


Localization of Cultural Values: A Case Study of “Visit Saudi” Website

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المخلص

تسعى الهيئة السعودية للسياحة إلى تعزيز السياحة في المملكة العربية السعودية، محليًا ودوليًا، من خلال تطبيق أساليب توظيف متطورة على موقع "روح السعودية". يتناول هذا البحث شح دراسات التوظيف على المواقع السياحية الدولية والمحلية، لا سيما تلك المتعلقة بالمملكة العربية السعودية. تهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية تصوير التوظيف بصريًا ولغويًا للقيم الثقافية في محتوى الوجهات السياحية، وتحليل كيفية تمثيل هذه القيم لمختلف الجماهير المحلية والدولية. اعتمد البحث على تصميم بحث نوعي، مستخدمًا المنهج الوثائقي باستخدام البيانات الثانوية. استندت الدراسة إلى دراسة حالة واحدة، وأجرت تحليلًا لمحتوى الموقع الإلكتروني. كشفت النتائج أن موقع "روح السعودية" يدمج عناصر نصية ومرئية في عرض وجهة العلاء السياحية، ناقلاً قيمًا ثقافية إيجابية للسياح تتضمن التراث التقليدي، كرم الضيافة السعودي، العمارة الملكية، والعادات والتقاليد. خلص البحث إلى أن المحتوى الترويجي يعكس القيم الثقافية في المجتمع، ستُعزز هذه النتائج تصميم سياسات سياحية شاملة تعطي الأولوية لإمكانية الوصول اللغوي والتواصل بين الثقافات، وتقود لتطوير محتوى يراعي الجماهير المحلية والعالمية، مما قد يعزز السياحة التراثية.


الكلمات المفتاحية: القيمة الثقافية، التوظيف، موقع "روح السعودية"، مواقع السياحة الإلكترونية

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Abstract

The Saudi Tourism Authority seeks to increase tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, both locally and internationally, by implementing advanced localization methods on the "Visit Saudi" website. This research addresses the lack of localization studies on international and local tourism websites, particularly those concerning the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study aims to explore how localization visually and linguistically depicts cultural values in tourism destination content and to analyze how these values are represented for different local and international audiences. The study consisted of a single case study adopting a qualitative research design. The findings reveal that the "Visit Saudi" website integrates textual and visual elements in the presentation of a key tourism destination, AlUla, conveying positive cultural values to prospective tourists, including traditional heritage, Saudi hospitality, royal architecture, and traditional customs. The research concludes that promotional content reflects cultural values in Saudi society and significantly impacts the tourism industry. These outcomes will enable policymakers to design inclusive tourism policies that prioritize linguistic accessibility, cross-cultural communication, and lead the development of culturally sensitive content for both local and global audiences, potentially enhancing heritage tourism.

Keywords: cultural value, localization, “Visit Saudi” website, tourism websites

Introduction

Study Background

Tourism in Saudi Arabia

According to Camilleri and Camilleri (2018, p. 2), “tourism is defined as the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work. Therefore, tourism includes the movement of people for all purposes, including day visits or excursions.” In 2016, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman took a groundbreaking step to attract tourists to the country by offering a broader range of provisions than previously existed in Saudi Arabia (KSA) (Abuhjeeleh, 2019). This move aligns with the Saudi Vision 2030, which has a plan to reduce the nation’s dependence on oil, with tourism being a significant aspect of this transformation.

According to Statista (2025), the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia is witnessing rapid growth, driven by developments in infrastructure, cultural heritage sites, and a focus on luxury travel experiences. The Saudi Ministry of Tourism (2025) states that, in 2023, Saudi Arabia attracted 27.42 million tourists, and this number has increased over the past two years. By 2025, this market is projected to generate revenues of approximately US\$4.09 billion, with an expected annual growth rate of 3.52%, resulting in a projected market volume of US\$4.70 billion by 2029. Furthermore, it is estimated that, by 2029, 86% of the total revenue in Saudi Arabia’s travel and tourism market will be derived from online sales (Statista, 2025).

“Visit Saudi” Website

“Visit Saudi” is an alluring website designed by the Saudi Tourism Authority to promote tourism throughout the Kingdom. It highlights interesting destinations, tells engaging stories, and provides useful information for visitors. In order to reach a wider audience, “Visit Saudi” has been made available in eight languages, which include Mandarin and Russian. The website has experienced a 35% increase in user engagement, thanks to its detailed descriptions, informative articles, and exciting stories. Upwards of 5,500 images have been added to the “Visit Saudi” website, showcasing the Kingdom’s picturesque landscapes, vibrant culture, and unique experiences. The implementation of a user-friendly calendar keeps visitors updated on available events and activities of interest. This enhancement led to a 73% increase in user engagement, a 122% rise in page views, and attracted 4.6 million new users (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2025).

Localization in Saudi Arabia

Localization emerged as a complementary and integrated phenomenon, allowing tourists to appreciate local features at a global level (Monaco, 2018). Effective localization serves as a bridge between businesses and the consumer, fostering a sense of belonging that can significantly impact businesses’ sustained success across diverse markets (Okonkwo et al., 2023). The topic of tourism localization and cultural values was studied in various global contexts, yet there is a lack of knowledge on how cultural dimensions impact the perception of tourism destinations (Tsai & Men, 2017; Hornikx & de Groot, 2017; Frederick & Gan, 2015). Academic research on tourism emphasized the value of tourism websites and localization strategies for communicating cultural values, yet there is a lack of academic consensus on the generalizability of these findings due to prior research focusing on specific locations or tourism contexts (Tigre Moura et al., 2015; Mele et al., 2021). The limited research on tourism in KSA

explored the cultural context of the Heritage Commission's website translation (Almanjumi, 2025), yet there was no prior research on the topic of localization and tourism.

Statement of the Problem

Localization in tourism is a complex process that adapts travel experiences to fit the cultural and social contexts of destinations. It requires a deep understanding of local customs and language to create effective promotions that appeal to both tourists and local communities. Currently, there is a lack of research exploring the use of localization strategies on tourism websites to compare the approaches targeted at local and global audiences. Moreover, prior research explored global destinations, yet the context of KSA tourism remains underexplored (Almanjumi, 2025). Considering the growing demand for tourism in KSA, Vision 2030 reforms, and the unique case study of "Visit Saudi" website, the following research questions were developed.

Research Purpose and Significance

The research aims to explore localization of cultural values in Saudi tourism through the case study of "Visit Saudi." Therefore, the following research objectives have been developed:

1. To explore how localization visually and linguistically depicts cultural values on tourism destination content.
2. To analyze how cultural values are represented in localized tourism destination content targeting different local and international audiences.

The scope of this research covers the heritage site located in AlUla, which is one of Saudi Arabia's most important archaeological and historical sites. This research contributes to expanding the understanding of how localized cultural values in tourism destination content impact tourism promotion. It particularly explores how promotional content that reflects cultural values is expressed in Saudi tourism. Moreover, the findings of this research contribute to the Saudi Arabian tourism industry. The outcomes can guide the creation of culturally sensitive content for both local and global audiences, potentially enhancing heritage tourism. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of authenticity in representing local cultural values in destination marketing strategies.

Research Questions

The current research aims to answer the following questions.

1. How are Saudi cultural values visually and linguistically represented in tourism promotions localized for different markets?
2. How Saudi tourism promotions utilize localization to attract local and international tourists?

Literature Review

Localization, Tourism and Cultural Values

Localization is a type of translation that came to the forefront in the 1980s with the global expansion of the computer industry (Mangiron, 2016, p. 189). According to Lisa (2003, p. 13), "localization is the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets." This process involves more than mere translation and the adjustment of elements such as images, colors, and symbols; it requires a deep understanding of local values,

social norms, and customer behaviors to align with the preferences of the intended local audience (Okonkwo et al., 2023). Localization that considers cultural values can lead to better engagement with consumers (Mangiron, 2016).

In translation studies, *culture* is recognized as a core and complex concept that significantly shapes translation decisions and strategies. Peter Newmark (1988) defined culture as “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression,” emphasizing the inseparability of language and culture. Similarly, Mona Baker (1992) highlighted how cultural references require translators to mediate meaning beyond the linguistic level. Susan Bassnett (2002) argued for the cultural turn in translation, viewing translation as an act embedded in power relations and cultural contexts. David Katan (2004) further elaborated on this by integrating intercultural communication theory, offering a model that positions translators as cultural mediators navigating between different worldviews. Incorporating these perspectives grounds this study more firmly within the theoretical frameworks of translation studies and underscores the cultural complexity of multilingual tourism translation.

According to Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 6), culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group [...] from another.” Hsu and Huang (2016, p. 9) further state that “the core of culture is formed by values which are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others,” and one of their roles is to guide consumer behavior in tourism. Cultural values, as stated by Hofstede et al. (2010), can be measured and compared on a national scale through six conceptual frameworks referred to as cultural dimensions. The scope of this research outlined two of them: individualism–collectivism and power distance. Individualism–collectivism is one of the key dimensions in cross-cultural psychology, whereas power distance is identified as a major influencing factor in decision-making about tourism destinations (Mele et al., 2021). In addition, both cultural dimensions are used in market research (Saleem & Larimo, 2017). Despite criticism from scholars for their simplistic reduction of cultural phenomena (Zainuddin et al., 2018), research shows that countries can be reliably distinguished based on a range of cultural values, and these are also reflected in online experiences (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2018).

Individualism and collectivism depict the extent to which individuals are connected to an ingroup (Hofstede et al., 2010). In collectivist cultures, the identity of the individual is formed within extended families or friend groups, emphasizing a collective sense of belonging as “we,” whereas cultures characterized by individualism value personal independence as “I” and self-sufficiency, with more flexible social bonds (Mele, 2020). Within the tourism context, collectivism can be conveyed through a focus on family and group-oriented activities, along with the purchase of gifts and souvenirs for family members. Conversely, individualism can be reflected in references to values such as independence, uniqueness, and self-fulfillment (Tigre Moura et al., 2015). Furthermore, the distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures is reflected in the approach to marketing messages. On one hand, individualist cultures prioritize directness, and persuasion relies on facts and figures. On the other hand, collectivist cultures focus on building trust between companies and customers, employing an indirect communication style (Tsai & Men, 2017) and emphasizing intangible aspects such as harmony (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017) and oneness with nature (Frederick & Gan, 2015).

In the context of Saudi Arabia, the power distance score is very high at 95, indicating that authority figures hold significant privileges over subordinates. This suggests that people in Saudi Arabia tend to accept decisions made by those in positions of power without requiring justification and often expect guidance on what to do. Additionally, with a score of 25, Saudi Arabia is considered a collectivist society, where individuals are part of tightly knit groups that offer support and care (Alsanoosy et al., 2018).

The cultural values conveyed by a website can also be modified to align with the cultural preferences of the target audience. In this regard, website localization encompasses a set of activities aimed at tailoring a website to meet the cultural requirements and preferences of a specific audience, ensuring it feels “local” or natural to the user (Noris et al., 2020). One of the strategies used to achieve this objective involves the localization of cultural values. This process entails aligning the values presented in website content with those held by online users from a particular country (Mele & Cantoni, 2017).

Global Research on Localization and Cultural Values

According to research on localization and cultural values in tourism, incongruent cultural values are defined as values that are adapted to reflect those that do not align with the characteristics of the target audience (Tigre Moura et al., 2015; Chau et al., 2002; Singh, Zhao, & Hu, 2003). This adaptation has a positive effect on the destination image and leads to a higher willingness to travel compared to congruent cultural values. Moreover, the study identified that the effectiveness of cultural congruity versus incongruity depends on users’ motivations, self-image, and the product or service category. Tigre Moura et al.’s (2015) research findings align with those of Chau et al. (2002), Singh, Zhao, and Hu (2003), Singh and Matsuo (2004), Callahan (2005), and Singh and Boughton (2005), who underscored that tourism often involves hedonic motivation and a desire for novelty. These findings, however, contradict previous research, which found that cultural congruity leads to more positive outcomes. This contradiction may be attributed to the fact that those studies focused on contexts in which the user’s prior knowledge of the site facilitated information searching and reduced the cognitive effort required to complete an online task (Nantel & Glaser, 2008). Nevertheless, the study was conducted in the New Zealand market with a focus on students, limiting the generalizability of these findings (Tigre Moura et al., 2015).

Mele’s (2020) research on cultural localization in online tourism promotion underscored that, on platforms like Instagram, cultural localization tends to have an individualistic focus, implying that tourism communications prioritize self-expression and solo experiences. Moreover, the study concluded that heritage tourism promotion on Instagram differs across cultures, particularly in terms of individualism–collectivism and high-context communication styles. Yet, the study’s scope is limited to Chile, Portugal, the USA, and the Netherlands, highlighting the value of exploring these findings in the Saudi Arabian context. Mele’s (2020) research findings align with those of Mele and Cantoni (2017), Jiang et al. (2020), Frederick and Gan (2015), and Lee and Gretzel (2014), who underscored that cultural differences influence online tourism promotion and website design, impacting communication style, content focus, and user engagement in various regions. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of analyzing both content and visual style when examining cultural differences in tourism promotion (Mele, 2020).

Mele, Kerkhof, and Cantoni (2021) examined the effects of localizing cultural values—focusing on the dimensions of collectivism–individualism and power distance—on perceived image and willingness to visit heritage sites. The study found a lack of support for the potential effects of localization in promoting tourism that holds cultural value. Furthermore, incongruent power distance values were found to influence the willingness to visit among Portuguese participants, whereas no such effect was observed among British respondents. In contrast, a study by Mele et al. (2021) reported no effect of congruent cultural values, in terms of collectivism–individualism and power distance, on destination experience image. However, another study by Mele et al. (2021) identified a positive effect among British respondents of localized individualism values on willingness to visit Kinderdijk, as recommended by the webpage, mediated by a more positive destination experience image. Yet, no such effect was found among Portuguese respondents.

Mele et al.'s (2021) research findings agree with those of Kastenholz (2010), Tigre Moura et al. (2015), and Yacout and Hefny (2015), who emphasized that cultural factors can influence perceived image formation. Moreover, Mele et al.'s (2021) research aligns with Molinillo et al. (2018) and Kim and Kerstetter (2016), who supported the notion that a positive perceived destination image impacts behavioral intentions, such as willingness to visit. Mele et al.'s (2021) research concluded that heritage interest had direct positive effects on perceived image and willingness to visit. Nevertheless, the research explored European heritage tourism, limiting the generalizability of these findings. Additionally, the study only considered heritage tourism, highlighting the need to explore additional types of tourism (Mele et al., 2021).

Mele et al. (2015) conducted research on the localization of national tourism organizations' websites, analyzing the U.S. and Italian editions of three European National Tourism Organization (NTO) websites: the Austrian National Tourist Office, Innovation Norway, and the Polish Tourist Organization. They propose a novel methodology combining user scenarios and content analysis to measure and report localization activities related to World Heritage Sites on tourism websites. Mele et al.'s (2015) research findings align with Cry and Trevor-Smith (2004), who underscore the relevance of localizing destination websites for different markets. The study concludes that content managers devoted considerable attention to adapting UNESCO World Heritage Sites content for the U.S. and Italian markets on European national tourism websites. However, the study explores only three European NTO websites, focusing solely on UNESCO World Heritage Site-related pages, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the study examines only websites with a higher degree of localization for comparison, highlighting the need for further research on lower degrees of localization.

Gicić (2023) assesses the localization quality of the Novi Pazar website and how well it matches the cultural profiles and preferences of domestic versus foreign tourists. Domestic tourists represent most visitors to Novi Pazar, while foreign tourists are mainly from Turkey and Germany. The study found that the website is well-adapted to domestic tourists' cultural characteristics and statistical profiles but lacks appeal to key foreign tourist segments. The scope of the study is limited to a single section of one website, which may not be representative of the site's overall localization quality, thereby restricting the generalizability of the findings. The research findings align with Jiménez-Crespo's (2013) work on translation and web localization, which underscores that effective tourism promotion requires content localization.

Mele et al. (2016) focus on the localization practices of National Tourism Office (NTO) websites, exploring how three European NTOs localize their websites for U.S. and Italian audiences. The study utilizes cultural frameworks based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's high/low-context cultures to analyze the websites. The high-context and low-context dimensions refer to the degree to which individuals rely on contextual cues and implicit communication. In high-context cultures, people tend to communicate indirectly, often using body language alongside spoken words. In contrast, low-context cultures are characterized by direct communication, where all verbal messages are explicit, clear, and to the point (Broeder, 2021). However, the study concluded that the websites did not effectively modify to suit different markets. While Mele et al. (2015, 2016, 2021) provide a framework for understanding localization in tourism, it is essential to consider critical perspectives. For example, Pym (2004) critiques over-localization, warning that excessive adaptation may lead to cultural dilution or loss of authenticity. This perspective may lead to a deeper and more balanced view of localization as a debated practice.

Pau (2017) suggests viewing website localization in tourism as a process that involves cultural adaptation and multimodal elements. The study analyzes the official tourism websites of Singapore and Macau through a comprehensive approach combining translation studies, visual semiotics, and multimodal discourse analysis. The key finding is that both official tourism websites developed similar identities in their original and localized formats, employing a strategy that involves translating textual content without adapting visual elements. Additionally, the integrated approach showcases inconsistencies in text transfer, highlighting the necessity to unify translation, localization, and multimodal discourse analysis. Pau's (2017) study aligns with Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger (2010), who underscored the value of multimodal discourse analysis in examining tourism websites. However, the study oversimplifies the intricate nature of the localization process by focusing primarily on linguistic and visual elements, potentially overlooking other important factors such as technical aspects.

Despite the significant attention that the topic of tourism localization and cultural values has attracted in academic research, there is still limited knowledge on how cultural dimensions impact the perception of tourism destinations. Moreover, the current academic debate is evident in the difference in generalizability of prior studies' findings, since the majority of research has focused on specific locations or tourism contexts.

KSA Research on Localization and Cultural Values

Almanjumi (2025) examines the localization strategies employed in translating the Saudi Heritage Commission's website from Arabic to English, focusing on domestication and foreignization approaches. The study analyzes particular translation techniques such as literal translation, transliteration, transposition, and omission, categorizing them within the framework of domestication or foreignization strategies. The research revealed that cultural connotations and labels play a crucial role in shaping Saudi culture and influencing Saudi choices. The study indicates that achieving a balance between domestication and foreignization is necessary for effective localization. Almanjumi (2025) aligns with Yang (2014), who underscores the importance of combining domestication and foreignization to achieve an effective translation, thereby enhancing comprehension and acceptance among readers. However, the study is limited solely to text translations and did not consider other localization aspects, such as image and design. This section highlights the limited research on tourism,

localization, and cultural values in the context of Saudi Arabia. While localization has been extensively explored in global contexts, there remains a gap in studies that specifically address how localization strategies are adapted to reflect the cultural values of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, particularly within its rapidly developing tourism sector. Understanding this relationship is crucial, as localizing cultural values can enhance the effectiveness of tourism promotion, improve tourist engagement, and support the Kingdom's vision for cultural openness and economic diversification.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach, which is defined as a form of inquiry grounded in naturalistic settings and focused on non-numerical data. It primarily seeks to understand and explore phenomena rather than to explain or manipulate variables. This approach is contextual, emphasizing the processes or patterns of development over the final products or outcomes of the research. It was adopted due to its exploratory nature, allowing for the elicitation of rich insights from textual and visual materials (Nassaji, 2020).

This study employed targeted sampling, suggested by Creswell and Poth (2016) selecting websites, specifically focusing on materials published by the Saudi Tourism Authority on the "Visit Saudi" website (<https://www.visitsaudi.com/en/alula>) from January 1, 2023, to May 1, 2025, with a particular focus on the heritage site of AlUla. The data selected aligns with the research's objectives exploring how cultural values are represented in localized tourism content targeting local and international audiences. Secondary data was prioritized in this study. The documentary method, as outlined by Cardno (2018), facilitates the analysis of existing materials, such as promotional content generated by official tourism bodies. The diverse sources provide rich qualitative data, offering fresh insight and a deeper understanding of the tourism communication process in Saudi Arabia (Abuhjeeleh, 2019). This method is well suited to this research because it involves the collection, review, and analysis of existing documents and materials. It enables the exploration of how cultural values are localized within Saudi Arabia's tourism discourse, with a particular focus on the official "Visit Saudi" website.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in a refined theoretical framework that draws from cultural studies, semiotics, and intercultural communication. These theories provide a holistic view through which the present study explores the role of culture in forming meaning, communication, and interpretation. Geert Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, developed in 1980 and updated in 2001, serves as a fundamental framework for understanding the impact of national culture on behavior, values, and communication styles. Hofstede identifies six dimensions power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint—that illustrate the dominant cultural characteristics of a society. In this research, Hofstede's model is used to analyze the influence of cultural values on the creation and interpretation of meaning within different social and national contexts (Hofstede, 2001). We used individualism versus collectivism and power distance due to their significant impact on users' preferences and user experience design (Mohamed & Ünsalan, 2025), while power distance also influences user trust and decision-making behavior (Feng et al., 2025). Moreover, De Saussure's semiotic theory explores the way in which signs and symbols create meaning. This theory assumes that all forms of communication, whether verbal, written, or visual, function as sign systems, where

meaning is generated through the relationship between the signifier and signified (De Saussure, 1959). In this research, semiotics is utilized to analyze how cultural codes, symbols, and imagery are embedded in promotional content, as well as how meaning is interpreted and constructed across cultural contexts. Furthermore, Edward T. Hall's (1976) theory of high-context and low-context communication suggests an essential dimension to understanding intercultural interaction. The high-context and low-context dimensions refer to the degree to which individuals rely heavily on contextual cues and implicit communication, while low-context cultures favor direct, explicit, clear, and to-the-point communication. The present research also uses Hall's theory to illustrate how context influences the delivery and acceptance of messages in a culturally diverse context. Using a framework that draws on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Hall's high-/low-context communication theory, and De Saussure's semiotics allows for a thorough analysis of localized tourism content. This triangulated approach enhances the validity, depth, and interpretive richness of the study, especially in a tourism context where meaning is constructed across cultural, linguistic, and visual modes.

Data Analysis

Documentary analysis was employed to systematically examine how cultural values are visually and linguistically represented. The investigation into the depiction of cultural values on tourism destination websites was conducted through close textual analysis which is a qualitative research method involving the detailed and critical examination of written and visual messages to uncover the cultural and ideological meanings that shape how individuals and communities interpret the world (Arya, 2020). This type of analysis relies on a data-gathering process that enables a deep exploration of implicit cultural messages and ideological meanings presented on the "Visit Saudi" website.

Since the aim of this research is to explore how Saudi cultural values are represented and localized in promotional tourism content, a qualitative documentary analysis method was employed, with an emphasis on interpretation, meaning, and cultural context. This approach is particularly suited for analyzing both visual and textual materials, as it allows for a deep exploration of how meaning is constructed and conveyed. Qualitative documentary analysis treats promotional materials not just as neutral texts, but as cultural artifacts that reflect and shape social values and national identity. It also facilitates a theory-based analysis, aligning with the study's use of Hofstede's, Hall's, and Saussure's theories to interpret how cultural values are communicated and adapted for local and international audiences. This method enables a rich, flexible exploration of the data, rather than imposing rigid variables or measurements, which would be less effective in capturing the complex process of cultural localization. By focusing on visual codes and language, the analysis provided rich qualitative data that went beyond surface-level content to uncover deeper layers of cultural signification (Arya, 2020).

Findings & Discussion

The "Visit Saudi" website exposes a cohesive use of language and visuals to convey Saudi Arabia's cultural identity and tourism appeal. The textual content combines a formal, yet warm tone, shifting from serious when addressing history and heritage to a more entertaining style when describing tourist attractions and experiences. It frequently uses the second-person voice, "you," to create a personal connection with the reader. Keywords include 'heritage,'

‘culture,’ ‘experience,’ ‘adventure,’ ‘landscape,’ and ‘tradition,’ which appear repeatedly to reinforce the core theme of cultural richness and exploration. The website visually focuses on natural landscapes and historical sites, including deserts, oases, ancient tombs, and traditional architecture, combined with depictions of cultural scenes such as local markets and festivals. The discussion of color symbolism in “Visit Saudi” website draws on principles from Saussure’s (1959) semiotic theory distinguishing the signifier (i.e. the color) and the signified (i.e., the concept). Here, Colors function as cultural signs, with earthy tones and vivid sunset hues, expressing timelessness, authenticity, and vitality. “Visit Saudi” uses descriptive and narrative language. It employs text that appeals to the reader's senses and emotions, focusing on three core topics: cultural heritage, beautiful sites, and visitor experience as a way to promote tourism. The website utilizes formal yet warm and inviting language. The tone is a combination of serious when talking about heritage, culture, and history to reflect the importance of the content, and entertaining when describing sites and activities to inspire tourists and stir curiosity. The website primarily uses the second-person voice to speak directly to the readers, making them feel personally invited to the experience. For instance, the phrase “you can walk in the paths that trace the kingdom’s history” and the phrase “you will find many international and local restaurants” create a sense of engagement and personal invitation. Furthermore, the text blends an inviting promotional tone with cultural respect, appealing to local families, international tourists, and heritage enthusiasts by offering both entertainment experiences and historical insight. On the “Visit Saudi” website, the most frequently used keywords are heritage, culture, experience, adventure, landscape, and tradition. In addition to these keywords, several recurring phrases appear throughout the site, such as historical journey, authentic experience, ancient city, cultural destination, and Saudi hospitality.

The natural beauty of the Kingdom is described using poetic and aesthetic language, such as “lush oasis surrounded by palm trees” and “admire the art in which nature’s colors and rich gradients blend.” This descriptive portrayal of nature is designed to evoke an emotional desire to visit. Moreover, the website deliberately uses words like “admire” instead of more common terms such as “experience” or “enjoy,” positioning Saudi culture as elevated and worthy of reverence and admiration. In addition, the cultural heritage of Saudi Arabia is illustrated through words such as “Traditional Najdi style” and “mud with stone foundation.” These words are precisely selected to frame the Kingdom as a place of incomparable cultural heritage.

Photography as a Visual Storytelling

Natural landscapes and heritage sites dominate the visual content on the “Visit Saudi” website. The photographs are composed of rock formations, desert landscapes, and historical architecture, such as the ancient tombs of AlUla. These visuals highlight the historical significance and natural beauty of the destinations. Some photographs portray cultural scenes of traditional markets, local crafts, and festivals in a way that is both inviting and uniquely reflective of Saudi Arabia’s rich heritage, alluring users into its vivid traditions. Other photographs vibrantly depict people appreciating the local scenery and participating in cultural activities, adding a relatable human element to the stunning landscapes and architecture. Many photographs depict people socializing against the backdrop of Saudi scenery, positioning the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a place to visit for both cultural and social experiences. The visuals reflect the natural colors of the desert environment, with a combination of sandy beiges, rich

browns, and sunset oranges. The same vivid colors are noticeable in traditional clothing and market scenes. These colors carry symbolic meanings such as warmth, timelessness, vitality, refreshment, freedom, calmness, and authenticity. Complementing this imagery, the use of deep blue and soft lighting enhances the overall ambiance, creating a serene, welcoming, and immersive atmosphere. By focusing on ancient landscapes, traditional markets, heritage villages, and human interaction within a natural backdrop, the imagery downplays the presence of modern technology and instead highlights a deep-rooted connection to history, land, and culture. The absence of digital distractions in these visuals fosters an escapist feeling, allowing potential tourists to imagine themselves stepping into a simpler, slower world, untouched by the noise of modern life.

Visual and Textual Cultural Localization

The combination of descriptive language and colorful photographs on the “Visit Saudi” website creates a meaningful message that encapsulates the cultural and natural identity of Saudi Arabia. The descriptive language used in text, such as “lush oasis,” “nature’s colors,” and “rich gradients”, is directly reflected in the website’s visual content, which features desert landscapes, vibrant sunsets, and greenery. This alignment between verbal and nonverbal elements heightens the user’s sensory experience and emotional connection to the Kingdom.

The text embodies cultural references such as “traditional Najdi style”, which is supported by photographs of mud-brick structures and traditional style, thus allowing users to behold what they are reading. Simultaneously, the visual content brings life to the words, and the text provides deeper meaning to the photos. For instance, on the AlUla Oasis site, visitors are invited to “explore AlUla oasis with lush date palms, dining options, guided tours, and activities.” This description is paired with vibrant images showcasing verdant palm groves set against the backdrop of a golden desert landscape. The combination of attractive language and compelling visuals transports viewers to a calm and timeless environment, highlighting the oasis as a harmonious blend of natural beauty and cultural richness. Not only do the carefully chosen text and visuals create a cohesive narrative of cultural heritage, deep spirituality, and natural beauty, but they also invite users to feel and understand the essence of Saudi Arabia. It goes beyond merely inviting tourists to visit (see Figures).

Figure 1.

Visitors Walking through AlUla Old Town Village, Surrounded by Traditional Crafts and Architecture. (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2025.)



The feature on AIUla Old Town Village emphasizes its traditional architectural heritage, portraying it as a crossroads of civilizations and an oasis city along the ancient incense-trading routes for thousands of years. The narrative highlights the village's rich history and the value of its cultural and historical sites. AIUla Old Town has been awarded Best Tourism Village by the United Nations World Tourism Organization. The village is described as a labyrinth of tightly packed streets lined with mudbrick houses, shops, and squares. Moreover, the text employs visual storytelling through a vibrant image that captures two young tourists walking along a traditional village road. By depicting foreign tourists enjoying the walk along the local sight, smiling and looking relaxed, this site appears welcoming and open to offering experiences to global tourists. The photo showcases earth-toned architecture, handcrafted décor, woven rugs, and local crafts displayed on the walls— all of which reflect AIUla's authentic cultural atmosphere and well-preserved heritage.

Figure 2.

Scenic View of Dadan and Jabal Ikmah in AIUla, Saudi Arabia, Showing the Natural Rock Formations and Surrounding Palm Groves (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2025).



“Offer a glimpse into the lives and artistry of ancient civilizations.” This quote implies that visiting Dadan is an experience akin to going back in time, appealing to tourists’ sentiment for bygone eras and nostalgia. The feature on AIUla’s Dadan and Jabal Ikmah highlights two heritage sites that stand as significant archaeological marvels, continuing to captivate the world today. Jabal Ikmah has been inducted into UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register, which adds greater value and provides a compelling reason to visit this site. These tombs, skillfully etched into red rock cliffs, are considered a testament to a bygone era, offering a glimpse into the lives and artistry of ancient civilizations. The visual depicts majestic rock formations, representing iconic geological structures closely tied to AIUla's ancient heritage. It also features a Saudi man wearing a white thobe, driving a cart in front of the site. This presents the site as a destination for a unique experience. The man's traditional clothing further emphasizes the enduring cultural identity of the region, blending natural beauty with authentic heritage. The site is surrounded by palm trees and an open desert foreground, showcasing a harmonious

connection between natural beauty and human history. The use of earthy tones throughout emphasizes authenticity and timelessness.

Discussion

Cultural Dimensions

The “Visit Saudi” website content directly reflects the strong collectivist cultural dimension of Saudi Arabia by showcasing local people and communities in traditional heritage settings. At the same time, it appeals to the individualist cultural dimension of foreign tourists by representing experiences available to individuals—such as a pair of tourists visiting AlUla Old Town Village (Hofstede et al., 2010). Tourists are shown exploring the UNESCO site in comfort and at their own pace, supporting the argument that the content is tailored to meet the expectations of a diverse target audience (Mele & Cantoni, 2017). The power distance dimension is strongly reflected in the design and content of the “Visit Saudi” website—specifically in how authority, prestige, and culture are depicted. As Saudi society is characterized by relatively high-power distance, Saudi Arabia’s tourism branding emphasizes prestigious heritage sites and historical significance, aligning with the cultural tendency to respect authority and tradition (Hofstede et al., 2010). For instance, UNESCO World Heritage Sites are mentioned multiple times throughout the “Visit Saudi” website, such as AlUla’s Dadan and Jabal Ikmah. This lends institutional endorsement and elevates the status of these sites, appealing to audiences who value authority and cultural prestige. Additionally, the website’s use of formal and respectful language—along with its focus on Saudi hospitality, royal architecture, and traditional customs—underscores cultural value (Mele et al., 2021). This finding contributes to the research on Saudi Arabian tourism by evaluating cultural dimensions within the promotional content and demonstrating the applicability of cultural values in localization strategies.

Localization

From a website localization stance, “Visit Saudi” embodies the practice of cultural adaptation, aiming to localize the website’s content according to the values and preferences of both local and international audiences. The use of traditional imagery, symbolic colors, and culturally suited text appeals to local users by reflecting familiar societal values, while also providing attractive and structured content for international visitors—shaped by Saudi Arabia’s own cultural standards. Furthermore, according to Mele and Cantoni (2017), destination marketing organizations often purposely tailor digital content to reflect cultural values and meet the cultural requirements and preferences of specific audiences. “Visit Saudi” offers a consistent visual identity that aligns with Saudi tradition and integrates language that fosters national pride and historical reverence. Thus, it presents the Kingdom not only as a tourism destination but also as a culturally rich and respected homeland. This represents an effective application of cultural alignment, aiming to increase engagement among both local and global users.

The theory developed by Tigre Moura, Gnoth, and Deans (2015) demonstrates that adapting to incongruent values can promote destination image and boost travel motivation, especially when tourism is presented as a hedonic and novel experience. The “Visit Saudi” website incorporates both congruent and incongruent elements to attract a wider global audience. For example, although the website reflects Saudi Arabia’s collectivist and high

power distance culture in its domestic messaging—clearly evident in themes of royal heritage, social cohesion, and family-oriented experiences—it also incorporates individualist elements such as visuals of solo travelers, personal adventures, and self-reflective moments in nature. This resonates with Western users driven by self-expression and escapism, aligning with Mele’s (2020) findings on tourism promotion on platforms such as Instagram. Therefore, the present study’s findings confirm the applicability of incongruent values in the KSA tourism context.

The “Visit Saudi” website’s content reflects Hall’s (1976) theory of high-context and low-context cultural dimensions. High-context culture is evident in the website’s use of visual elements, storytelling, and references to historical and religious symbols, which resonate with local users due to their familiarity with these themes. The website consistently showcases imagery of culturally significant sites such as AlUla, and its storytelling is based on themes such as heritage, family unity, and hospitality—core values in Saudi society (Broeder, 2021). The research contributes to Hall’s theoretical framework by expanding its application to websites and online user experiences. It analyzes how culture is implicitly expressed through website images, colors, symbols, and narratives embedded in the design of promotional content. This study illustrates how high-context elements enhance user engagement and emotional resonance, while also emphasizing the importance of culturally considering local traditions, values, and communication styles. Through this lens, the research underscores the significance of understanding cultural communication styles in shaping user perception and interaction in the digital sphere.

Drawing on Pau’s (2017) emphasis on multimodal discourse and visual semiotics, “Visit Saudi” effectively develops a unified visual identity that underscores the uniqueness and richness of Saudi culture. It uses a curated blend of images, text, color, and layout to communicate a destination identity grounded in tradition, luxury, and discovery. Key visuals involve a holistic view of desert landscapes, Islamic architecture, vibrant souks, and culturally significant clothing, which not only reflect local aesthetics but also cater to international tourists looking for authentic and novel experiences. These features serve as semiotic tools that accurately communicate meaning, set a cultural tone, and create a unique experience. This kind of content has a substantial impact on tourism by forming perceptions, creating emotional connections, and influencing travel motivations. By embedding cultural cues such as calligraphic styles, heritage symbols, or scenes from local life into the visual narrative design, “Visit Saudi” enhances the appeal of the destination, fostering curiosity and building trust among diverse global audiences. Furthermore, my research contributes to this discourse by systematically analyzing how high-context cultural elements—such as symbolism, traditional photographs, and color schemes—are incorporated into online tourism platforms. By doing so, it extends existing theories of visual communication and cultural semiotics into the digital tourism domain, highlighting how culturally resonant design fosters user engagement, shapes expectations, and ultimately contributes to destination branding and competitiveness in the global market.

Conclusion

This research fosters the creation of culturally sensitive content for local and global audiences, enhancing heritage tourism and emphasizing the importance of authenticity in representing local cultural values within destination marketing strategies. The "Visit Saudi"

website demonstrates a cohesive integration of textual and visual elements to illustrate Saudi Arabia's cultural identity and tourism appeal. Through the use of descriptive language combined with vibrant imagery—featuring local markets, traditional festivals, and breathtaking natural landscapes—the website invites tourists to experience Saudi culture firsthand. The findings highlight AlUla as a prime tourism destination characterized by a rich history and valuable cultural and historical sites. Overall, the "Visit Saudi" website portrays Saudi Arabia as a destination of deep cultural heritage and natural beauty, offering an unforgettable tourism experience. In addressing the research questions, the study finds that Saudi cultural values are visually and linguistically represented through a formal yet warm tone that embodies the spirit of Saudi hospitality. The use of the second person ("you") establishes personal engagement, while the descriptive and poetic language paints vivid scenes. These representations are further reinforced visually through imagery capturing the warm, earthy tones of the Saudi setting. Furthermore, the research illustrates that localization strategies are employed to tailor content to the expectations and values of different audiences. Content directed at local tourists emphasizes traditional values, religious significance, and a collectivist cultural orientation, while content targeting international tourists focuses more on individual experiences, personal discovery, and accessible language.

While this study offers an in-depth analysis of a single tourism website, it is limited in scope and therefore not fully generalizable. Future research could address this by incorporating tourist perceptions, such as how audiences from different cultural backgrounds interpret localized content. Consequently, further research is necessary to refine the understanding of localization strategies by analyzing a broader range of tourism websites and promotional content. Moreover, Future research could explore interactive components of tourism websites such as user reviews and feedback sections to find how localized content is perceived and evaluated by local and international users. Such audience-centered evidence will complement any textual analysis and will provide researchers and policymakers with a better understanding of the users' interpretations and satisfaction.

Bio

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