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Heritage-based Entertainment: Empirical Evidence from Diriyah, Saudi Arabia

CASE STUDY

Heritage-based Entertainment: Empirical Evidence from Diriyah, Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

Entertainment, heritage and tourism are at the forefront of Vision 2030 for diversifying Saudi's economic sectors, especially to promote the country as a leading global destination.

PURPOSE: This study investigates the demand profile for Diriyah as a heritage-based entertainment destination to assess demand's characteristics, limitations and preferences.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY: The study is based on primary data collected through questionnaires circulated electronically. An independent samples test and one way Anova were used to assess demand's characteristics.

FINDINGS: The preliminary findings suggest that the symbolic value of Diriyah is very high. Despite diverse events, children and the elderly are not considered as market segments. Data confirm the gathering pattern of visiting the area.

IMPLICATIONS: The study suggests that the destination's portfolio must be enriched to achieve loyalty of segments. Sustaining the Diriyah brand needs a creative approach, such as people taking part in competitions. In addition, making Diriyah a regional hub for film production could strengthen the creative mix.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE:

1. Assessment of demand's profile over world heritage sites;
2. Demonstrate how entertainment could manage simultaneously with heritage;
3. Providing policies and action plans that contribute a brand for Diriyah.

KEYWORDS: *Entertainment; place branding; heritage; Vision 2030*

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INTRODUCTION

Entertainment is a vibrant and growing sector in the global economy, and plays a prominent role in many countries. This role is not limited in economic impact; furthermore, it contributes towards attracting visitors, transforming local economies, branding places and narrating identities.

This paper helps to understand the context, demand and experience in heritage-based entertainment, focusing on Diriyah as a case study. The Saudi 2030 Vision adopted entertainment as a pillar of economic transformation, aiming to promote the country as a leading global destination.

The study used a descriptive quantitative and qualitative methodology based on a tailor-made questionnaire.

ENTERTAINMENT, HERITAGE AND PLACE BRANDING

Despite the rapid technological transformation of entertainment, it needs to enrich visitors' experience by narrative and authenticity that could be found in an area's heritage. Studies have highlighted heritage as a source of identity and a driver of competitiveness, meanwhile visitors seem to personally create the brand based on perceptions and their own experiences (Lindberg-Repo, 2001). This personal experience leads Kapferer (2008) to affirm that a brand is, above all, a relationship that involves deep emotional contacts and loyalty. Zenker and Braun (2017) defined place brand as a network of associations in consumers' minds based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place and its stakeholders.

Heritage has the potential to form a key element of place brands by providing authenticity, distinctiveness and credibility to place brands. However, the term destination management and place branding are often used interchangeably; the latter is an holistic concept that focuses on developing, communicating and managing the perception of a place.

A place branding is a planned, complicated process that synthesises many components (environment, urban, design, history, politics, etc.) into an organised, unified image that signals content and differentiability (Kawaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). Boisen (2015) called this process a strategy:

“The place brand strategy could be a framework of core values, emphasising the identity of the place. Such a framework should then work as a set of guiding principles against which all other strategies and policies should be judged to the extent to which they are on-brand or off-brand and to the extent to which their contribution to the place brand is positive, negative or neutral.” (Boisen, 2015; p.16).

Branding, especially places, begins with a narrative (Vivant, 2011); therefore, heritage stands as a cornerstone in this creative process. Notably, Quinn (2005) argues that festivals are “texts” that form part of local cultural and consolidated identities.

In order to create competitive advantage, places stand to gain value from building brands, investing in image, publicity and uniqueness. This culture-led branding strategy focuses on how iconic cultural structures generate symbolic capital. Some events are reconstructed or revitalised for tourism consumption (Quinn, 2005). This relationship between events and place branding emphasises the role of these activities as sources of group and place identity (de Bres and Davis, 2001). In the same way, this destination branding concerns selecting a consistent element mix to identify and differentiate one's country through destination image building (Cai, 2002; Wagner and Peters, 2009).

We can identify many functions of place branding, namely:

- a) create a narrative about locality;
- b) diversify a destination's products;
- c) stimulate the local economy;
- d) construct place value;
- e) encourage employment.

Through our identities, narratives connect the past, present and future. They are also closely linked with values, affecting the mode of knowing and production of new knowledge (Grenni, 2020).

This branding manipulates heritage as a source enriching event portfolio, building entertainment on heritage activities (traditional playing, folk arts, etc.), or creating a place brand as a logo of continuity and creative mix. In his assessment for Mumbai, Nallathiga (2006) asserts that entertainment is an important source for attracting tourists to visit in the short term, but will be more useful in retaining them for longer periods. Furthermore, entertainment and tourism have been re-evaluated as a creative economy based on characteristics, expanding value chain and investing in cultural diversity (Aliraqi, 2019).

Richards (2017) observed that there had been: "a shift towards the integration of place making and events coincided with the growing need for cities and regions to profile themselves and attract attention and inward investment following the economic restructuring and urban repositioning of the 1970s and 1980s". Subsequently, this strengthens the linkages between events, urban fabric and economic policies.

In their research to evaluate place branding in the Philippines, Nagaynay and Lee (2020) confirmed that culture and heritage preservation were seen as being the core of promoting flagship construction. Whereby, "most projects in the region have involved heritage conservation, which has included the preservation of old districts, houses, buildings, and other infrastructure related to the city's historical and cultural identities".

Schuster (2021) affirms that there are two views in the study of events in the city, the first concentrating on arts and urban development, with the second focusing on liveable cities. These approaches shift the relationship between place, culture and entertainment from economic activity to a way of life that could shape the urban fabric. This is the crucial role of place branding based on heritage and culture preservation.

ENTERTAINMENT AND HERITAGE IN SAUDI ARABIA

The Saudi government organised the AlJanadriyah National Festival for Heritage and Culture, the most distinguished event in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and the only festival in Saudi Arabia for over 20 years (1985-2005) (Monshi and Scott, 2016). By 2013, the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTNH) had led co-ordinated government organisations to create and develop three types of events portfolio: festivals and cultural celebrations, sporting, and business events (Getz, 2012).

Entertainment, heritage and tourism are at the cutting edge of Vision 2030, with the government's commitment to transform the country into a leading destination globally; this ambitious goal could expand the entertainment landscape in both size and content. A total of 5,000 events were held across the kingdom in 2019, more than double the figure from the previous year.

In 2019, the SCTNH and the General Entertainment Authority (GEA) launched Saudi seasons. This major events programme is a year-round entertainment festival held across several cities, and delivers a range of entertainment and cultural experiences. One of the remarkable events is the Diriyah season, held over a month (22 November-21 December); the season hosted international sports championships and entertainment events. The main programmes in the season were a world heavyweight boxing match, Formula E championship, and the Diriyah tennis cup.

Saudi Arabia has witnessed a tremendous focus on tourism and heritage during the last 20 years; these efforts have led to 5 sites being inscribed to the world heritage list, one of them being Turaif in Diriyah. The At-Turaif District in Diriyah was the first capital of the Saudi kingdom, in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, north-west of Riyadh. Founded in the 15th century, it bears witness to the Najdi architectural style, which is specific to the centre of the Arabian Peninsula. In the 18th and early 19th century, its regional political and religious role increased, and the citadel of At-Turaif became the centre of the temporal power of the House of Saud and the spread of the Islamic reform movement in Arabia. The property includes the remains of many palaces and an urban ensemble built on the edge of the Diriyah oasis (UNESCO World Heritage List).

The Diriyah Gate Development Authority (DGDA) was established in July 2017 and focuses on:

1. creating an experience for visitors that will expose the architectural, cultural and artistic legacy of Diriyah;

2. celebrating the rich and diverse culture and heritage of the kingdom's history and the Saudi people;
3. honouring the local community and safeguarding the traditions of past generations through the preservation of the kingdom's history in a unique gathering place for future generations.

Figure 1 below shows the location of Riyadh within Saudi Arabia, Figure 2 shows an aerial view of Diriyah, and Figure 3 shows some of the monuments in Diriyah.



Figure 1: Riyadh's location in Saudi Arabia

Source: https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81:Riyadh,_Saudi_Arabia_locator_map.png



Figure 2: Diriyah, the Land of Kings and the Jewel of the Future

Source: <https://www.diriyahgate.sa/Who-we-are.aspx>



Figure 3: Monuments in Diriyah

Source: <https://www.diriyahgate.sa/Who-we-are.aspx>

The DGDA is working towards making Diriyah one of the region's foremost destinations for historical and cultural knowledge-sharing activities (place branding). In its Plan, the DGDA aspires to develop Diriyah into a global gathering place by creating rich experiences that narrate the stories of Saudi history. Activities will cover history and culture, gather and explore, shop and dine, retreat and relax, live and work, learn and be inspired.

We can see that the DGDA's scope is place/destination branding through wide-ranging activities, whereby entertainment is adopted as an operational strategy.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This research is based on primary data collected through questionnaires circulated electronically to 220 recipients; responses were received from 210 recipients. The questions assess Diriyah as a heritage and entertainment brand and how respondents (visitors) value the destination mix. The data are analysed from different points of view, such as gender, qualifications, age and work.

The responses to the questions are given in Tables 1-3 below.

Table 1: Why Did You Visit Diriyah?

Purpose		Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Enjoying historical value	F	3	10	39	63	95	4.13	0.97	1
	%	1.4	4.8	18.6	30.0	45.2			
Shop and dine	F	10	29	54	63	54	3.58	1.15	4
	%	4.8	13.8	25.7	30.0	25.7			
Attending heritage events	F	6	18	48	67	71	3.85	1.07	3
	%	2.9	8.6	22.9	31.9	33.8			
Retreat and relax	F	9	14	50	57	80	3.88	1.12	2
	%	4.3	6.7	23.8	27.1	38.1			
Attending international events (formula E, boxing match, etc.)	F	40	42	37	35	56	3.12	1.48	5
	%	19.0	20.0	17.6	16.7	26.7			

Source: Statistical analysis based on questionnaire

Table 2: To What Extent Do You Believe the Entertainment in Diriyah is Suitable for the Following Sectors?

Segment		Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Children	F	14	34	79	47	36	3.27	1.13	6
	%	6.7	16.2	37.6	22.4	17.1			
Families	F	3	7	37	89	74	4.07	0.89	4
	%	1.4	3.3	17.6	42.4	35.2			
Youth	F	5	9	28	67	101	4.19	0.98	2
	%	2.4	4.3	13.3	31.9	48.1			
The elderly	F	8	25	59	53	65	3.68	1.14	5
	%	3.8	11.9	28.1	25.2	31.0			
Government's guests	F	3	5	41	62	99	4.19	0.93	1
	%	1.4	2.4	19.5	29.5	47.1			
Firm's guests	F	4	7	50	51	98	4.10	1.00	3

Source: Statistical analysis based on questionnaire

Table 3: With Whom Did You Visit Diriyah?

		Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Alone	F	42	74	41	22	31	2.65	1.32	4
	%	20.0	35.2	19.5	10.5	14.8			
With my family	F	6	23	45	61	75	3.84	1.12	1
	%	2.9	11.0	21.4	29.0	35.7			
With my work's guests	F	45	56	38	34	37	2.82	1.40	3
	%	21.4	26.7	18.1	16.2	17.6			
With my friends	F	13	18	49	60	70	3.74	1.19	2

Source: Statistical analysis based on questionnaire

Males accounted for 56.7% of the sample and females 43.5%. Saudi citizens dominate the sample with 92.4%. Regarding the youths of the Saudi population, the age group (20-40 years) represent 76.7% of the sample.

Using independent samples tested regarding gender variables, we found statistically significant differences in retreat and relaxation for females, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Gender Variables of the Sample

	Gender	N	Mean	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
Enjoying historical value	Male	119	4.0756	-0.902	0.368
	Female	91	4.1978		
Shop and dine	Male	119	3.5798	-0.016	0.987
	Female	91	3.5824		
Attending heritage events	Male	119	3.7563	-1.489	0.138
	Female	91	3.9780		
Retreat and relax	Male	119	3.7311	-2.230	0.027
	Female	91	4.0769		
Attending international events (formula E, boxing match, etc.)	Male	119	3.0924	-0.299	0.767

Source: Statistical analysis based on questionnaire

Testing the significance of age as a variable, one way Anova mentions statistical differences within and between groups (Table 5).

Table 5: Age Variables of the Sample

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Enjoying historical value	Between Groups	1.594	4	0.398	0.417	0.796
	Within Groups	195.935	205	0.956		
	Total	197.529	209			
Shop and dine	Between Groups	16.656	4	4.164	3.277	0.012
	Within Groups	260.468	205	1.271		
	Total	277.124	209			
Attending heritage events	Between Groups	29.570	4	7.392	7.187	0.000
	Within Groups	210.854	205	1.029		
	Total	240.424	209			
Retreat and relax	Between Groups	22.592	4	5.648	4.796	0.001
	Within Groups	241.431	205	1.178		
	Total	264.024	209			
Attending international events (formula E, boxing match, etc.)	Between Groups	31.135	4	7.784	3.738	0.006
	Within Groups	426.889	205	2.082		
	Total	458.024	209			

Source: Statistical analysis based on questionnaire

A one way Anova test was used to determine the significance of qualifications on the visit's purpose. While there were no differences between groups in 'enjoying historical value', the data revealed a significant difference in 'shop and dine', with more graduates than postgraduates visiting for this reason.

The results were statistically significant when compared using a least significant difference test (LSD) for those 'attending international events' regarding qualification, with higher numbers for secondary qualifications over graduate qualifications, also more graduates than postgraduates (see Table 6).

Table 6: Qualification Variables of the Sample

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Enjoying historical value	Between Groups	1.207	2	0.603	0.636	0.530
	Within Groups	196.322	207	0.948		
	Total	197.529	209			
Shop and dine	Between Groups	11.625	2	5.813	4.532	0.012
	Within Groups	265.498	207	1.283		
	Total	277.124	209			
Attending heritage events	Between Groups	2.376	2	1.188	1.033	0.358
	Within Groups	238.048	207	1.150		
	Total	240.424	209			
Retreat and relax	Between Groups	4.420	2	2.210	1.762	0.174
	Within Groups	259.604	207	1.254		
	Total	264.024	209			
Attending international events (formula E, boxing match, etc.)	Between Groups	23.728	2	11.864	5.655	0.004
	Within Groups	434.296	207	2.098		
	Total	458.024	209			

Source: Statistical analysis based on questionnaire

According to our data, however, there were significant differences in 'shop and dine' purpose regarding a respondent's employment. An LSD test was used to determine the significance of the data; it is clear there were differences between the groups 'other jobs' over 'government officer'. The same trend is shown between 'other jobs' and 'firm's officer' (Table 7).

Table 7: Employment Variables of the Sample

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Enjoying historical value	Between Groups	5.731	4	1.433	1.531	0.194
	Within Groups	191.798	205	0.936		
	Total	197.529	209			
Shop and dine	Between Groups	21.527	4	5.382	4.316	0.002
	Within Groups	255.597	205	1.247		
	Total	277.124	209			
Attending heritage events	Between Groups	11.103	4	2.776	2.481	0.045
	Within Groups	229.321	205	1.119		
	Total	240.424	209			
Retreat and relax	Between Groups	10.412	4	2.603	2.104	0.082
	Within Groups	253.611	205	1.237		
	Total	264.024	209			
Attending international events (formula E, boxing match, etc.)	Between Groups	25.623	4	6.406	3.037	0.018
	Within Groups	432.401	205	2.109		
	Total	458.024	209			

Source: Statistical analysis based on questionnaire

We can observe the same pattern in both ‘retreat and relaxation purposes’ or ‘attending heritage events’.

Interestingly, the test found no significant differences in the visit’s purpose regarding income, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Income Variables of the Sample

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Enjoying historical value	Between Groups	3.478	3	1.159	1.231	0.300
	Within Groups	194.051	206	0.942		
	Total	197.529	209			
Shop and dine	Between Groups	8.208	3	2.736	2.096	0.102
	Within Groups	268.916	206	1.305		
	Total	277.124	209			
Attending heritage events	Between Groups	5.440	3	1.813	1.590	0.193
	Within Groups	234.984	206	1.141		
	Total	240.424	209			

(continued)

Table 8: Income Variables of the Sample (continued)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Retreat and relax	Between Groups	7.438	3	2.479	1.991	0.117
	Within Groups	256.585	206	1.246		
	Total	264.024	209			
Attending international events (formula E, boxing match, etc.)	Between Groups	10.571	3	3.524	1.622	0.185
	Within Groups	447.453	206	2.172		
	Total	458.024	209			

Source: Statistical analysis based on questionnaire

DISCUSSION

Respondents confirmed the gathering pattern during their visit; this is why ‘alone’ ranked as the last option compared with ‘gathering’ options (Table 3). While gathering is a pattern, respondents expressed their low satisfaction regarding suitability of the visit for children and elders (Table 2).

Interestingly, the only significant difference found in the visit’s purpose regarding gender was recorded for females in ‘retreat and relax’. To investigate this statistically, we calculated the LSD test for marital status; this proved significant differences for single females over married ones.

Despite the wide-ranging activities portfolio, it is clear that respondents valued Diriyah as a heritage-based location. Therefore, ‘enjoying historical value’ ranked as the first option in the visit’s purpose.

According to our data, however, there are no significant differences in enjoying historical value, attending heritage events and relaxing regarding qualifications. Therefore, the data reveal significant differences in ‘shop and dine’, and the LSD test confirmed a preference for graduates over postgraduates. Correspondingly, the data show significant differences in attending international events, with a higher score for secondary qualifications over graduates, and for graduates over postgraduates.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Diriyah achieved its goal in place making; it made creative linkages between culture, heritage and entertainment. This coherent place brand denotes the sound logo of DGDA: “there is only one Diriyah”.

The culture-led branding strategy adopted for Diriyah creates a symbolic culture through iconic heritage structures. More in-depth analysis is required for the demand profile and to study the destination mix and its efficiency.

Regarding the place and demand profile, it is recommended that the event portfolio is further enriched. People taking part in competitions that will stimulate children’s participation should be

organised and the entertainment experience that would increase the country's market share both regionally and globally should be enhanced.

In order to utilise the wide-ranging capacity, linking the location with creative industries, such as film production, could shape the uniqueness of Diriyah as a regional centre. In the same way, this approach matches mega entertainment projects in Vision 2030, namely Neom, Qiddiya and the Red Sea.

Authenticity is a cornerstone in such a location; therefore, managing it creatively paves the way towards advance positioning. Correspondingly, reproducing symbolic values using technology could assert Diriyah as an outstanding destination.

Future research into Diriyah should focus on consumer behaviour, supply chain, creative mix and the impact on the local economy.

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BIOGRAPHY



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