because of the cultural heritage that it possesses (Bogari et al. 2003; Mourad and Paul, 2017; Reed, 2019), both for Muslim tourists as well as for tourists from western cultures, who, according to the Saudi government, are welcome to the country with tourist visas (Madden, 2018). This change comes in the context of a number of legislative measures taken by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who aims to achieve peace and stability and demonstrates a relaxation of the strict Islamic laws that were previously imposed in KSA. For instance, as Madden (2018) observes, significant legislative reform was implemented in what concerns the treatment of women in KSA.

As Reed (2019) argues that the best approach for Saudi Arabia is to focus on its cultural and religious tourism. As the home of the two most important pillars of Islam, Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia is already a top destination for people of Islamic religion (Almurhrzi et al., 2017), but it is expected to become more interesting for westerners as well, due to its cultural heritage (Al-Sulbi, 2010). This type of tourism is known in theoretical works as cultural or heritage tourism (Hewison, 1987; Richards, 1996; Ivanovic, 2008; DuCros and McKercher, 2014) and studies (Barbieri and Mahoney, 2010; Falk, 2011; Ponferrada, 2015; Guccio et al., 2018; Qiu et al., 2019) and there is extensive evidence to support the fact that people are attracted to visit locations where they become exposed to cultural practices and customs different than their own.

However, there can be numerous concerns regarding the preservation of the cultural heritage in the context of tourism and over tourism (Adie et al., 2019) or the lack of tourists' ethics with respect to culturally sensitive behaviours (Yang, 2011). For example, for religious or cultural reasons, some behaviours, such as public drinking, are inacceptable in KSA, therefore tourists should respect this and refrain from this behaviour. To achieve sustainability in cultural tourism, Chhabra (2009) proposed a marketing model with KPIs such as environmental impact, cultural impact, local community involvement, and maintenance of traditionally based

values. A more detailed framework was developed later on by the same author (Chhabra, 2010), and others have analysed the topic of sustainability in the context of heritage tourism (Hughes et al., 2015; Epler Wood, 2017; Font and McCabe, 2018), still, there continues to be a gap in the literature. Moreover, the topic of heritage tourism appears to be insufficiently researched, the term only being brought back into focus a few years ago by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2017; 2018) in their reports concerning the increasing role of culture in tourism, after some countries indicated their cultural heritage is a factor that is attractive to tourists.

In addition, the context of world tourism has drastically changed with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic (Borko et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Uğur and Akbıyık, 2020), which has put a stop to a high percentage of international travel for more than one year. Travel restrictions are still in place depending on the development of the virus spread, however now that a vaccine has been globally distributed, scholars are expecting tourism to recover, however this recovery is seen as being first on the domestic side (Hussain, 2021) and, later on, on a global side (Bhammar et al., 2021; Cheung et al., 2021). While some proposals were made for the recovery of international tourism in the aftermath of the pandemic (Deb and Nafi, 2020; UNTWO, 2020; Word Travel and Tourism Council, 2020; Abbas et al., 2021) there is a gap of research on how this would impact the progress of the 2030 Vision as far as tourism is concerned.

The contribution of this article is to understand to what extent the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) can use principles of sustainable marketing in order to develop its tourism sector in the manner in which it is presented in the Vision 2030 project. Under this aim, a series of objectives can be listed, as follows: (i) understanding the role of sustainability in the context of the Vision 2030 project, considering its focus on heritage tourism; (ii) understanding which principles of sustainable marketing can be applied to further develop the tourism plan to achieve long term sustainability; (iii) seeing how can KSA move forward with the plan in the context of its reputation as an austere country, in order to attract tourists and ensure their safety

The remainder of this article is as follow. Section two presents the literature review. Section three describes the used methodology. Sections four and five presents and discusses the obtained results. Section six concludes and provides some policy recommendations.

1. Literature Review

As defined by Kotler and Armstrong (2010: 626), sustainable marketing is aimed at supporting the best possible lung-run of the marketing system of the company. These authors distinguish five main principles of sustainable marketing: consumer-oriented marketing, customer value marketing, innovative marketing, sense of mission marketing, and societal marketing. These principles, therefore, guided the literature extracted in terms of application to the KSA tourism industry.

Thus, as noted by Kotler and Armstrong (2010), consumer-oriented marketing is focused on organizing the company's marketing activities in alignment with the consumer's perspectives. Within this principle, companies must strive to identify, understand and satisfy the needs of their targeted audience. Secondly, as related to consumer value marketing, companies must strive to create constant values for customers, rather than short-lived bargains, such as discounts. As noted by Kotler and Armstrong (2010), by creating and investing in value for customers, companies gather themselves value in the form of customer loyalty. Thirdly, notions of innovative marketing imply constant transformation and adaptation to new emerging trends, technologies, and preferences. It is expected that seeking out continuous improvements to current processes can lead to a better competitive advantage and market positioning. Fourthly, companies must seek out to perpetuate a message that evokes a sense of mission for society at large and strive to serve the long-term best interests of consumers. Finally, to practice a societal type of marketing, companies must assess and balance consumer wants, with company needs and the long-term interests of society. On this note, companies engaging in innovative practice must also consider how their newly uncovered strategies could impact society. These notions have thus been subjected to a desk research following a literature review procedure.

1.1. Consumer-Oriented Marketing

Within the tourism industry, consumer needs are described as broad categories of leisure, enjoyment, wellbeing, and entertainment (Kasemsap, 2015). However, these broad categories seem to denote various subcategories that describe tourist needs. For example, Karamustafa and Ülker (2019) note that during visitations to Turkey, tourists select restaurants based on their level of perceived cleanliness and staff attributes. Cultural specificities as related to cultural dining seem to be secondary, yet nevertheless, still important. Yet other consumer preferences still arise, such as needs for cultural, entertainment, or vacation activities. As noted by Yusuf (2014) there is potential for cultural clashes when satisfying these needs. Moreover, the strict Islamic laws on behaviour and tradition may tamper with the potential of KSA to increase tourism. Change in this sense may thus be necessary.

It must be considered that developing the tourism industry in KSA to withhold >10% of the national GDP (KSA Government, 2021) will require some changes on the part of managerial staff working in the hospitality industry. In this sense, Tajeddini (2011) hypothesised that hotel performance can be assessed as the outcome of new service developments, that are influenced by the relationship between the consumer and learning orientations, as well as the managerial attitudes towards change. On this note, to be consumer-oriented,

Tajeddini (2011) underlines the importance of also being open-minded to new trends and consumer needs, which further require a process of continuous professional learning and development. In testing their model, Tajeddini (2011) found that an integrative approach to change is necessary to achieve business performance. Similarly, it was further noted that innovation is constantly needed to adapt and adjust to new emerging consumer trends and needs.

It is important to mention that the KSA service industry is no stranger to receiving foreigners especially for religious festivals and pilgrimage. In this sense, Eid (2012: 509) found in a sample of 934 in Hajj that their experience is enhanced by "tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy". These aspects seem to increase customer satisfaction, make Hajj a safe place, and denote consumer-oriented practice, despite the fact that visitors are from varied nationalities. Despite these results, it must also be considered that Hajj visitors are in their great majority Muslims. This indicates that any type of cultural disagreement would be less likely to take place, and consumer orientation is significantly facilitated.

At the other end of the spectrum, a qualitative research (Battour et al., 2018) with 34 participants, visiting hotels that are particularly designed for servicing Islamic religion customers (halal tourism), indicates that in some cases the majority of tourists would choose not to visit due to restrictions. This is despite the fact that all participants felt that this visitation would be a unique experience of culture and religion. The main aspects that were impediments for tourist visitations were: gender segregation, alcohol prohibition, swimsuit obligations, and dress codes, as well as Morning Prayer (Azan) calling which some participants noted to be disturbing for their sleep. It is to be noted that only some of these restrictions now remain in KSA, such as the alcohol ban, and burkini on public beaches, but not on private beaches.

Emerging trends in the KSA tourism market further underline the need for change and openness. However, while the Ministry of tourism seems open to compromises for the sake of a consumer-oriented market, the general public seems to favour less these practices. In this sense, Mumuni and Mansour (2014) found that while one segment of domestic tourists is characterised by conservator public represented through older married men, who hold a profound dislike of entertainment and prefer religious tourism, other segments are formed by young single females and single middle-aged females who prefer vacation activities and entertainment, such as shopping or leisure activities. A more recent investigation (Damanhouri, 2017), notes that international tourists visit KSA to meet with friends and relatives, for religious purposes, treatment or business, thus entertainment and leisure activities were not listed as reasons for visitation in the study's sample.

Even more recent data (Aldakhil, 2020) based on Twitter post-analysis indicates that Vision30 major projects, such as concerts and festivals, were rated positively by western English-speaking international visitors, but had less popularity with the Arabic-speaking public. Although the quality of this evidence may be rated as low due to the absence of a peer review assessment, this data points to potential cultural resistance from within the country to foreign tourism for entertainments, despite the fact that among younger KSA residents' audiences.

On the other side of the spectrum, various western countries have implemented a tourism practice known as *halal tourism*. Although there are no internationally established guidelines for what halal tourism is, organisations that practice this type of tourism seek to attract (a do so) a high number of Muslim tourists by providing access to restaurants where haram (sinful) foods and drinks are not served, separated access to pools for men and women is provided, and prayer times are announced throughout the day (Raj and Griffin, 2017). Looking at the plans for Vision30, it can be argued that KSA does attempt a similar practice, by enhancing the entertainment and leisure branch of tourism, which may not be very well received by traditionalists.

Concomitantly, considering that western tourists seek leisure and entertainment, these practices are often associated with alcohol consumption in western countries (Ornberg and Room, 2014), a behaviour that is banned in KSA. Despite the fact that a recent report by Oxford Analytica (2020) published in February 2020 argued that because KSA is the new location for the G20 summit, the country may reconsider alcohol bans for tourists, the Saudi Tourism Minister stated in late 2020 that while KSA will not lift the ban on alcohol for tourists (Arab News, 2020). As further noted by the Minister, 40-50% of people would still be visiting the country despite the ban on alcohol. While this may be true for religious and cultural tourism, this may apply to a lesser extent to leisure and entertainment tourism. Considering these aspects, it can be argued that KSA took a middle ground on developing its tourism strategy, by lessening some bans, such as gender segregation, but still upholding others even for tourists. Moreover, there is a significant possibility that local communities may reject these initiatives, although how exactly this may impact tourists visiting is unclear.

1.2. Customer-Oriented Value

The primary goal of consumer-oriented value is to create customer loyalty and by default to create customer engagement with the brand and generate commitment (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). In the tourism industry, several studies (Taheri et al., 2014; 2017; 2018) indicate that engagement with the customer tourist is created through a desire for social interaction, cultural capital and cultural exchange, perceptions of authenticity, motivation, host sincerity, and knowledge of the site of visitation. When tourists are engaged via these pathways, they tend to become committed customers who experience high levels of satisfaction and brand loyalty (Bore et al., 2017).

Within the investigated context, creating engagement with KSA as a tourism destination can be assessed through three main focal points: religion, which was already a strong part of tourism in the kingdom, cultural tourism due to religious and historical sites, and more recently entertainment and leisure tourism. In this sense, Triki (2019) conducted an economic analysis hypothesis testing and found that religious tourism contributes significantly to annual GDP rates in KSA, as the number of visiting pilgrims affects financial outcomes for the specified year. This further suggests, as also observed by the author, that Vision2030 should not disregard the economic importance of religious tourism, especially considering that site preservation and sustainability guarantee the integrity of sites. Nonetheless, by extrapolation, these data may also indicate that the entertainment and leisure sector developments may in fact bring a significant contribution to GDP.

According to the Vision2030 plan, KSA is marketed as having unique religious and cultural attractions, which can thus be regarded through the concept of authenticity. This can be an appealing motivation for visitation for leisure and entertainment-seeking tourists. In line with the framework developed by Chhabra (2010), authenticity is described as an essential part of heritage tourism, especially for locations that have been previously hidden from tourist sight. These locations thus hold a great potential to satisfy the modern tourists' needs for authentic experiences, rather than being merely contented by artificial narrative fabrications.

Chhabra (2010) notes that authenticity is described through four schools of thought: essentialist, negotiated, constructivism and existentialism. From an objective essentialist view, authenticity is granted by the value of the object presented in terms of its historical and cultural significance. In heritage and cultural tourism, this view also encourages non-intervention with natural phenomena and by default impedes any modernisation-led changes to heritage sites and traditions. At the other end of the spectrum, subjective authenticity in heritage tourism reflects the individual experience with history, culture, and heritage. Yet, in the grey area between essentialism and existentialism, or subjective ideology, lies the notion of constructivism and its object of negotiation. In this sense, the meaning of authenticity is constructed based on negotiations that take place between objective authenticity and subjective authenticity (Chhabra, 2019).

These aspects are visible in the tourism strategy listed by KSA within Vision2030. Religious tourism and cultural tourism are recognised as important parts of the strategy, with heritage sites being at the centre of attraction. Concomitantly, a form of negotiation seems to be taking place in the sense that KSA is now opened to festivals and concerns for foreigners, visa granting procedures have been simplified, segregation was removed and entertainment parks and cities are under development. This approach seems to be aligned with negotiating strict Islamic law and cultural along with religious authenticity, with providing tourists from different countries, who did not have access to these sites so far, with subjective authentic experiences. This can create significant value for customers and aid KSA in building a loyal tourist base.

1.3. Innovation

As observed in the Vision2030 (2019) project plan, innovation is implemented as advised by Kotler and Armstrong (2010) across various areas of business and development, including in building external and international partnerships, education, research, and individual sector development. When referring strictly to tourism the Vision2030 (KSA Government, 2021) plan, it is observed that educational, technological, business and partnership innovations support the development of the new branch of tourism for foreigners.

Alshuaibi (2017) andAl-Thoblany and Alyuosef (2020) noted that for Vision2030 to be successful in terms of tourism, KSA needs to integrate across multiple domains e-management strategies to obtain better administrative control and monitoring across the industry. Concomitantly, this approach should facilitate cooperation and collaborations across industry operators and the labour force, as well as access to potential investors and developers. These aspects seem to be fulfilled by the Vision2030 strategy, firstly through the existence of the National Tourism Monitoring Platform, e-services for tourism licensing, and secondly, through the existence of apps for allowing customers to provide feedback and the implementation of e-learning programmes to facilitate the creation of a new labour force.

Despite the existence of these e-services, some aspects are to be noted. At the current date, the webpage for the Ministry of Tourism in the KSA (KSA Government, 2021) indicates that not all these apps are functional. Concomitantly, as advised by Al-Thoblany and Alyuosef (2020), e-services that will allow investors and developers to come in contact with industry providers are also necessary.

As noted by an economic prediction model developed by Aminat and Zaidi (2020), the Vision2030 strategy investments in innovation may indeed pay off in the form of a projected increased GDP following its implementation. Notably, other economic dynamics may increase or decrease the forecasted GDP; however, innovation in tourism is most likely to generate the highest portion of revenues. Hence, considering that technology is listed as a crucial aspect for innovation (Alshuaibi, 2017), innovation in this area must increase substantially if the forecasted GDP from Vision 2030 is to be reached.

1.4. Sense of Mission Marketing and Societal Marketing

A sense of mission for the organisation, which in this case can be transposed as country branding for tourism, and societal impact must be considered together. The reason for this is that the sense of mission to improve the

lives of citizens is closely connected with the impact that Vision2030 as related to tourism may have on local communities given cultural aspects.

In this sense, the main goal of Vision 2030 is to improve the KSA economy, improve the standard of living and quality of the health care system, as well as increase employment rates and reduce poverty. The sense of purpose is further underlined in the plan's mission statement, aiming to improve the standard of living for all citizens and reduce the reliance on oil. However, when considering the impact on society at large, as initially shown by Aldakhil, (2020), local people tend to respond with less positive views over entertainment facilities developed by KSA. On a similar note, Basendwah (2018) has shown that while the majority of residents in cities targeted for development do not perceive tourists as a cultural threat, a large portion of them (10-15%) feel that their culture may be affected by a large number of tourists. It is also important to underline that, Basendwah's (2018) data does indicate some discrepancies in terms of participant income level and responses, whereby people with lower monthly incomes hold stronger beliefs that tourists will affect their culture by contrast with higher earners. Unfortunately, this study did not test for statistical significance of these differences, albeit it can be implied that a 20% difference in opinions as listed by the descriptive results is most likely statistically significant.

Another aspect to be considered is that Basendwah (2018) looked at the opinions of residents living in a big KSA city. Local community perceptions may be different in smaller communities, especially in locations that hold sacred spots. Furthermore, it must be considered that there are some locations in the Arabic Peninsula, where non-Muslim people are strictly prohibited. This is the case for the city of Mecca, where expulsion and other penalties may apply for non-Muslims who seek to enter the city (Butowski, 2018). Other sites of anthropological, natural, or political importance are allowed for visitation. Nonetheless, as a place of visitation, Mecca is the holiest place of Islamic Religion. For places that do allow visitation, the Arabic culture is well adapted to sustainable practice and merger with nature for preservation. These adaptations, as well as limiting the number of tourists per day can have a significant impact both on preserving the natural sites, as well as on providing tourists with unique experiences, building loyalty, and increasing local economies (Alshammaa, 2019; Abdou et al., 2020).

The impact of tourism in KSA has been further explored through a quantitative study carried out by Khizindar (2012) in relation to the quality of life for Saudi residents, from an economic, social, cultural, and environmental perspective. Khizindar (2012) considered both positive and negative elements as extracted from the literature to develop hypothesis testing models for assessing each domain of impact. Herein the economic impact of tourism on the quality of lives of communities' dwellers was shown to be negative in the sense that, tourism can lead to seasonal jobs, increased land prices, increased prices, fund diversion from other areas needed except tourism and imports rather than local market reliance due to demand. Social, cultural, and environmental impacts seemed to positively affect the quality of life. In terms of social impacts, tourism created more learning opportunities, developed a positive image of the country, facilitates modernisation, and provides residents with more recreational space. When discussing cultural notions, Khizindar (2012) found that tourism encourages natural arts and improves heritage preservation. Finally, the impact of tourism on the environment was also positive, noting that tourism increases awareness of preservation, protects wildlife, and provides a justification for green practices.

Although positive, the results from this study must be considered with some limitations. Firstly, the hypothesis testing does not use economic, social, or cultural objective data, rather it uses data collected based on the perception of residents. Secondly, the hypothesis testing did not consider alternatives for negative impacts on the quality of life as expressed by literature analysed by Khizindar (2012). Consequently, this evidence can be regarded as a potential forecast based on subjective perceptions of residents, rather than real-life impacts of tourism on the quality of life.

One example of real-life impact can be taken from a recent Deloitte (2020) reported on the tourism market in KSA during the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis generated significant unemployment and had a detrimental impact on local economies due to the industry shutdown. In this context, KSA now relies extensively on domestic tourism, lifted quarantine bans for vaccinated international travellers, and had initially offered discounted quarantine costs for those who wanted to visit from outside the country. In this case, the cut-down of the economic contribution was negative, albeit based on data provided by Khizindar (2012), this cut-down should have impacted positively local communities.

As noted from this literature, KSA may have issues in implementing its strategy in accordance with the consumer-oriented market principle and societal marketing principle. As noted through the review, there is a focus on examining Muslim samples visiting western destinations, and less so on non-Muslims visiting Muslim countries. Moreover, as education and innovation are necessary, cultural adaptation may also be needed, especially for local managers and staff that need to adhere to the consumer-oriented policy. There is also limited data on the perceptions of industry workers on the importance of sustainability and the importance of authenticity for customer value. Consequently, this research will attempt to address these gaps and provide further recommendations for the practice of developing tourism in KSA.

2. Methodology

This section presents the research philosophy and research methods chosen to guide the data collection and analysis in the current study. The main approach to secondary data collection (literature review) and primary data collection and analysis, as well as the ethical considerations of these approaches, are also presented.

2.1. Research philosophy

The philosophical framework which guides the current research is interpretivism. As Saunders et al. (2012) explain, interpretivism is a paradigm that allows the researcher to explain an abstract phenomenon through the prism of his or her own knowledge and/or experience. In other words, interpretivist researchers are seeking to make sense of the meaning of a certain phenomenon, answering a question relating to how that particular phenomenon occurs (Sjobeg and Barkin, 2017; Tracy, 2019). This philosophy was considered as being appropriate for the current research, as it is aligned with the aim of the study, which is to reveal how principles of sustainable marketing can apply for the application of KSA's Vision 2030 project in the tourism sector.

It is important to mention that, according to Creswell (2013), another qualitative research philosophy could answer the same question of how a phenomenon function. This is known as phenomenology, a philosophy through which researchers aim to arrive at describing the nature of a particular phenomenon. While Creswell (2013) argued that phenomenology can be a correct approach to learn how a phenomenon works, Maxwell (2013) indicated this paradigm is more appropriately applied in the context of psychology or educational studies, as it limits the research to the lived experience of a particular group. Still, the aim of the current study extends beyond a certain experience, to a more abstract concept of applying marketing theories and principles to a certain situation, which is why interpretivism was chosen as a more appropriate approach.

2.2. Research design

The chosen research philosophy dictates a qualitative research design. For validity and reliability purposes, both primary and secondary data were collected and analysed. For the secondary data collection, a narrative literature review design was used. For primary data collection, semi-structured interviews were chosen (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

2.2.1. Secondary data collection

A narrative literature review was used for collecting secondary evidence related to sustainable marketing and KSA's Vision 2030 tourism strategy. Natural vocabulary keywords were developed in line with the aim and objectives of this study, as well as with the sustainable marketing principles listed by Kotler and Armstrong (2010). Keywords included "consumer needs AND sustainable marketing AND tourism"; Saudi Arabia AND tourism AND consumer needs"; consumer-oriented value AND sustainable marketing AND tourism; "Saudi Arabia AND tourism AND consumer-oriented value"; "Saudi Arabia AND innovation AND tourism"; "sense of mission AND sustainable marketing AND tourism" "societal marketing AND tourism AND Saudi Arabia". Resources extracted via this method were further subjected to a reference-list scan to extract additional studies that could be of importance to this study. Finally, a total of 30 resources were identified.

2.2.2. Primary data collection and analysis

The primary data was collected via semi-structured interviews, as they allow amore in depth analysis of a phenomenon, and the researcher is not limited by a certain number or format of questions, as in structured interviews, being allowed to use probing questions in order to learn more about a particular topic (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Linked-In, a social media platform for professionals, was used in order to find professionals from the hospitality industry in Saudi Arabia, with a certain level of experience, who would have enough knowledge to discuss the topic of the 2030 Vision in the context of tourism in the KSA. 844 professionals were identified, out of which 532 private profiles were eliminated. From the remaining 312 potential participants, individuals with more than 5 years of experience in the hospitality field were selected. 54 individuals met the experience criteria and were all contacted via Linked-In. These individuals were presented the purpose of the study and were invited to participate in one approximately 1-hour interview at a time of their convenience from January 2021 to February 2021. The interviews took place on Skype due to Covid-19 restrictions, and participants were not required to share their cameras, for confidentiality purposes. In the allotted time, 14 people provided verbal agreement via Linked-In to participate in the study. Out of these, two people did not return a signed consent form, and for three individuals a date and time for the interview could not be established in the time frame allotted for data collection. Any responses received after February 2021 expressing willingness to participate were not taken into consideration.

As far as the analysis is concerned, the interview transcripts were coded by key words, divided into themes (Robson and McCartan, 2016). This is known as thematic content analysis, and is generally applied as a data analysis method when interviews are used as a collection approach.

2.3. Ethical considerations

Given the chosen research design, ethical aspects must be applied both for the primary data collection and the secondary data collection. In the case of secondary data collection, the narrative literature review was subjected

to a rigorous ethical process, and all resources used were referenced to their original authors. This, process, according to Manu and Akotia (2021), is essential in any type of literature review, be it narrative or systematic. As far as the primary data collection is concerned, considering that data from human participants was gathered, some ethical aspects were considered (Fowler, 2014). Approval to conduct this research with human participants was obtained from an Ethics Committee prior to starting the selection process. Personal information from the participants, such as name, places of employment or other sensitive data were not shared in the data analysis process. Any Linked-In data of the participants was not saved for the purpose of this study;however, the email addresses and Skype usernames of the participants are stored together with the recordings of their interviews. Participants were required to sign a consent form (Tomal and Schwartz, 2019), in which they were informed about the purpose of the study, the fact that their interview would be recorded, and the fact that the recordings and the transcripts will be stored for a period of 1 year for data validation purposes. The recordings and the transcripts are stored in a password protected archived folder on the researcher's computer. The transcripts of the interviews are not attached in full in the Appendix or data analysis sections, only information relevant to the aims and objectives of the study being selected.

3. Results

A total of 30 resources were extracted and analysed through the narrative review presented in Chapter 2. It is to be noted that most of these resources focus on theoretical foundations of sustainability principles, while a limited number of studies look into principles of sustainable marketing in KSA tourism. Nonetheless, these data were used to generate the semi-structured interview questions presented in Appendix 1.

From the total number of contacts made on Linked-In, only 14 people agreed to take part in the study. Two people did not return the signed informed consent file and it was considered that they withdrew consent. For other three participants dates could not have been agreed upon for interview within the data collection time frame. Consequently, 9 interviews were carried out in total. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' experience in KSA tourism industry and job position.

Table 1

Participant Experience and Job Position.

Participants	Experience	Job Position
Interviewee 1	5 years	Barista
Interviewee 2	5 years	Hotel administrator
Interviewee 3	5 years	Travel agent
Interviewee 4	6 years	Travel agent
Interviewee 5	6 years	Restaurant manager
Interviewee 6	7 years	Hotel waiter
Interviewee 7	8 years	Hotel waiter
Interviewee 8	10 years	Hotel manager
Interviewee 9	10 years	Hotel manager

Thematic analysis was used to extract main themes emerging from the transcripts. Triangulation procedures were carried out concomitantly with the data analysis process. Given the limited number of participants, theoretic sample saturation procedures were not carried out. Three main themes were extracted from the literature, along with two sub-themes corresponding to each main theme identified: *Cultural Knowledge* with the subtheme's*cultural immersion* and *cultural respect*; *EconomicDevelopment* encompassing *community development* and *human capital development* and finally, *Country Branding* where no subthemes have been extracted.

3.1. Cultural Knowledge

All participants noted that communities where the majority of people make a living based on tourism show no reluctance to servicing people from other cultures. This seems to be applied to larger cities, as well as to small communities. In fact, people from these locations tend to know their tourists' background quite well, and as a result, tend to adapt their products and services to match the market demand. Whilst there are some limitations to this, such as for serving alcohol, people in the industry seek out to offer an Arabic cultural experience that foreigners seek. This extends to offering Arabic spa rituals, and cultural shows, to local foods and beverages, and to the sale of traditional souvenirs. The main argument behind this adaptation is linked with the identified need of foreign tourists to gain access to a culture that was not so long-ago off limits. However, while the tourism industry seeks to offer a cultural immersion for foreign tourists, people working in the industry also expect for their visitors to uphold laws and regulations, just as they would have done with laws and regulations within their own country.

3.2. Cultural Immersion

Some studies (Yusuf, 2014; Battour et al., 2018) pointed out that foreign tourists may be reluctant to visiting KSA because of the various religious restrictions and customs that may affect their vacation and leisure time. At

the same time, western culture may affect Islamic culture. Nonetheless, there is evidence to indicate (Chhabra, 2019; 2010) that aspects of a culture, including religion and tradition, can contribute to its authenticity. In this sense, the majority of the participants noted that people visiting KSA do so for religious purposes, but also to experience Arabic culture.

"*Before (*in reference to previous years where gender segregation and clothing restrictions for women existed*) we had no foreign visitors...now we had a few before the virus bans (*i.e. COVID-19*). I know that the general idea is that no one will want to come because of restricting this, and that, but people are genuinely interested in our culture, and I believe that the reasons for which we are interesting is among others our outlook on life and our restrictions"***Interviewee 8**

Interviewee 2 further noted that:

"*It's a form of spiritual experience. People that used to come here were not interested in seeing or buying things they could have seen or bought at home, and they are certainly not interested in cultural contact with people from the west. They want to see what's it like here, with the people, the traditions, the prayers. They are all very interested in Adhan (i.*e. Azan call to prayer*). You can spot them from the crowd because they take out their phones to record and don't go in the mosque.*" **Interviewee 2**

In terms of sustainability, participants recognised that the Arabic culture and tradition is aligned with notions of environmentalist and using the natural world to benefit humans. Similarly, participants who had been working as hotel managers noted that they had been implementing sustainable practice for several years now.

"*Green principles are part of the cultural experience that people seek with us. I see sustainability as part of our heritage, because when we build, we build with cost-impact in mind. For example, our facility is designed based on natural ventilation and lighting and we use special glass windows for this that are repellent to heat. Now this is a new building, it was opened in 2009, but it uses the same ventilation principles as mosques build thousands of years ago.*"**Interviewee 9**

Consequently, it can be argued that sustainable practice is a part of Arabic tradition and culture, which permeated into modern-day life. This merger of modernity and antiquity thus further contributes to creating a unique cultural immersion for tourists who are willing to forego some of the western vacation habits. This being said, not all westernised entertainment is prohibited as exemplified by various concerts and music festivals recently held in KSA (Aldakhil, 2020).

Nonetheless, participants recognised that introducing some aspects of western life to tourists' vacations can make their stay more pleasurable, yet transforming KSA in a western-type vacation would affect cultural heritage. The merge of culture, tradition, religion and law may, as well as the notion of authenticity, also act as a protection to cultural dilution and enhance preservation

"*We have a significant cultural advantage as the country was closed to foreigners before...or at least it was very difficult to get here. So, the rest of the world is curios now about our culture and I think this is why they will come in great numbers. But if we offer them the same things they can get at home, then we have diluted our culture and lost our competitive advantage.*" **Interviewee 6**

3.3. Cultural Respect

All participants in this study underlined the need for tourists to respect traditions and customs, particularly in terms of religious practice and prohibition. As noted by one participant:

"*In Islam, when you receive a visitor you must honour him and he must honour you. It would be haram to enter someone's house and cross their rules inside their house. It is also disrespectful to be nosey, and question a man under his own roof. We will treat all with respect and I personally expect to deliver service to people who respect us and our culture.*"Interviewee **5**

People working in the tourism industry also expect others to abide by the country's rules and laws although some may find these laws to restrict liberties that they are accustomed to. As noted by participants in this study, people who have a genuine interest in experiencing the Arabic culture will also have respect for this culture, and abiding by these rules is in a sense, a part of the cultural experience. These results have not been previously reported by others. However, there is evidence (Taheri et al., 2014; 2017; 2018) to indicate that motivation for visitation and host behaviour can add to the value of the cultural experience for the customer. Consequently, it can be argued that if the tourist's motivation is centred on experiencing culture, transitioning to a completely different style of living may be facilitated by the tourist's desire for the experience.

For some participants, the Islamic laws that limit certain liberties granted in the west were not seen as important barriers to visitation. As argued by these participants. When one visits a country, it would be expected for them to abide by the laws of the country they are visiting.

"*One would not expect to enter a country and disobey their laws. Of course, that attraction would be higher (with serving alcohol) ...The western idea of good time is linked with alcohol. Even America has a ban on alcohol...you cannot drink unless you're 21, or 18 in the UK. So, if I was 17 and went to the UK I can't drink.*" **Interviewee 7**

Consequently, while industry workers did agree on the fact that consumer orientation is important for sustainability, some aspects of culture and legislation were deemed as essential in light of religious law.

Subsequently, a general trend in the discourse was observed whereby aspects of authenticity in terms of experience for tourists and what KSA had to offer were seen as more important than country restrictions.

3.4. Economic Development

All participants in this study underlined economic development as a direct impact of increasing foreign tourist visitations in KSA. None of the participants identified any peril from a high number of tourists for cultural heritage sites, arguing that most sites are well maintained and cared for as they are sacred in Islam. In terms of environmental degradation, participants noted that sustainable building for tourism infrastructure can address these issues, despite the fact that the country's overreliance on fossil fuel contributed significantly to current levels of pollution. At the other end of the spectrum, local communities could benefit from environmental, infrastructural and living standard developments. Concomitantly, because a developing industry needs a new labour force, the tourism industry can create significant job opportunities and aid in the development of human capital.

3.5. Community Development

There is current evidence (Khizindar, 2012; Basendwah, 2018; Alshammaa, 2019; Abdou et al., 2020) in the literature noting that local communities experience development as a result of tourism. Participants in this study expressed similar views and opinions, and furthermore, saw community development as a crucial aspect to long-term sustainability in KSA tourism as the industry would become a viable resource that would benefit all, but especially those from rural areas.

"The plan for the future is based on developing communities, but now we cannot do that just by relying on oil. We have amazing sites and there is great opportunity here especially for those living in rural area as the landscapes here are amazing...like nothing you've ever see. I think that if we are to achieve something we will do this when we give opportunity to those who have been less favoured rather than focusing on building more hotels" **Interviewee 1**

It is important to note that Vision 2030 (KSA Government, 2021) does indeed miss a plan on developing rural areas as tourist attraction sites, and it is rather centred on larger cities, which are already enjoying economic prime. As noted by Yousuf (2014) building local infrastructures to enable access to these areas is necessary if they are to be exploited as tourist attraction sites. Nonetheless, when these aspects were explored further, potential cultural clashes were unknown to participants.

"I know that people in the city are used to foreigners as these cities are major business hubs and the country has investors for business from all over the world. I don't think that foreigners would not be welcomed in more conservative areas if they comply with local rules". **Interviewee 1**

At the opposed end, other participants saw the new tourism plans as a great opportunity for recovery after the COVID-19 crisis. As noted by Deloitte (2020) KSA is now heavily reliant on religious tourism to recover from the crisis, yet participants further noted that the vaccine has significantly increased visitation opportunities from foreigners.

"We expect to see a great number of tourists pouring in with the restrictions lifted. I think that local cities will benefit substantially from this, especially if we get in foreign tourists as well. The plan is for development....if next year, and now, at the moment we will be getting a lot (tourists) *we will definitely expand. This means more jobs and more money for our local economy."* **Interviewee 8**

3.6. Human Capital Development

All participants recognised that developments in the tourism industry would need to be substantiated by the development of a strong human capital. Indeed Vision 2030 does seek to target graduates and undergraduates for training and specialisation in the tourism industry. Nonetheless, several of the participants noted that the industry is struggling with a lack of staff at the moment.

"It is difficult to find someone experienced enough now, and someone that is accepting of the new laws by the state regarding segregation. The young generation is more opened to this, but more experienced staff is of course older and less likely to be extra friendly with the opposed sex. In Sharia (Islamic law) there is no rule prohibiting conversation between a man and a woman, but it is within our culture to keep these conversations brief and to the point. Women customers may leave with the impression that their waiter was rather rude, and have a bad experience of our place....or men customers may feel that their female servicer was attending" **Interviewee 5**

The data provided by this participant indicates that for human capital development to take place in the tourism industry, cultural awareness and adjustment may also be necessary on the part of staff. As noted by Bore et al. (2017) friendliness and engagement with the customer can add significantly to the tourist's experience. Any cultural misinterpretation of non-verbal language may thus be damaging to the experience. Corroborating this with data from the cultural respect subtheme, it can be argued that it is necessary for travellers to be aware of interaction differences between their own culture and the Arabic culture.

Additionally, participants in this study felt that for the industry to develop at the point where tourism will bring a significant contribution to KSA's GDP, the industry will need more than people prepared in hospitality, as business management and planning, construction, food industry and other services, will be needing staff.

"As the industry will be developing, I am certain that there will be more need for people in other domains that are head-to-head with tourism. Business, food and services people will all be required. I am not sure what the plans are to get these people ready in a few years but they will be needed certainly" **Interviewee7**

Overall, participants recognised the plan to develop the tourism industry as an important part of human capital development, because developments within the industry are likely to daw in other domains and staff needs. No current literature data has been located to corroborate these findings.

3.7. Country Branding

Participants in this study expressed the need for branding KSA differently within the public's eye which was seen as a method for increasing the appeal for visitations by foreigners. As noted by Chhabra (2019) and Kottler and Armstrong (2010) for sustainable marketing, a company's brand must be aligned with the customer's needs. In this particular case, concepts of authenticity as described by Chhabra (2010) become relevant, as KSA holds a significant global competitive advantage in terms of authentic culture, landmarks, traditions and heritage sites. These elements can thus become central to providing an authentic experience for customers and as argued by Chhabra (2010), bring more value than their objective authenticity could. Concomitantly, KSA cultural values seem to be aligned with principles of preservation and heritage, thus denoting societal marketing and sense of mission.

All participants in this study discussed the fact that visiting the KSA would provide tourists with unique experiences. On this note, Epler Wood (2017) had previously argued that tourism in virgin places is paradoxical as while increasing economies, it subsequently affects the quality of life through environmental destruction. Nonetheless, KSA seems to be uniquely positioned for preservation and authenticity. In this sense, some participants noted that destroying the environment at holly locations and landmarks would be considered haram, which in practice forces tourism businesses to ensure their protection. Concomitantly, given tradition and law merger, authenticity and concomitantly sustainability are preserved.

"When people come here their visit is for religious scopes. If they come to visit as non-believers, then they come because they want to know us and our culture. In both cases, the scope is not to destroy a culture or a place but to show respect and reverence to the amazing creation of God. I am not aware of any incident where tourism was harmful for the environment, but I am aware that oil has polluted our place. But we also are responsible for protecting our culture and places." **Interviewee 6**

Benefiting from the authentic Arabian experience thus comes with the responsibility of preserving it for others through generations.

"We are unique and we want the world to see us and experience us, but we are also responsible for protecting our heritage for future generations. What is more precious to offer than to open one's door to others to let them see the greatness of God?" **Interviewee 7**

Consequently, KSA's uniqueness resides both in its cultural values, but also in the way in which these cultural values help to create an authentic experience while at the same time focusing on preserving heritage.

Nonetheless, some participants also recognised that some tourists, especially those who hold negative views of KSA, may refuse to visit not because of laws banning certain clothes or drinks, but because of the image associated with KSA in the world.

"The international press has always accused us of human rights violations, and that we do dreadful things to people here. Cases of people who were public enemies were mediatised excessively, while in the west these people would have been locked away too if they were enemy of the state. But the bad image stays, and some may be too scared to visit."

None of the participants discussed how KSA could address these issues in terms of negative global image as a tourist attraction country. The literature on tourist perceptions of visiting KSA also failed to discuss these notions. Hence, these aspects still remain to be investigated.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to understand to what extent the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) can use principles of sustainable marketing to develop its tourism sector in the manner in which it is presented in the Vision 2030 project. Three main objectives were established for this study. The first objective was to understand the role of sustainability in the context of Vision 2030, considering notions of heritage tourism.

As sown by the results obtained, people working in the industry understood the importance of uniqueness and cultural authenticity and sought to brand the country within these notions. Furthermore, it was noted that the new approach on tourism in KSA is seen as less potentially damaging to both culture and heritage sites. To this end, the mixture between religion and culture seems to function as a protective shield for potential degradation of sites, which in the Islamic culture are holly grounds. Despite the fact that these results have not been reported elsewhere, these notions seem to align with the principles of authenticity as described by Chhabra (2010), where negotiation of what authenticity means takes place between subjective and objective evaluations. In the objective sense, the authentic culture of KSA needed to be adapted to western consumer needs if the tourism industry is to be developed. However, losing parts of this culture for the sake of subjectivism could in fact dilute culture and deprive people coming for the experience from a true Arabic feel.

Other notions related to sustainability reflect eco-friendly developments in infrastructure for developing tourism. In this sense, participants argued that their culture was based on using the natural environment and thus some of these notions have been transposed to today's modern developments in the country. The extent to which this adds to consumer needs and consumer value can be extensive when considering the western trend towards eco-friendly options. Moreover, none of the participants in this study considered that tourism development may affect in terms of ecological impact, local communities. This perception was maintained even though some (Basendwah, 2018) have argued that communities may experience negative social and environmental outcomes as a result of tourism development in their areas.

Considering these aspects, it can be argued that the customer value in terms of heritage tourism has an essential role both for the development of this industry, as well as for the preservation of local communities, environments, history, and culture. The reason for this is reflected in the uniqueness of these sites and their connections with the cultural and religious character of Arab communities, which enrich the tourist's experience and simultaneously benefit local communities. To provide the same value over time, these sites and their corresponding cultural meanings are to be preserved, rather than westernised.

The second objective of this study focused on understanding which principles of sustainable marketing can be applied to KSA's tourism plan to achieve long-term sustainability. In this case, it can be concluded that all five principles are relevant. Firstly, given its unique cultural advantage, the KSA tourism market can create significant customer value by proving unique experiences that may not be available in the west, or that are nearly imitations of Arabic culture. However, this principle seems to collide with consumer needs principles. Various studies ((Battour et al., 2018; Mumuni and Mansour, 2014) found that people visiting halal hotels were not pleased with religious customs, gender segregation, or the prohibition of alcohol. Yet others were ready to forego these aspects for the experience. It is also worth mentioning that since gender segregation no longer takes place in KSA, only a few aspects of cultural inconveniences for westerners remain.   It is further important to note that KSA may not renounce these aspects due to several solid reasons. Firstly, prohibitions are aligned with state law, respectively with Islamic law. Secondly, renouncing these prohibitions would imply renouncing cultural values, thus diluting culture and missing on the authenticity competitive advantage on the global tourism market.

In terms of innovation, business plans guided by the Vision2030 project (KSA Government, 2021), as well as e-platform developments seem to respond to future needs of the market (Al-Thoblany and Alyuosef, 2020; Alshuaibi, 2017). Nonetheless, although there is data stipulated in the Vision2030 project as related to developments across various sectors, participants felt that these initiatives were lacking. This was particularly relevant for labour force requirements that are necessary outside the tourism industry but are nevertheless required as subcontractors or inside developments.

Perhaps the most relevant aspect for sustainable marketing in KSA's tourism industry is the connection between the sense of mission and societal marketing. The Vision2030 project is framed as an initiative to improve the standard of living for citizens of the country and impose a knowledge-based economy rather than an oil-based economy. Aminat and Zaidi (2020 argued that tourism developments in the country would bring economic development, albeit some have argued that the focus of Vision2030 disregards smaller rural communities, and instead focus on larger cities, which already benefit from a high standard of living.

Finally, the third objective of this study focused on determining how KSA can move forward with Vision2030 and tourism in the context of its reputation. Data collected and analysed by this study found that cultural respect and branding based on authenticity can act as main strategies for attracting tourists. Participants in this study did not report any particular safety concerns for tourists. However, most participants talked about shared respect for cultures, especially when considering people visiting from western nations. To this end, it can be argued that preserving heritage and authenticity, while it may seem repressing and discouraging for some tourists, can in fact attract others that are willing to receive an authentic experience and in exchange renounce western privileges, such as consuming alcohol.

5.   Conclusion and recommendations

In summary, the aim of this study was to understand to what extent the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) can use principles of sustainable marketing in order to develop its tourism sector in the manner in which it is presented in the Vision 2030 project. For this aim, three study objectives were developed.

The first objective, which was to understand the role of sustainability in the context of the Vision 2030 project, considering its focus on heritage tourism, was achieved through this study. Interview data showed that participants from the hospitality industry in KSA have a good understanding of the implications of the Vision 2030 plan for their country's tourism. Cultural heritage, as well as environmentally friendly improvements to infrastructure are sought in order to achieve the 2030 Vision plan in a sustainable manner. To that extent, evidence from the participants demonstrated that they are guided by sustainability in their actions.

The second objective was to understand which principles of sustainable marketing can be applied to further develop the tourism plan to achieve long term sustainability. Again, in this case, the majority of the participants' responses seemed to point towards the concept of creating customer value as a guide in their approach to

opening KSA for international tourism. While so far international tourists to KSA were mainly coming from Muslim countries and were engaged in religious driven tourism to Mecca and Medina, now the industry is demonstrating openness towards understanding the needs for a wider pool of customers, from different cultural backgrounds. To that end, it can be said that all five principles bare relevancy, as they can contribute to creating customer value.

Finally, the third objective was to learn how can KSA move forward with the plan in the context of its reputation as an austere country, in order to attract tourists and ensure their safety. This objective was also achieved, as it was determined that KSA should continue to focus on cultural heritage tourism and promoting their unique culture, religion, and traditions to attract tourists. There are numerous festivals and celebrations that take place in KSA depending on religious and cultural events, which can be considered as unique in the world and can provide customers with an authentic experience of a different culture. Nevertheless, it was also agreed among participants, that a certain level of respect and ethical behaviour is expected from the tourists. Thus, to ensure that offense is not brought to the people of Saudi Arabia, tourists should be informed and willing to renounce some wester privileges, such as alcohol consumption or different behaviours that may be seen as inappropriate, in exchange for their experience. Moreover, as Covid-19 restrictions begin to lift in the context of Worldwide spread schema of vaccination, it is a good opportunity for KSA to explore and invest in promoting cultural heritage tourism in a safe environment.

The main limitation of this study is sourced in its qualitative design. The main limitation of qualitative research is subjectivity. As the results are interpreted through the knowledge and experience of the researcher, it is necessary to mention that the interpretation is limited to the extent of the researcher's perspectives. This limitation can be addressed by corroborating the results from qualitative research with further quantitative inquiries. In addition, qualitative designs are often impacted by a limited number of participants. In order to achieve data validity, a minimum number of 10 participants was sought, however only 9 participants completed the interviews. For this reason, as a recommendation for future research, a quantitative approach over a much larger population sample is advised. Finally, because qualitative research is time consuming, data collection was limited to a period of two months. This too can be considered a limitation, as a more extended period for the research could have allowed for a higher number of participants.

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