

A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of @VisitSaudi.ar's Arabic Instagram Posts

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Abstract

This project explores how Saudi Arabia constructs its tourism identity through digital media, focusing on Arabic-language Instagram advertisements published on the official @VisitSaudi.ar account. The study situates this work within a global perspective on tourism branding and cultural representation. By adopting a multimodal lens that considers both linguistic and visual elements, the research examines how textual choices, imagery, and digital symbols work together to shape narratives about Saudi Arabia's heritage, modernity, and place in the world. Drawing on Machin and Mayr's (2012) multimodal critical discourse framework and Siever's (2019) iconographic communication model, the study analyses the official account's most popular posts to understand how language and visuals interact to project meaning. Attention is given to the blending of colloquial and standard modern Arabic, figurative language, and visual strategies that balance cultural authenticity with global appeal. This approach highlights how digital tourism campaigns not only market destinations but also contribute to shaping international perceptions of nations. Drawing on translation, semiotics, and discourse analysis, the research contributes to broader debates on identity, globalization, and intercultural relations. It also points toward practical implications for tourism authorities. It emphasizes the importance of carefully crafted digital messaging in strengthening Saudi Arabia's global visibility and supporting its ambitions to reshape its international image through cultural diplomacy and destination marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon which is widely experienced and valued by diverse populations around the world. It encompasses cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions (Saarinen, 2016) that involve travel beyond one's usual environment for personal

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and professional reasons (Camilleri, 2018). The concept of tourism has evolved significantly over time, transitioning from religious purposes to a diverse range of business and tourism reasons (Nicolaidis, 2016; Nolan & Nolan, 1992). According to Kotler et al. (2017), the industrial revolution in the 19th century brought about notable transformations in transportation and communication, promoting the expansion of tourism. They go on to argue that the 20th century saw rapid growth in the sector, with the introduction of air travel in the 1950s. The emergence of alternative forms of tourism in the 1970s, such as cultural and ecotourism, was driven by increased environmental awareness and demand for authentic travel experiences (Canavan, 2018). In the 21st century, the advent of the Internet and social media significantly altered the tourism sector, enabling travellers to make online reservations and share their experiences with others (Page & Connell, 2020). In sum, tourism has evolved throughout history.

The evolution of tourism has also been evident in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Traditionally, tourists were largely pilgrims performing Umrah and/or Hajj. However, recent years have seen transformations in the sector due to government initiatives aimed at promoting tourism in light of the Saudi Vision 2030 (Abuhjeeleh, 2019). This country has begun to prioritize tourism as a sustainable economic resource by developing religious and historical sites, establishing tourist attractions, and streamlining visitor visa procedures (Alshuwaikhat & Mohammed, 2017). This development is connected to advertising strategies, with linguistic discourse playing a significant role in tourism advertisements (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018; Rokowski & Curado, 2003). Social media marketing (SMM) has become a crucial tool in promoting tourist destinations. The way verbal and visual components of language are employed in advertisements significantly influence the marketing of tourist destinations (Dann, 1996). Furthermore, KSA has been implementing distinctive branding strategies to cultivate the identities of its cities with the aim of enhancing its global appeal (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2024a). This transformative journey aims to position it as a leading destination for diverse and dynamic tourism experiences.

Recently, KSA's restrictions in the tourism industry has undergone drastic changes. Alshammari and Kim (2019) assert that while traditionally known for its strict adherence to conservative Islamic practices, efforts have been made to relax certain restrictions and promote tourism as part of economic diversification initiatives. They claim that since 2016, **rapid** growth in leisure tourism has been observed as part of the Saudi Vision 2030. Furthermore, various large-scale projects have been initiated to highlight the country's strengths as a leading tourist destination in the Middle East (Public Investment Fund, 2024). The establishment of key public entities, such as the Ministry of Tourism, highlights KSA's commitment to advancing both domestic and international tourism (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2024a). Thus, effective

advertising plays a crucial role in elevating KSA's tourism sector. For this reason, the Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) has been tasked with advocating the country as a premier global tourism destination through campaigns such as 'Rethink Summer' launched in May 2023 (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2024b). This country's evolution of tourism illustrates its ability to balance tradition with innovative visions paving the way to a thriving tourism hub.

Furthermore, it has recognized the role of effective promotion and marketing by specifically leveraging various media channels such as digital platforms to cultivate interest among target audiences. Different social media platforms are used to promote destinations around the country. The official accounts, @VisitSaudi.en for English speakers and @VisitSaudi.ar for Arabic speakers, serve as primary channels for attracting potential tourists. The literature identifies online promotion as a crucial element in shaping tourist perceptions by effectively highlighting locations through diverse media (Rinka & Pratt, 2018). Moreover, as an added appeal, various foreign public figures and social media influencers have been incorporated into Saudi tourism advertisements. However, despite the advancements, there is a scarcity of research on the dynamics involved in its creation, use, and potential. While several studies have focused on tourism advertisements in KSA from marketing perspectives (Bogari et al., 2003; Eid, 2012; Yusuf, 2014), there is a significant gap in understanding discursive aspects of social media advertisements representing this country. Therefore, this study aims to address this by employing multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) to examine both linguistic and non-linguistic elements present in @VisitSaudi.ar's Instagram posts. By providing a comprehensive understanding of the formation and articulation of KSA's tourism identity through these posts, this study provides insights into how language, visuals, and cultural identity intersect in today's modern tourism discourse.

This research aims to broaden the scope of existing tourism studies and highlights the importance of integrating discursive analysis into the evaluation of marketing strategies. Therefore, to address the gap and contribute to current research, the following questions are used to investigate this topic:

1. How do multimodal elements in @VisitSaudi.ar's Instagram advertisement posts enhance visitor experience while conveying authenticity?
2. How is the Saudi Arabian identity realized through linguistic and non-linguistic content in @VisitSaudi.ar's Instagram advertisement posts?

Although research on tourism branding on social media is increasing, the discursive and semiotic construction of Saudi tourism identity in official social media advertising remains under-examined. Existing studies on tourism in KSA have largely approached the topic from a marketing and management perspective. As a result, there is less focus on how identity is

shaped through language and visuals in social media promotion. To address this gap, the study adopts a MCDA framework, drawing on Machin and Mayr (2012), and uses Siever (2019) to guide the semiotic investigation of visual and other non-linguistic resources. The analysis examines how @VisitSaudi.ar constructs Saudi identity and promotes heritage, modernity, and hospitality through linked verbal and visual strategies. The following section outlines the dataset, analytical categories, and procedures used in the analysis.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative approach. It uses non-numerical data to understand and investigate variables (Nassaji, 2020). It seeks a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon to acquire information about attitudes, views, and societal settings within a specific context (Oranga & Matere, 2023). Accordingly, the research aims to understand the development of KSA's image through examining both linguistic and non-linguistic components found in @VisitSaudi.ar's advertisement Instagram posts. It achieves this through Machin and Mayr's (2012) multimodal critical discourse framework that merges systemic functional grammar and visual grammar. Therefore, it offers insights into different resources, both linguistic and non-linguistic. It is worth noting that according to van Dijk (2007), a place's image is conceptualized as a collection of evaluative qualities that are realized through various semiotic resources while influenced by larger sociocultural contexts. Thus, the data collection focuses exclusively on @VisitSaudi.ar Instagram content. The reason for choosing this platform is that it is the official account of the Saudi Tourism Authority (STA). Moreover, Instagram is widely used in KSA with more than twenty million users (Madani, 2022). According to Gupta et al. (2020), the platform is widely used in tourism for its broad audience appeal, interactive features, and measurable post engagement.

Additionally, the Arabic version of the Instagram account was specifically chosen because it is the official language of KSA and has significantly more posts compared to the English version, i.e., about 5000 vs. 1000 respectively, which suggests more active engagement. Therefore, this study argues that a country's image is built through signs and meanings and is not inherently self-explanatory. Thus, through the use of multimodal discourse analysis it can examine how KSA constructs its self-image on social media. For the study, the top thirty-five most-liked posts (e.g., P1, P2, etc.) from @VisitSaudi.ar were collected between September 29, 2019, and May 13, 2024. As Instagram does not provide access to the most and least liked posts, 'Popsters' (2024), an analytical tool for social media platforms, was used (e.g., Pronchev et al., 2020; Raturi et al., 2024). The tool arranges posts in ascending order from most to least liked. Moreover, after reviewing the posts, four entries published from 2017–2018, before the new identity of Saudi tourism was implemented in 2019, were excluded, making the final dataset thirty-one posts. The data was analyzed manually. Finally, in terms of

gaining access to the online data, permission was deemed unnecessary as the posts were published publicly and can be used with reference according to the platforms' terms and conditions (Stommel & Rijk, 2021).

Regarding the data, the textual and visual elements of the posts were analysed focusing on their different representations. Regarding the first type, they were transcribed to ensure accurate representation and then translated into English to facilitate the analysis and allow for clearer interpretation of culturally embedded meanings (Ho et al., 2019). This preparation supported the code identification used in the analytical process (Elliott, 2018) and uncovered significant patterns/themes (de Farias et al., 2021). The study employed a manual iterative coding approach that integrated deductive and inductive analysis. Deductively, coding began with a theory driven framework informed by Machin and Mayr's (2012) multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) and Siever's (2019) iconographic communication model to guide the coding focus. The dataset was then systematically coded for semiotic features across modes. Linguistic elements were coded at lexical, phonological, semantic, and syntactic levels. This included word choice, figurative language, pronouns, imperatives, and shifts between standard modern and colloquial Arabic. Visual elements were coded for gaze, framing, camera angle, perspective, colour, and overall composition, drawing on MCDA's integration of systemic functional grammar and visual grammar. Paralinguistic and other semiotic resources were also coded to examine how branding cues, celebrity presence, and other non-linguistic elements contributed to representing Saudi culture and identity. Finally, emoji use was analysed using Siever's (2019) categories of referential and modal functions to assess how emojis shaped emotional tone, audience engagement, and accessibility.

Through numerous coding cycles, key themes were identified: the construction of Saudi national identity, authenticity in tourism and emotional appeal, and the negotiation of tradition and modernity. Inductively, revisiting of the dataset enabled the identification of additional patterns and themes such as identity, authenticity, and engagement. Together, deductive and inductive coding strengthened the overall interpretation of the data. To ensure credibility, a peer coding process was used. It was shared by the two researchers, and any differences were discussed until agreement was reached. The team met regularly to adjust categories and make decisions. Interpretations were also checked against the images and coded text. Key steps and decisions were recorded throughout the project. All these different stages strengthened the credibility of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dataset consisted of explicit textual language that is strategically used to emotionally engage Arabic speaking audiences and build national identity. The linguistic choices were not arbitrary. They were designed to persuade readers and position KSA as a culturally rich destination by transforming tourism advertising into a narrative-driven branding

tool that help visitors create vivid mental imagery of this country. To minimize the risk of misinterpretation, posts also included detailed descriptions and information (e.g., links). Together, these elements allow visitors to imagine themselves experiencing the destination. Moreover, the textual information was a combination of standard modern and colloquial Arabic (i.e., KSA dialects) or 'linguaging' (Cappelli, 2013). This approach helped achieve significant pragmatic outcomes and enhanced the tourist experience by adding linguistic nuances. It was also a persuasive approach that served as a means of expressing authenticity (Manca, 2018). Accordingly, this section will be divided into two parts: textual and visual analyses. The former reveals different techniques of stylistic and figurative language use at the lexical, phonological, semantic, and syntactic levels, while the latter discusses branding, celebrity endorsement, and semiotic resources of the posts.

3.1. Textual Analysis

3.1.1. Lexical Level

The analysis uncovers the use of various terms and phrases that function as adjectives and are used as persuasive mechanisms to influence the mindset of the @VisitSaudi.ar visitor. Three adjectives stood out: 'nature,' 'culture,' and 'touristic experience.' They describe various aspects of tourism experiences and are used repetitively throughout the different Instagram posts to evoke vivid imagery, emotional responses, and contribute to the overall appeal of KSA as a travel destination. For instance, adjective use such as /sāḥirah/ (Enchanting), /zurqah tad'hish al-'ayn/ (Blue that dazzles the eye), and /tanāghum / (Harmony) represent natural landscapes, aiming to attract potential nature-loving tourists. The term /rahīb/ (Awesome) is employed to instil a sense of awe towards natural wonders, highlighting their grandeur and uniqueness. Additionally, /mā tatafawwat/ (Not to be missed) serves as a compelling call-to-action, emphasizing the importance of visiting this exotic destination and ensuring that the experience is perceived as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

In addition, a notable characteristic of the lexical items representing nature is the seamless combination of standard modern Arabic and colloquial Saudi Arabian dialects. For instance, the terms /sāḥirah/ (Enchanting) and /tanāghum/ (Harmony) are formal lexical choices that add a layer of elegance and allure, suggesting that KSA's natural beauty is both mesmerizing and harmonious. On the other hand, informal expressions such as /rahīb/ (Awesome) and /mā tatafawwat/ (Not to be missed) bring a sense of immediacy and personal recommendation, making the descriptions more relatable and engaging for the audience. The use of both standard modern and colloquial Arabic maintains message clarity while preserving Saudi cultural identity; the first type guarantees a broader comprehension while the second adds a regional touch that is frequently understood through context. This type of blend ensures

that posts appeal to a wide demographic by balancing sophistication with approachability and authenticity.

The analysis also reveals a focus on culture. Terms such as /umq/ (Depth), /ḥafāwah/ (Hospitality), and /arāqah/ (Ancientness) are used to emphasize the rich cultural heritage and hospitality of KSA, appealing to tourists interested in immersive cultural experiences. Such adjectives help create a narrative that KSA is a destination with deep historical roots and a welcoming atmosphere. Another representation is the tourism experience itself. In this category, adjectives such as /mumti'ah/ (Enjoyable), /mutanawwi'ah/ (Diverse), and /mukhtalifah/ (Different) highlight the variety and uniqueness of the activities available. The phrase /ta'siruk bi-jamāluhā/ (Captivates you with its beauty) further enhances the appeal by suggesting that the experiences offered are not only varied but also beautiful, thus encouraging potential tourists to explore the diverse offerings of KSA.

Advertising content must possess a high degree of persuasiveness and influence to effectively fulfil the objectives of the producer(s), which in this case is STA. To accomplish their goal, they utilize the strategic use of adjectives to create positive images and opinions about KSA (Ebaid, 2018). The role of these adjectives extends beyond simple description. They function to evoke specific emotional responses and build a vivid mental image in the minds of potential tourists. This strategic use of language can generate feelings of excitement, wonder, and curiosity, which are essential for motivating individuals to consider KSA as a travel destination. Thus, they appeal not only to the logical, but also to the emotional, decision-making processes. By continually employing adjectives that emphasize the unique qualities of natural landscapes, as well as the cultural richness and the overall tourism experience, the posts create a strong narrative. This positions KSA as a diverse, captivating, and must-visit travel destination, which can significantly influence the attitudes and travel intentions of Instagram visitors.

3.1.2. Phonological Level

The use of assonance emerges as a notable stylistic feature in the dataset. It involves the recurrence of similar consonant and vowel sounds in nearby words. In Post 1 below, the rhythmic effect is found in the words /qadīmah/ (old), /jamīlah/ (beautiful), and /wamumayyizah/ (distinguished) where the repeated vowel sound /a:/ creates assonance.

P1: We are connected to our tourist destinations in KSA through our old relationships and beautiful and distinguished memories. (/wajuhātina alsiyahiyah fi almalikah tarbatna biha ealaaqa qadīmah, wadhikrayāt jamīlah wamumayyizah/)

Assonance is also identified in P2, specifically in the words /minanna/ (part of us), /waṣarnā/ (we became), and /minhā/ (part of it), with the sound /a/ in the final position.

P2: It became part of us, and we became part of it. (/sārat juz'an minanna waṣarnā juz'an minhā/)

As evident from the data, assonance is used to create a rhythmic effect that enhances expressiveness, engages the intended audience, and elicits emotional reactions. A method that helps the absorption of the message (Mănescu, 2020), which in this case emphasizes the connection and harmony between tourists and the Saudi destination. The identified assonance devices illustrate that the use of poetic elements through the employment of recurring vowel sounds create a lyrical and rhythmic flow that enhances the attractiveness and memorability of the tourist product thus amplifying the overall impact of the conveyed message. This phonological technique aids in reinforcing the emotional and cultural connection between tourists and the destination. This effectively emphasizes the sense of harmony and unity. Therefore, assonance serves as a powerful linguistic tool that enriches the persuasive appeal of the content to foster a deeper attachment to KSA as a travel destination.

3.1.3. Semantic Level

Saudi tourism discourse conveys meaning expressively using various figures of speech, including synecdoche, metaphor, metonymy, and entendre (pun). Figurative language can enhance the visual representation of tourism services and helps in directing attention towards the showcased offerings (Djafarova, 2017). The choice of adjectives /umqu/ (depth) and /khayāliyah/ (fascinating) is a good example of synecdoche. They evoke the ancientness of Ad Diriyah (a historic area in Riyadh) and highlight the beauty of the Boulevard Riyadh City area. This use of figurative language creates a deeper connection and a more profound appreciation of the sites' unique qualities. Thus, it allows the discourse to refine complex and multifaceted destinations into singular, memorable concepts that can be easily grasped and appreciated by potential visitors.

P3: Welcome Messi to Ad Diriyah, the depth of history and hospitality. (/Ahlan_Messi fi aldiri'iah; 'umqu alttarikh, walḥifāwah/)

P4: Boulevard Riyadh City, a fascinating and diverse location beyond imagination! (/#Bulivārd_Riyadh_City.. mintaqah khayāliyah wamutanawwi'ah fuq alkhayal!/))

Metaphor is also used in the posts. In P5 (see below), where the term /tanāghum/ (harmony) depicts the beauty of 'Wadi Lagb' valley, and in P6 (see below), specifically with the nouns /almuta'ah/ (joy) and /albahjah/ (happiness) that highlight the pleasure of the family tourism experience. These examples borrow characteristics of melody and pleasure, enriching the narrative and making the description more engaging and relatable. These types of metaphors are powerful because they create a vivid sensory experience for the audience. Additionally, by associating the interaction between man and nature with harmony, it conveys

a sense of peaceful coexistence while suggesting a musical, almost poetic relationship with the environment. Similarly, describing the family's experience through the lens of joy and happiness taps into universal human emotions, making the narrative relatable and compelling to post visitors.

P5: Harmony between man and diverse nature in 'Wadi Lagb.' (/tanāghum jamīl bayna al'insan watabi'atih almutanawwi'ah fi 'wadī lajib/)

P6: Joy and happiness in Messi's family's faces during their visit to #Via_Riyadh. (/almuta'ah walbaḥjah fi wujuh 'a'ilat Messi khilāl ziyāratihim #via_Ar Riyad/)

In addition to these examples, terms such as /istithnā'ī/ (exceptional) and /ruuh/ (spirit) are used as metonymy in P7 and P8 (see below) to identify the beauty and magnificence of Abha's summer and KSA respectively. The first term elevates the seasonal experience to something rare and extraordinary, while the second one conveys the deep cultural and emotional identity of the country. Thus, they capture the broader abstract qualities of these experiences, further enhancing their appeal. Moreover, the use of metonymy simplifies complex ideas through specific terms as the discourse communicates essential aspects without lengthy explanations. This conciseness is crucial in advertising, where capturing audience interest quickly is vital.

P7: Do not go away; live an exceptional summer with Abha's rainy weather. (/lā tadhhabu baeida wai'iishḥ saiyf istithnā'ī ma'a ajwaa abha almuṣṭirah/)

P8: Spirit of Saudi Arabia. (/#ruuh al-Su'ūdiyyah/)

Finally, *entendre* (using words or phrases with double meanings) was also identified, adding sophistication to the discourse. The phrases /al-Su'ūdiyyah b-intizarak/ (Saudi Arabia is waiting for you) and /Nusabiq_al-mustaqbal/ (We race toward the future) in P9 and P10 (see below) both use *entendre*. The phrases carry layered meaning; implicit duality that make them inviting and meaningful. Regarding P9, on one level, it can be interpreted literally as KSA is ready to welcome travellers to explore its landscapes, culture, and heritage. On a deeper level, it evokes a sense of personal discovery and connection, as if the country itself holds something unique for each visitor. This layered meaning combines a warm invitation with the promise of adventure and self-exploration. Regarding P10, it blends a literal sense of moving quickly with a metaphorical implication of ambition and progress. It suggests determination and urgency to embrace change and innovation, using the metaphor of 'racing' to evoke both speed and enthusiasm. The duality of both posts allows the phrases to resonate with visitors on multiple levels. It invites the audience to interpret it in their own way.

P9: Saudi Arabia is waiting for you.... (/#al-Su'ūdiyyah_b-intizarak)

P10: We race toward the future. (/#Nusabiq_al-mustaqbal)

Based on this analysis, strategic implementation of figurative language in Saudi tourism discourse serves multiple functions beyond elaboration. It plays a crucial role in creating a captivating narrative that connects with diverse audiences while enhancing their imagination and emotional engagement.

Through rhetorical devices, STA does not merely convey factual details about different sites but tells a narrative that potential tourists can envision themselves being part of. This approach is likely to inspire travel by creating a convincing vision of what visitors can expect from their experiences (Djafarova & Andersen, 2008). Furthermore, the utilization of figurative language aligns with broader marketing patterns that prioritize narrative and emotional involvement which makes phrases memorable while aiding brand recall (Kronrod & Danziger, 2013). Through strategic metaphorical language use, the Saudi tourism discourse data effectively showcases stunning beauty and attractions while establishing a compelling brand image that resonates with a wide audience.

3.1.4. Syntactic Level

In terms of syntax, Saudi tourism discourse relies heavily on imperatives to effectively persuade, convince, and influence the reader to engage in the promoted activities. This is achieved through lexical choices such as commands, as in P11 (see below), using the term /Ruuh/, which means 'visit' in this context rather than 'spirit,' in contrast to what was mentioned earlier in P8. This highlights the homonymous nature of this Arabic word.

P11: Visit Saudi. (/Ruuh Al-Saudiyah/)

Imperatives are also used as directives, as in P12 (see below), with the concept /Ta'al a'ish al-tajriba binafsak/ ('Come experience it yourself'), and instructions, as in P13 (see below), using /Ittali/ ('Check out').

P12: Come experience it yourself and see Saudi Arabia through your own eyes. (/Ta'al a'ish al-tajriba binafsak wa shouf Al-Saudia bi'uyunak/)

P13: Check out the winter experiences on the VisitSaudi website. (/Ittali' 'ala tajārib al-shitā' 'abr mawqi' Rūh al-Su'ūdiyyah/)

As evident from the data above, @VisitSaudi.ar demonstrates a notable preference for imperative sentence constructions, effectively directing potential tourists toward desired actions. The lexical choices create a sense of urgency and direct engagement with potential tourists (Kaur et al., 2013). They play a vital role in persuasion by influencing audience

behavior. On the other hand, imperatives can also serve to create a direct call to action, an essential marketing strategy that streamlines decision-making processes by offering unambiguous instructions (Zjakic et al., 2017). Thus, STA fosters effective communication and encourages active participation in Saudi tourism by utilizing this approach.

Additionally, another commonly used strategy in the posts is the use of pronouns, especially first- and second-person ones. This is evident in P14 (see below) where first-person plural pronouns are used; /na/ appears in both /Wujahātunā/ (our destinations) and /Tarbiṭunā/ (connect us). Additionally, /hā/ in /Bihā/ can be interpreted as 'to us,' emphasizing the connection between Saudis and their destinations.

P14: Our tourist destinations in the Kingdom are connected to us by old relationships and beautiful memories. (/Wujahātunā al-siyāḥiyya fī al-mamlakah tarbiṭunā bihā 'alāqah qadīmah wa dhikrayāt jamīlah/)

Similarly, pronouns were also used in P15 (see below), where the suffix /k/ in /Dunyāk/ represents the second-person singular possessive pronoun 'your,' making the phrase address the reader directly. Similarly, the prefix /t/ in /tarāk/ indicates the second-person singular pronoun 'you,' while the suffix /k/ is an object pronoun 'you.' All the pronouns collectively strengthen the direct engagement with readers, personalizing messages and making readers feel individually acknowledged and engaged.

P15: Your world is travel; you haven't seen anything of it yet. (/Dunyāk safar; tarāk mā shift shay' minhā/)

The data illustrates the strategic use of pronouns, particularly first- and second-person forms. This technique, known as ego-targeting, addresses individuals targeted by advertisements as distinct persons (Dann, 1996). Research on the impact of social media pronoun usage reveals it increases engagement (Cruz et al., 2017; Koçak, 2021). Therefore, personalization is very important in these posts. It enhances the emotional impact of messages and increases the likelihood that audiences will connect with the content (Chou, 2020). This kind of direct involvement fosters familiarity between KSA and potential tourists.

In sum, the textual analysis of @VisitSaudi.ar Instagram posts reveal a strategic use of language to engage and persuade potential tourists effectively. The blend of standard modern and colloquial Arabic imparts the content with both sophistication and relatability. Vivid adjectives, phonological elements, and figurative language create compelling imagery. They foster emotional connections and shape tourists' perceptions. Imperatives frequently create a sense of direct engagement, while pronouns personalize the narrative. These findings

emphasize the importance of careful implementation of linguistic strategies. They support KSA's efforts to position itself as a leading global destination through verbal nuances.

3.2. Visual Analysis

From another perspective, @VisitSaudi's Instagram advertisement posts reveal a strategic use of semiotic resources to enhance the memorability and appeal of Saudi tourism marketing. They highlight KSA's rich cultural legacy and portray it as a contemporary, vibrant, and internationally connected travel destination reframing this country's image as a welcoming, forward-thinking, and appealing travel destination for both domestic and foreign viewers. The analysis uncovers three specific techniques, and these include the official slogan design and branding, celebrity endorsements, and the use of different semiotic resources. These collectively contribute to reshaping perceptions of KSA, presenting it as a diverse, culturally rich, and modern destination. Each technique will be discussed below.

3.2.1. Logo and Branding

An important paralinguistic element in every industry is its logo. Although there are four types of logos (Alrasheed & Siddiqui, 2023), the one used by @VisitSaudi.ar is known as a slogan; a brief attention-getting phrase used in advertising or promotion that consists mainly of words (Pan, 2019). Figure 1 illustrates the official slogan of @VisitSaudi.ar. It uses the 2aLT Zarid Sherif font, a modern Arabic typeface that preserves classic calligraphy. A popular choice that preserves KSA's cultural identity while adapting to digital technologies (Abu Hasna, 2021). Moreover, the integration of calligraphic elements in contemporary typography allows for creative expression in advertising, specifically in enhancing identity branding and cultural representation (Al Rifai, 2020). Even the handwriting-like font design conveys different types of senses. It creates a personal and genuine feel as if the message was written by hand for the visitors. Handwritten fonts create a sense of human presence and connectedness which lead to increased emotional attachment and purchase intentions (Guo et al. 2024; Schroll et al., 2018). In addition to the latter, the slogan itself is divided into "ruuh" (spirit) and "Al-Saudiyah" (KSA). These two words are distinct in size; the second is larger for more emphasis (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Moreover, the two words are written in white. This can help create a sense of openness and neutrality in branding (Tham et al., 2020). In addition, white can complement other colours well, making it suitable for a wide range of brand identities and messages (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). All these different elements create an enticing atmosphere for post visitors.



Figure 1: *The official slogan of @VisitSaudi.ar*

3.2.2. Celebrity Endorsement

The impact of prominent individuals on social media involvement in tourism marketing cannot be overstated. In the dataset, the most-liked posts had the common feature of incorporating famous people, such as, celebrities and royal family members. The promotion of tourism by notable people is important as it increases consumer engagement, trust, and strengthens travel intentions (Roy et al., 2021). In one of the posts, there was an image portraying Lionel Messi and Princess Haifa Mohammed Al-Saud looking slightly upward, conveying positivity and enjoyment (see Figure 2). Two factors are evident here. First, celebrity endorsement is used excessively on social media and remains a trusted strategy for brand building and creating favourable consumer impressions (Kantarcioğlu, 2022). The inclusion of Lionel Messi, a famous football player and Princess Haifa Mohammed Al-Saud, a Saudi royal, and the Deputy Minister of Tourism is an effective marketing strategy. Endorsing such individuals is a strategic approach that leverages the influence and credibility of well-known figures to boost brand awareness, increase purchase intention, and drive sales (Vaghela, 2012). The second factor is that both influential figures were pictured implementing the strategic use of indirect gaze which creates an emotional connection with the audience. The use of averted gaze in social media can enhance their effectiveness by increasing attention to the advertised product, improving brand memory, and promoting narrative transportation (To & Patrick, 2021). Gaze can also highlight positivity (Machin & Mayr, 2012), in the sense that Messi is enjoying his time in KSA. This visual strategy not only highlights a positive experience but also aligns with the promotional goals of the STA, emphasising a welcoming and enjoyable atmosphere for visitors. Both approaches are very effective in enhancing this country's appeal as a tourist destination.



Figure 2: *Lionel Messi and Princess Haifa Mohammed Al-Saud*

3.2.3. Semiotic Resources

The analysis also identifies the strategic use of semiotic resources specifically the varying perspectives in imagery that play a role in conveying different aspects of the tourism experience. In some images, people are shown from behind, which offers their perspective and view of the world, as in Figure 3. This picture is associated with natural landscapes, thus emphasising the enjoyment of serenity and beauty. Other images represent people looking directly at the viewer, as in Figure 4. This creates a form of visual address, in that the tourist is acknowledged, a demand image, because the viewer is asked to engage in an imagery relationship (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). It also shows a welcoming gesture because of the smiling face. Such individuals are perceived as warmer, more competent, and more genuine, leading to enhanced perceived brand authenticity and consumer responses (Yang et al., 2021). This not only encourages the viewer to interact with the image but also communicates a feeling of warmth and receptiveness. This technique, similar to the others, aligns with the broader marketing strategy of fostering a sense of personalization and inclusivity for the audience. The images add depth to the narrative of KSA as a congenial and hospitable destination, prepared to embrace tourists wholeheartedly.



Figure 3: *Back view of people*



Figure 4: *Direct smiling face gaze*

Additionally, other salient features of the data are collectivism and individualism. In entertainment and various nature-based sports activities, participants are predominantly depicted in groups, often comprising families or friends, highlighting the social and communal aspects of these experiences, as shown in Figure 5 with Lionel Messi. These images evoke a sense of togetherness and shared experiences, which are highly valued in collectivist societies, such as those in many Asian, South American, and Middle Eastern countries, which prioritise

group harmony and family cohesion (Cohen et al., 2016). This highlights the cultural emphasis on community and collective experiences in these regions.



Figure 5: *Lionel Messi with his family*

The dataset also reveals that not all the Instagram posts depict people as points of concentration. Some of the images portray natural and cultural landscapes, as in Figure 6, or with people but with a focus on the backdrop of nature, as in Figure 7. Most of these images have a frontal angle, which expresses extreme involvement. Such visuals are symbolic, suggestive pictures, which means that an identity can be interpreted from them (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). Moreover, individualism in nature connotes unique experiences and self-discovery by highlighting a person’s freedom to explore and create their own journey. In addition to the latter, some images employ a top-down angle to convey a position of power (Machin & Mayr, 2012) as exemplified in Figure 8. This perspective inherently positions the viewer as dominant, while the subject appears less powerful and more controlled by the elements within the frame, effectively communicating a sense of authority and emphasizing the hierarchical relationship between the viewer and the subject (Giessner et al., 2011). In short, these visual techniques underscore the dual narratives of individual freedom and collective strength in the Saudi tourism discourse.



Figure 6: *Cultural Landscapes with people*



Figure 7: *Cultural Landscapes with no people*

Additionally, visuals in the posts have other uses as they also maintain a delicate balance between celebrating the rich Saudi cultural heritage and showcasing its modern advancements. Some cultural examples are the presentation of historical landscapes, such as Hegra (Figure 8), the southernmost city of Nabataean and folk Saudi art (Figure 9). Cultural tourism is characterised as both an entertaining and educational experience (Richards, 2013).



Figure 8: *Hegra*



Figure 9: *Folk Saudi Art*

The modern aspects of KSA are also highlighted in the data. This includes the representation of modern entertainment facilities, such as Boulevard Riyadh City and the representation of modern entertainment facilities, such as Boulevard Riyadh City an entertainment and cultural social hub that reflects both modern innovation and traditional heritage. Also, the focus on new sports such as motorcycling which shows the importance of physical engagement and aligns with the country's broader goals of fostering a healthier, more active society. Both examples are depicted in Figures 10 and 11 respectfully. These elements showcase KSA as a progressive, ambitious, and vibrant country. They highlight its blend of innovation and tradition, reflecting a vision for a dynamic future while staying rooted in its rich cultural identity. The strategic use of visual elements not only captures attention of post visitors but also reshapes perceptions of KSA, presenting it as a diverse, culturally rich, and modern destination. The analysis demonstrates how carefully crafted visual communication can challenge stereotypes and create a compelling narrative for potential tourists. Overall, these images effectively bridge the past and present, offering a comprehensive portrayal of KSA's multifaceted identity making it both enriching and immersive for visitors.



Figure 10: *Boulevard Riyadh City*



Figure 11: *The Sport of Motorcycling*

The analysis of the dataset also reveals 'culturally neutral' usage of emojis in the @VisitSaudi posts. In this era of text messaging, non-verbal forms of communication (pictograms) show facial expressions, objects, symbols, or actions (Völkel et al. 2019). Their use creates engaging and emotionally rich social media content because they enhance linguistic and emotional expression (Chand & Naidu, 2024). The emojis serve two main functions:

referential and modal. The first function refers to the replacement of words, with icons acting as visual referents to objects, actions, or concepts mentioned in the text. The referential function can be seen in Figures 12 and 13, in which the camera emoji replaces the phrase 'taken by' and the umbrella one with rain drops highlighting Al-Bahah's beautiful rainy weather.

visitsaudi.ar من قلب الرمال الذهبية وبواجهة فريدة، #القصر_الفرید في #العلا معلم مهم على مر العصور 📷 Gab Scanu

Figure 12: A referential function of the camera emoji

تعطيك فرصة للاستمتاع بجوها الجميل طول السنة ☂️

Figure 13: A referential function of the umbrella emoji

Alternatively, the modal emoji function conveys the speaker's attitude and emotions, thus influencing the tone of the message. This function can be seen in Figure 14, in which the emoji emphasises amazement at the different places in Boulevard Riyadh City. Furthermore, this function can serve a decorative function as well, as in Figure 15 or may provide semantic redundancy (i.e. expressing information both in writing and through emojis), as in Figure 16.

بمناطق مختلفة وأجواء جميلة تأسرك بجمالها 😊

Figure 14: A modal function of the grinning face with star eyes/star-struck emoji

visitsaudi.ar التقاطة استثنائية لـ #الرياض_الخضراء 🌳💚

Figure 15: A modal function of the tree and heart emojis

أهلاً بسفير السياحة السعودية ليونيل ميسي مجدداً مع عائلته خلال رحلته السياحية الثانية إلى المملكة! 🇸🇦

Figure 16: A modal function of the Saudi flag emoji

A key role of communication is to rely on context and shared knowledge to help the sender and receiver understand or convey the intended meaning behind a message. Within this study's dataset, it was evident that emojis were chosen carefully. Their different referential and modal functions were general enough to make them easy for any culture to understand them. Although studies show that emoji usage varies across countries because of cultural differences (Lu et al., 2016; Mei, 2019), in the dataset posts for this study, they are clearly 'culturally neutral.' This strategic use of emojis not only captures attention but also simulates social interactions, thereby enhancing consumer engagement and experience (Herring & Dainas, 2020). This is because most people already use this kind of communication in their daily lives

which makes it relatable. In addition, the emojis provide visual cues that convey emotions and attitudes. They act as persuasive tools that influence the tone and reception of messages (Das et al., 2019). They also create an impression of instant communication, an effective substitute for physical presence that fosters an intimate atmosphere (Leone, 2020). These characteristics enhance expressiveness and simulate real-time interaction. They also highlight the multifaceted functionality of emoji use in Saudi tourism discourse to convey diverse connotations depending on context which in turn enhances the effectiveness of Saudi tourist discourse.

These results highlight the evolving importance of visual features in digital communication. The integration of different elements, design, celebrity endorsements, and semiotic resources, collectively contribute to reshaping the Saudi identity as they help elevate the communicative experience for visitors. Their employment strengthens KSA's identity which ultimately encourages more visitors to this travel destination.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis of @VisitSaudi.ar's Instagram advertisement posts reveal an intentional use of linguistic and visual resources to shape how audiences perceive KSA and position it as a global tourism destination. On a textual level, the posts combine standard modern and colloquial Arabic, balancing between formality and familiarity. This linguistic hybridity increases the relatability of the content. Moreover, the use of adjectives, phonological repetition, and figurative language helps create mental imagery and emotional depth, while imperatives add energy and urgency to the content. The use of inclusive pronouns also serves to personalize the message. These rhetorical strategies not only inform but engage, persuade, and emotionally involve the reader, thereby enhancing message retention and impact.

Such language choices contribute to the ongoing construction of national identity. Rather than simply reflecting how KSA sees itself, the language actively shapes how it wants to be seen. In addition to textual elements, visual strategies play an equally critical role to strengthen this messaging. The use of symbolic imagery, varied photographic perspectives, carefully constructed layouts, celebrity endorsements, and culturally neutral emojis all contribute to an aesthetic that is modern yet grounded in tradition. These visuals play a central role in reinforcing trust, relatability, and emotional appeal. They can create a sense of direct involvement or convey authority and aspiration. This strategic visual composition helps build immediacy and intimacy which allows viewers to feel closer to the experience being promoted. Taken together, the linguistic and visual strategies reveal the growing power of multimodal storytelling in digital tourism marketing. The STA is not just promoting a destination, it is crafting a national narrative that is accessible, authentic, and inclusive. The brand identity is dynamic, evolving through ongoing interaction between the destination and its social media audience. As Instagram visitors engage with this content, they participate in co-creating the

country's evolving global image and help define how KSA is understood locally and internationally. However, it is worth noting that these posts are circulated widely and that global audiences may interpret them in different ways. Some viewers may accept the messages as intended, while others may question them or understand them differently. Their responses can vary because of cultural background, past media representations of Saudi Arabia, political positioning, and familiarity with Vision 2030. Overall, these Instagram posts can shape a preferred national image, but meaning may still shift as they circulate across international audiences and contexts.

In spite of the latter, the study's findings carry practical implications for tourism authorities seeking to optimize their social media engagement. The adoption of hybrid linguistic strategies can improve relatability across potential tourists to KSA. Meanwhile, the use of rhythmic, emotionally charged language can heighten message absorption. Visually, the incorporation of influential figures, culturally blended symbolism, and framing techniques that evoke empowerment/involvement can strengthen audience connection and highlight communal experiences. Furthermore, a balanced portrayal of individual and collective identities, supported by universal neutral visual cues, may broaden international appeal without compromising cultural specificity. Ultimately, these multimodal strategies enhance the persuasive power of tourism marketing and align with broader national objectives. These techniques help tourism authorities turn digital platforms into tools for storytelling and sustainable engagement.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of @VisitSaudi.ar's Instagram posts. The findings highlight the significance of tourism discourse in KSA and its contribution to the construction of the country's identity through various textual and visual resources. The verbal elements demonstrate a deliberate use of language and figurative speech to bridge cultural divides and create a relatable narrative for potential tourists. Meanwhile, the non-linguistic elements highlight modernity and diversity to create emotionally engaging, visually appealing, and culturally relevant content that resonates with modern tourists and enhances brand relatability.

While this study provides valuable insights into STA's lexical and visual strategies to promote the country's identity, it is important to acknowledge that it is not without limitations. The analysis encompassed only thirty-one posts, which is a small fraction of the total content available on the @VisitSaudi's account. It is also limited by its platform-specific scope which may not capture broader trends across different social media platforms or time periods. Nonetheless, these limitations provide a clear foundation for future research to expand on these findings and explore additional dimensions of digital communication.

Future research can address these limitations by examining a wider range of posts to identify different strategies. It can also explore other social media platforms, such as X and TikTok, or even investigate audience reception through comments and interactions. Additionally, comparative studies between various versions of tourism accounts could reveal different strategies employed for multiple languages. Overall, this study contributes valuable insight into how multimodal discourse can shape perceptions of KSA as a dynamic and appealing destination for travel through lexical and visual strategies, paving the way for more research in this field.

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