

# THE WAKE OF MODERNISTIC TOURISM IN THE KINGDOM: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF ONLINE DISCOURSE

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** Revolutionising the tourism industry is one of the key components in the Saudi Vision 2030 for developing a sustainable economic source as well as representing the versatility of the Saudi landscape and culture to the outer world. To attract tourists from around the globe, it is pertinent to clearly and persuasively elucidate what the country has to offer in terms of its tourist attractions, facilities, and activities. The current project aimed at analysing the effectiveness of linguistic and semiotic representation of the content provided online to attract foreign tourists specifically.

**Methods.** The multimodal framework was adopted to analyse the selected content. To evaluate the written discourse, Fairclough's critical analysis consisting of "descrip-



tion, interpretation, and explanation of text" (1989, p. 109) was implemented. Similarly, to scrutinise the images, the "grammar of images" model promulgated by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) was employed.

**Results.** The findings of the study demonstrate that the website discourse effectively presents the Kingdom as a modern, multicultural, and rich landscape for prospective tourists. Also, the imagery and discursive strategies applied positively exhibit the vitality and vivacity of Saudi culture, lifestyle, and tourism experience by complementing each other effectively.

**Conclusion.** The Kingdom's identity as a multicultural and modern place with reference to its lifestyle and culture is effectively created and convincingly advocated. Moreover, the verbal and visual discourse meritoriously compliments each other and presents the Kingdom as a technologically advanced state which is diverse in its landscape, culture, and tourist attractions.

**Key words:** tourism, online discourse, multimodal analysis, themes, discourse, semiotic analysis

## INTRODUCTION

Since its initiation in 2016, Saudi Vision 2030 has been considered a blueprint for the Kingdom's social, cultural, and economic growth reducing its dependence on and recognition of being an oil-based economy only (Hameed et al., 2020). Pertaining to the fact that the Middle East has been emerging as a prominent tourist region (Abuhjeeleh, 2019) tourism has become one of the main sectors the Kingdom envisions to promote to diversify the economy. Existing tourism in KSA heavily depends upon the religious sector, pilgrimages visiting Makkah and Madinah from all around the world for Hajj and Umrah purposes. However, as outlined in Saudi Vision 2030, the aim concerning the tourism industry is to "create attractions that are of the highest international standards" (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2016, p. 44) to promote the said industry and attract diverse international tourists other than religious visitors. And to achieve that purpose, KSA "needs to understand and comprehend the implications of tourism activities in KSA from various perspectives e.g. social, cultural, political, and economic effects" (Madden, 2018, as cited in Abuhjeeleh, 2019, p. 2).

Conventionally, the image of KSA has been of a strictly regulated land with multiple legal and socio-cultural restrictions such as strict visit visa policies, barring entry of females without their male family members, and death penalties for drug-related crimes, etc. (Abuhjeeleh, 2019, Scott & Jafari, 2010;). Such an image shuns the tourists away which, after Saudi Vision 2030 in action, needed to be addressed and changed. For that purpose, the internal and external rules of conduct and policies were softened and changed by the decree of the Crown Prince, such as granting tourist visas, lifting the condition of showing marriage certificates by the foreign visitors, the opening of cinemas, allowing women to travel alone, drive, etc. (Abuhjeeleh, 2019).

Moreover, Saudi Arabia has redefined its tourism goals to align with the 2030 Vision such as: increasing the tourist sector's contribution to the gross domestic product to more than 10%, developing the number of work possibilities by one million, and aiming for 100 million yearly visitors by 2030. The Kingdom's focus on tourism investment is intended to bridge cultural exchange between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world and create investment possibilities for both domestic and international investors. The National Tourism Monitoring Platform was established to track the performance of tourism facilities, as well as to serve as a repository for tourism-related information (Saudi Arabia's National Unified Portal for Government Services, 2022). Also, along with the Ministry of Tourism, many public bodies and agencies such as Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, Saudi Tourism Authority were also formulated to promote tourism in the country.

However, the success of any new change, idea, or product primarily depends on its effective promotion and marketing. In this regard, all media generally and electronic media specifically not only introduces the products and ideas, but also endorse them effectively by creating a desire, need, and longing in the targeted community (Wimmer & Dominick, 2012). Realising the undeniable role of electronic media in shaping and reshaping the image of anything in hand, KSA also deploys this platform in branding Saudia as a tourist destination by creating official websites such as Visit Saudia. However, the question remains what type of online content is crafted and published on this website to persuade potential tourists. Also, it is important to explore how the discursive strategies and semiotic representations are employed to cater to the interests of tourists belonging to diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Thus, the following objectives were set forth to explore the said phenomenon:

- to explore the nature of the discourse and imagery employed in online content to attract the sightseers;
- to analyse and decode the discursive patterns and images through a multimodal analysis framework;
- to determine whether or not the online discourse and image content is effective to persuade the prospective tourists.

Saudi Vision 2030 is considered as a fundamental blueprint for an advanced nation and country in almost all the spheres of life including citizens, society, culture, economy, education, etc. Tourism is one of the prominent areas regarded as crucial to the socio-economic growth of the Kingdom in the coming years. The current study is significant in critically examining the online content of the selected parts of the [visitsaudi.com](https://visitsaudi.com) website, published to attract prospective tourists. The findings of the project highlight whether or not the efforts of the concerned authorities to improve the tourism industry are effective under a linguistic paradigm. Furthermore, the study reveals the type of image created before prospective tourists regarding socio-cultural life in KSA by using illustrations and discursive strategies. The study also contributes to the research conducted within KSA address-

sing the dearth of studies held to analyse the online content intended to promote tourism under the linguistic paradigm employing a multimodal framework.-

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The advent of the term “discourse analysis” dates back to 1952 when linguist Zellig Harris, working on the analysis of the sentence, used the term in his article “Discourse Analysis.” He refers to discourse analysis as a method used to analyse the “connected speech or writing, for continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limit of a simple sentence at a time” (Kamalu & Osisanwo, 2015). Since its beginning, the term has been defined in a variety of ways for the sake of clarity and elaboration, first, looking at discourse and analysis as two different terms and then putting the two together. For instance, the term “discourse” is simply described as “language in use” (Guardado, 2018; McCarthy, 1991). When combined with “analysis” the term “discourse analysis” is considered as a process to critically analyse the language used in a particular context including “written texts of all kinds, and spoken data, from conversation to highly institutionalised forms of talk” (McCarthy, 1991, p. 5).

In other words, discourse analysis simply means to probe “who speaks, to whom, when, with what purposes, in what ways” (Kress, 2013, p. 35) during the course of language in use. Evolved during the 1960s and 1970s, discourse analysis became a multidisciplinary approach widely applied in linguistics, semiotics, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. In linguistics, the early notable works included “Speech Act Theory” by John Langshaw Austin (1962), and the sociological perspective of discourse represented by Dell Hymes (1964). Similarly, Halliday and Hasan’s *Functional Approach to Language* (1989) influenced the works in discourse immensely considering it as a social act and event (Kamalu & Osisanwo, 2015). Norman Fairclough (1989) offered another significant and widely acknowledged contribution in the name of critical discourse analysis. The primary focus of critical discourse analysis is treating and analysing a text as a product of its particular context. The three-dimensional framework promulgated by Fairclough functions at the description, interpretation, and explanation stages. The purpose, intention, and implicit ideologies of the text producers are unearthed working through the carefully designated stages.

Further research in the analysis of discourse encompassed not only the spoken or written words but the paralinguistic features, too. It maintained that in order to understand the whole of the text, gestures, body language, and external material such as images are crucial to study side by side. This approach to the text is referred to as multimodal discourse analysis asserting, “‘language’ is just one among the many resources for making meaning” (Kress, 2013, p. 38). Rather, there are multiple and diverse threads naming “gestures, speech, image (still or moving), wri-

ting and music" (Kress, 2013, p. 36) intentionally interwoven to achieve certain purposes. The integral role media plays these days in developing, shaping, and reshaping the meaning and ideologies of its users, it has become inevitable to look at the media discourse as an embodiment of the implicit meaning-making process. To critically reflect upon the semiotic signs, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) brought forth the model named "grammar of images," opining that images just like language have their own grammar structure open to critical inquiry and analysis (Ly & Jung, 2015). Thus, a multimodal analysis framework supports the researchers in critically probing a text from linguistic as well as semiotic perspectives focusing both on the internal and external features of the selected media discourse.

Researchers, scholars, and linguists around the world had applied the multi-modals and frameworks for analysing the texts and images together, belonging to diverse backgrounds and cultures, primarily to discover both explicit and implicit meanings and intentions working behind the selected discourses and images. For instance, in recent years, the multimodal framework of discourse analysis was incorporated by various researchers. (Bi, 2019; Er, 2020; Hoffman, 2018; Lim, 2019; Nilsen, 2020; Sukma, 2021; Van der Schyff, et al. 2018; Wallace, 2021; Zhang & Tu, 2019). The diversity of the phenomena and hypotheses underlying such studies signifies the fundamental role multimodal analysis may have in investigating a text as a whole from linguistic features to semiotic signs.

For instance, Van der Schyff et al. (2018) focused their research on unearthing the hidden "capitalist exploitation" of the users by Facebook behind seemingly working as a mere web platform for social connectivity and socialisation. Interestingly, such hidden agendas are not exercised by the social networking sites only, even the discursive content aided by the illustrative representation at the institutional websites like that of universities also create a highly goal-oriented image of themselves to persuade foreign students (Zhang & Tu, 2018). Similarly, more subtle and sensitive issues such as forced displacement and misrepresentation of refugees are critically analysed and found to be "symbolically annihilated" through mass and homogeneous representations in print and social media in Latin America (Wallace, 2021).

The multimodal frameworks have also been applied in critically evaluating classroom discourses and experiences (Lim, 2021). For example, systematic multimodal discourse analysis (SFMDA), was used by Fei Victor Lim (2019) to methodically assess the effectiveness of gestures and body language exercised by the instructors during their classroom interactions. A substantial body of research within multimodal frameworks is on print content such as newspapers (Brantner et al., 2020; Bouvier, 2019; Chovanec, 2019; Zhang & Min, 2019). Chovanec demonstrates in his study how a series of pictures combined with verbal content may be employed implicitly in visual story-telling for stereotypically "othering" the "others."

Moving from the global to the immediate context, the researchers within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have extensively applied multimodal discourse analysis theories and tools for a variety of text analyses, specifically within the last few years (Al-Ghamdi & Albawadi, 2020; Alsalem, 2019; Alyousef, 2021; Taher, 2019). These research studies focus on diverse issues like female representation in commercial magazine images (Taher, 2019), the exploration of linguistic and semiotic features of TV commercials (Alsalem, 2019), sociocultural placing, and representation of visuals and texts related to Covid-19 in social media posts (Al-Ghamdi & Albawardi, 2020), implicit persuasiveness of political content in Mubarak's and Algaddafi's speeches during Arab Spring (Alduhaim, 2019).

However, referring to the Saudi Vision 2030 (SV 2030), the studies conducted with a linguistic analysis perspective are only a few mainly because it is relatively a new and specific research paradigm. The notable researches include but are not limited to exploring the effective contribution English can play towards the success of the Vision (Alzahrani, 2017), the perceptions and attitudes of the teachers towards implementing the Vision (Al-Zahrani & Rajab, 2017), bringing the women out from the realm of invisibility to visibility (Eum, 2019), the analysis of the document itself through corpus-assisted critical analysis approach (Mohammad & Alshahrani, 2019), and a semantic-grammatical based discourse analysis (Hameed et al., 2020), and the corpus-based critical discourse analysis investigating the visualisation of women empowerment in the SV 2030 (Afzal & Omar, 2021). However, none of the previous research applies multimodal analysis to critically analyse the online discourse emancipated in the light of the SV 2030 to promote the tourism industry within the Kingdom. Thus, the current study focused on analysing the selected media discourse by employing Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model of text analysis as well as Kress & Leeuwen's model of "grammar of images" to examine the nature and effectiveness of the written discourse aided by the imagery.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To explore the use of discourse markers and illustrations published online on [visitsaudi.com](http://visitsaudi.com), the multimodal framework was employed for the collection and interpretation of the data. The framework included the three-dimensional text analysis approach presented by Fairclough (1989) to evaluate the online text, and the "grammar of images" model introduced by Kress & Leeuwen (2006) to investigate the use of images embedded with the written discourse. Falling in the qualitative research paradigm, the multi-modal approach facilitated the in-depth and detailed inquiry of the phenomenon of this research from different perspectives. Focusing both on the textual/linguistic as well as paralinguistic features fundamentally brought together "the individual bits of representation and interaction into

the kind of wholes we recognise as specific kinds of text or communicative event" (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p. 140).

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process involved three stages. First, the critical reading and exploration of the online content available on different websites related to the tourism industry within KSA were carried out. Second, after a thorough examination of different sources, the research was limited to the content published on [www.visitsaudi.com](http://www.visitsaudi.com) promoted by the Saudi Tourism Authority website, i.e. [www.sta.gov.sa](http://www.sta.gov.sa).

The rationale behind selecting this specific website was manifold. First, the website is recognised by the Saudi Tourism Authority which makes it an authentic and reliable source of information for the readers in general and the tourists in particular. Second, the website offers both linguistic and paralinguistic features regarding the opportunities for sightseeing in KSA. Keeping in view the common belief that the combination of words with images generally renders the discourse with more power and influence over the reader than a simple written text, the selected website becomes viable to study how the use of both written discourse and imagery complemented each other to disseminate the intended ideologies and persona.

### **Corpus of the Study**

The data of this study comprised of the descriptive discourse and selected images complementing the linguistic discourse available on [www.visitsaudi.com](http://www.visitsaudi.com), in the section *Activities and Attractions*, under the following captions:

- homepage,
- adventure activities,
- family activities,
- lifestyle activities,
- culture.

The "homepage" of any website carries the first impression on the users so it was vital to study the content and imagery displayed on this particular page of the website. Similarly, the most relevant and sought out information for the majority of the tourists are presumably to be the information related to the kind of activities, sight-seeing options, culture, and lifestyle one place can offer to them. This important information was provided on the selected pages of the website.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The data collected was primarily qualitative in nature, leading to a qualitative analysis stance for analysing and interpreting the data collected. The analysis was conducted in two stages:

### **Discourse Analysis**

The written discourse was investigated by means of critical discourse analysis through the three-dimensional framework of Fairclough (1989) implemented frequently by other researchers for the same purpose (Joshi & Och, 2014; Luca, 2020; O'Grady, 2011; Wetherell, 1998). The text was probed at three levels: description, interpretation, and explanation of the selected discourse. In this model, the description stage stands for probing the "formal properties of the text" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 110), such as where the text was produced or written, its layout, font, position, etc. The next stage named "interpretation" of the text refers to examining the "relationship between the text and the interaction" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 141) denoting the process of interpreting the situational context in which that particular text is produced, presented and referred to by the target audience and readers (Dai, 2015). Based on the interpretation of the text, at the explanation level, the social analysis is presented focusing on the hidden ideologies and their intended impact on the receivers of the text.

### **Image Analysis**

The second phase of data analysis critically evaluated the use of images and their creation by employing the framework of "grammar of images" created by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006). The pictures were analysed focusing on the representational and the interactive dimensions. The representational dimension evaluated the image at the level of the narrative process unfolding the "actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements," whereas the conceptual patterns unfolded the static status of the "participants in terms of their class, structure, or meaning" (Ly & Jung, 2015, p. 50). The interactive dimension in this model provided a detailed semiotic analysis based on the factors such as the gaze, social distance, angle, and modality. The third dimension i.e. composition was not included as it was not deemed very relevant to the analysis to be established.

### **Data Analysis**

The following sections present the analytical evaluation of the online discourse and illustrations presented on the Visit Saudi website. Firstly, the critical analysis of the verbal content exhibited on the selected pages of the website is presented, followed by a detailed investigation of the images displayed on the same pages to complement the texts with the power of the imagery. To achieve the said purpose, the following pages were selected:

- "homepage" of Visit Saudi: <https://www.visitsaudi.com/en>;
- "adventure activities": <https://www.visitsaudi.com/en/do/adventure-activities>;
- "family activities": <https://www.visitsaudi.com/en/do/family-activities>;
- "lifestyle activities": <https://www.visitsaudi.com/en/do/lifestyle>;
- "culture": <https://www.visitsaudi.com/en/do/culture>.

## FAIRCLOUGH'S THREE DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK

### Description of the Selected Pages

#### *Homepage*

Simple yet vibrant in colours, the homepage of the website contains multiple sections: the description of the range of activities and adventures available for the tourists, travel, stay and tour options, and the link to further specified content pages such as Travel Packages, Plan your Trip, etc. Each section is complemented by relevant imagery. Within the main menu on the homepage header, the most important caption appears to be "See & Do" which explains the kind of adventures, fun activities, lifestyle, and culture Saudi offers for the tourists.

#### *Adventure Activities*

One of the main pages of the website, the adventure activities page has an ensemble of a variety of adventure and "in action" pictures along with written descriptions. An array of options starting from scuba diving to desert safari and camping are pictured on this page.

#### *Family Activities*

This page represents the family tourism attractions where whole families can have a memorable time spent discovering the Al Kharara National Park, Fakieh Aquarium, or Jeddah Beach. Following the same pattern of the whole website, this page also includes different activities with discursive descriptions along with relevant images.

#### *Lifestyle Activities*

Catering to the tourists' interest in the Saudi fashion, brands, fragrances, and overall shopping experience, this page offers a virtual tour to the tourists in the realms of Must-see Concept Stores, Touring Saudi Perfumes, and Five Work-friendly Cafes in Riyadh, etc.

#### *Culture*

The last page selected as a sample of the study details the rich culture Saudi has to offer to prospective tourists including the historical monuments, castles, the wealth of artistic heritage, and homemade pottery, just a few examples from many.

The critical analysis of the linguistic discourse published in the above-mentioned pages highlights multiple linguistic strategies and textual features employed by the producer of the content. The following sections present the tabular representation and interpretation of the findings based on the data derived from the selected pages and analysed critically.

**Lexical Items.** The advertising content needs to be highly persuasive and influential in order to achieve the purpose of the producer(s). This objective can be achieved through the use of effective lexicon/ vocabulary including the use of adjectives for instance, for creating positive or/and negative images and ideologies (Delin, 2000). There is a visible abundance of adjectives or adjectival phrases in the text presented on the selected website such as the ones mentioned in the table below:

**Table 1**  
**Prominent Adjectival Items**

Representational purpose	Lexical items used to achieve the purpose
Creating excitement	exciting, roaring, glorious, challenging, wild, breathtaking, thrilling, dramatic,
Scenic representation	ancient, spectacular, beautiful, stunning, calm, boutique, charming, lively, picturesque, fresh, mesmerising, softly lit
Landscape grandeur	great, iconic, huge, majestic, vast, magnificent, sweeping, sprawling, deep, enormous, large, royal, historic, open-air
Words of colours	golden, tranquil blue, azure, bright, black and blue, red-hued, red-velvet, grey-tinged
Representing uniqueness	untouched, undiscovered, uninhabited, new, impromptu, traditional, contemporary, unique, hidden, vintage
Representing quality	best, excellent, popular, famous, perfect, favourite, finer, wide, impressive, celebrated, incredible, powerful, luxurious, well-edited, best-known, modern, kid-friendly, inviting, well-stocked, decent, ample, thriving, ideal

Source: own research

The online text of the website uses a range of adjectives and descriptive expressions not only to present a vivid, effective, and alluring picture of the Kingdom but also to instigate desire, dream, and fantasy in the minds of prospective tourists.

**Compound Nouns.** Another distinctive feature of the language employed on the tourism website is the use of compound nouns. The following examples highlight the versatility of the compound nouns found:

**Table 2**  
**Prominent compound nouns**

Lexical category	Lexical items used
Compound nouns	light-blue, world-class, high-speed, crystal-clear, eco-friendly, lush-green, mud-brick, memory lane, lifestyle, campfire, skin care, rainfall, wildlife, weekdays, shipwreck, household, homemade, treehouses, goat-hair

Source: own research

**Imperative Sentences.** The website discourse generally employs the imperatives to persuade, convince and influence the reader towards taking the “necessary” steps or actions through lexical choices like commands, directions, and instructions (Kaur, Arumugam & Yunus, 2013). The Visit Saudi exhibits a significant inclination towards imperative sentence structures.

**Table 3**  
*Prominent Imperative Sentences*

Activity/page category	Imperative expressions used
Home page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Discover</i> an exciting range of activities ...</li> <li>• <i>Experience</i> the thrill of Riyadh Seasons ...</li> <li>• <i>Enjoy</i> the temperate climate of the Red Sea ...</li> <li>• <i>Explore</i> Saudi's national parks and ...</li> <li>• <i>Or head</i> for the colder climes of ...</li> </ul>
Adventure activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Explore</i> ancient shipwrecks and uninhabited desert islands ...</li> <li>• <i>Dive</i> in at four of the country's best scuba spots</li> <li>• <i>Find</i> Nemo and More in Sharm Obhur (header)</li> <li>• <i>Explore</i> Shipwrecks in Abu Tair (header)</li> <li>• <i>Wreck Dive</i> in Abu Faramish (header)</li> <li>• <i>Swim</i> with Whale Sharks in Jebel Al Lith (header)</li> </ul>
Family activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Seek out</i> the upside-down jellyfish known as the Cassiopea ...</li> <li>• <i>Take</i> the high-speed lift to the 99th floor of the iconic Kingdom Center ...</li> <li>• <i>Visit</i> for a fresh filter on Riyadh's mesmerisingly modern skyline ...</li> <li>• <i>Start</i> by entering the main reception area of the Kingdom Center ...</li> </ul>
Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Check out</i> Alakeel's video with Saudi actress Fatima Albanawi ...</li> <li>• <i>Check out</i> these four retail brands in Riyadh ...</li> <li>• <i>Pick</i> from a variety of coffees ...</li> <li>• <i>Think</i> sumptuous red velvet cake and ...</li> </ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Come with</i> some time to tour around the palace ...</li> <li>• <i>Blend it</i> all up with more cultural gems by stepping ...</li> <li>• <i>Relive</i> your childhood at Taybeen Museum (header)</li> <li>• <i>Discover</i> Tarout Castle (header)</li> </ul>

Source: own research

**Use of Pronouns.** Frequent use of pronouns in any persuasive discourse is another commonly demonstrated strategy by the text producers. The first and second-person pronouns such as "I" & "we" develop a rapport, personal engagement, and close acquaintance between the two entities (Kaur et al., 2013), so that the deliverance of the message and ideology at the part of the producer of the text becomes easier. The online discourse of the selected site makes effective use of personal pronouns throughout its whole content, as depicted in the following examples:

**Table 4**  
*Frequently Used Pronouns*

Lexical category	Lexical items used
Pronouns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spend <i>your</i> winter, Saudi has an exciting experience waiting for <i>you</i>.</li> <li>• ... a great place to begin earning <i>your</i> scuba stripes.</li> <li>• <i>Your</i> underwater welcoming committee includes turtles ...</li> <li>• ... make sure <i>you</i> take precautions to have a safe dive ...</li> <li>• If <i>your</i> preferred vibe is industrial chic, Cup &amp; Couch probably isn't for <i>you</i>...</li> <li>• This concept shop should be at the top of <i>your</i> list if <i>you're</i> hunting for quirky gifts...</li> <li>• ... but simply explain the purpose of <i>your</i> visit and <i>you'll</i> soon be on <i>your</i> way.</li> <li>• <i>We've</i> toured the city's abundance of cafés and coffee houses ...</li> <li>• Here's <i>our</i> shortlist of some of Jeddah's best outings for art aficionados.</li> </ul>

Source: own research

### INTERPRETATION

Putting the discourse and its brief analysis mentioned above within the contextual time and place of its production, the relevance and significance of it in achieving the goal to “support the growth of the travel and tourism sector” (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2021) becomes explicit. The economic growth of the future Kingdom immensely depends on resources other than the oil industry (currently as only \$43.3b to \$267b by 2030), and tourism has emerged as one of such “other” key sectors within the current years estimated to be contributing 10% of the GDP in coming years. And to attract tourists Saudia needs to be created, presented, or marketed as a tourist brand. In this regard, this online discourse has been crafted and disseminated, as online platforms have emerged as significantly effective “vehicles for ‘selling’ goods, services, organizations, ideas or people” (Fairclough, 2010, as cited in Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015, p. 8).

At its peak in 2019, pre-Covid, the world’s tourism industry was worth \$1868 trillion which declined to \$1311 trillion in 2021 (Statista Research Department, 2021). In the same year i.e., the tourism industry of KSA was evaluated to be \$8 trillion (Anis & Salameh, 2021) which was almost 10.3% of the world share but only 3% of the Kingdom’s GDP itself. To increase tourism by hosting 100 million tourists a year as compared to the current number of 18 million per annum, the branding of the Kingdom as a tourist destination becomes inevitable. Moreover, shifting the Kingdom’s long-established socio-cultural image of specifically being a “religious tourist destination” (Nicolaidis, 2016) to an equally open and prolific tourist experience for non-religious entities, becomes even more challenging. Changing

this perception and projecting the Kingdom as a diverse tourist site, the most convenient as well as undeniably the most effective tool in the current era is online marketing.

### **Explanation**

The linguistic discourse created for attracting diverse tourists uses several linguistic techniques. The manipulation of figurative language with an abundance of quality expressions such as *bustling, spectacular, thrilling, royal, iconic, untouched, luxurious, azure, red-hued* creates excitement and desire in the readers to visit the place. Similarly, the combination of expressions like *ancient, historic, modern, undiscovered* and the inclusion of informal and slang words such as *quirky, kid-friendly, chic*, implicitly counter the common perception and portrayal of the Kingdom as a “conservative society” (Scott & Jafari, 2010) by highlighting the modernistic and global aspect of it. Moreover, linguistic choices such as *eco-friendly, modern-day, high speed*, etc., identify the Kingdom as a part of the contemporary world. Another visibly significant linguistic technique employed is the application of imperatives which apparently creates a more friendly and close relationship between the host and the guest but implicitly generates the power asymmetries whereby “the speaker/writer is in the position of asking something of the addressee (action on the latter’s part), while the addressee is (ideally!) a compliant actor” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 105). The direct imperatives such as *discover, dive in, seek out, relive, blend it*, effectively influence the readers to comply with the directions of the discourse producer (Mattheis, 2017).

To build a rapport and friendly relationship between the reader and the text/producer, personal pronouns are frequently used. The selected discourse is abundant in the practice of *we, you, and your* which develops a sense of intimacy and shared identity and ideology between the two agents to offset and neutralise the image of the Kingdom as a strict, conservative and segregated nation (Daher, 2007). Overall, the online discourse effectively serves the multipurpose of informing, educating, and pursuing the tourists by presenting the Kingdom as a modern, welcoming, and globally competing tourist destination.

### **Image Analysis**

Following the tenets of “grammar of images” introduced by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) the images accompanying and complimenting the verbal discourse were critically analysed to reveal the function of the whole discourse produced. The images were selected on the basis of equal numbers from each section, representation of the core idea of their particular placing and labelling as well as the inclusion of people. Instead of analysing every image separately, considering the significant number of pictures, a collective analysis was conducted.

### Representational Dimension

Every picture given (see Appendix available online) is rich in its dynamics, involving the actors in diverse leisure, exciting and recreational events. At the narrative level, the majority of the images include more than one “represented participant” (Kress & Leeuwan, 2006) which creates an impression of union, companionship, and communal and familial bonding for the viewers at the interactive level. In these images, the actors are reacting to goals such as in Figures (2A, 3A & 16A) where the goals are the other people being looked at. However, in Figures (1A, 4A, 7A, 11A & 15A) the goal is invisible as the reactional process is non-transactional, which provokes imagination and curiosity in the viewers. At the conceptual level, it is evident that the tourists are functioning as superordinate (Figures 12A, 13A, 14A & 16A), whereas the objects or the people serving them are functioning as subordinates (Stoian, 2015).

Similarly, the diversity of locations in the images such as beach (Figures 6A, 8A and 15A), marketplace (Figures 13A, 14A and 16A), indoor recreation (Figures 5A, 9A, 10A and 12A), park/valleys/outdoors (Figures 1A, 2A, 11A and 7A), desert (Figures 3A and 4A) position the participants in multiple actions representing KSA as the land of vast tourist opportunities.

## INTERACTIVE DIMENSION

Also, refereeing to the interactive dimension, direct and indirect gaze, the participants’ reaction to their serene and socially engaging surroundings, the proxemics in the images from intimate to personal distance, effectively create “a powerful sense of empathy or identification” of the viewers “with the represented participant” (Ly & Jung, 2015, p. 54). More significantly, the participants as carriers impart powerful symbolic messages of modernity, independence, ambience, social engagement of the whole experience. For instance, (Figures 2A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 9A, 11A and 15A) showcase females wearing modern attire, uncovered heads, participating in generally considered male-oriented activities such as car racing and archery, implicitly displaying a more reformed approach towards promoting tourism eventually “making it desirable” (Ly & Jung, 2015). The modern architecture and interior (Figures 6A & 9A) combined with traditional surroundings (Figures 13A, 12A and 16A) and cultural objects (Figures 12A, 13A, 14A and 16A) all reveal the exceptionality of the Kingdom’s tourism lifestyle, culture, and vitality.

Similarly, almost all the pictures highlight the frontal frame or foreground placing the reactors at the centre of the image, smiling and joyful, which metaphorically values the “people” above all thus creating a “hierarchy of importance among the elements” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 201) and at the same demanding the viewers to “enter into a relation of social affinity and identification” with participants (Stoian, 2015, p. 26).

## CONCLUSION

The above analysis strengthens the concept that a discourse developed through verbal and visual texts needs to be analysed together to comprehend the interrelationship between the two and their functioning in disseminating a message as a whole (Kress, 2013). When placing the above images and verbal explanation in their contextual framework, evidently the whole discourse seems to effectively represent the Kingdom as a desired tourist destination through “perpetuation and positive self-presentation” (Sukma, 2020, p. 74). The Kingdom’s identity is created as a multicultural and modern place with reference to its lifestyle and culture dispelling its perceptions of leading a conservative lifestyle (Abuhjeeleh, 2019; Daher, 2007). Most of the images either have female(s) only or include females along with males and children as families or social groups, which portrays the KSA as a sponsor of equal tourism opportunities for all and demonstrates the country as a promising destination for tourists. In addition, the Kingdom is presented as advanced technologically and infrastructurally, rich in a diverse landscape, unique culture, and offering limitless recreational and leisure activities. In a nutshell, the verbal and visual discourse of the selected website efficaciously realises the aim of representing and identifying the Kingdom as a safe, open-minded, and progressive land for potential tourists.

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