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Saudi National Day: Conservatism Versus Modernity in the Light of Saudi Vision 2030

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the transformation of Saudi society from traditional conservatism to modernity, as envisioned in the Saudi Vision 2030 plan. Utilizing a descriptive research design, the article explores the processes through which countries emerge and cultivate national identities after gaining independence, and how these identities are reinforced through the celebration of national holidays. The article also delves the challenges confronted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in establishing a cohesive national identity, including the delicate balance between tradition and progress, and the need to address diversity and inclusivity. Significantly, the article concludes that the initial rejection of celebrating the Saudi National Day has evolved into widespread acceptance among Saudi citizens, highlighting the government's pivotal role in guiding the society's shift from conservatism to modernity.

KEYWORDS

Arab countries, conservatism, modernity, National Day, Saudi society, Vision 2030

Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is undergoing significant social and economic transformations, further amplified by the implementation of Saudi Vision 2030. This ambitious vision includes various programs and initiatives aimed at transitioning the Kingdom from a traditional society heavily reliant on oil revenues to a modern, diversified economy (Al-Rasheed, 2021). As a part of

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this transformation, the Saudi government has made concerted efforts to combine modernity, social justice, and economic freedom. This has involved overruling objections to opening up international markets, allowing women to enter the private sector, standardizing systems and laws governing gender, and working to end gender discrimination (Yamani, 1998).

These sweeping changes, however, have posed significant challenges to the religious authority and traditional power structures within the Kingdom. Despite the resistance from conservative factions, the Saudi government has been proactive in pushing forward with these reforms (Fandy, 1999). The introduction of new laws, policies, and social initiatives has been a key part of this modernization process, as the Kingdom seeks to align itself with global standards and foster a more inclusive and prosperous society (Al-Rasheed, 2021).

Saudi Arabia has always represented a society of paradoxes (Clarke, 2007) where modernity and tradition coexist and restrain each other. The term modernity is understood in a broad sense, encompassing its various impacts on the country, forcing the Kingdom to make a general reevaluation of its economic and demographic basis. According to Ghafar (2018), KSA is witnessing a process of change in its social, financial, and political structures that has not been seen since its founding in 1932.

According to the Saudi Vision 2030 document, one of the objectives is to build on the Kingdom's heritage, values, and Islamic principles. Several decisions have already been made to ensure this national identity, based on the traditional heritage of the Arabic peninsula (Arabism), Islamic values (Islam), and technology (the West) (Vision 2030, n.d.). With a focus on the nation's policies and strengths, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 seeks to create social and economic policies that will enable the country to break its dependence on oil exports, create a prosperous and sustainable economic future, improve lifestyles and social cohesion within Saudi Arabian communities, and lift some conservative social restrictions (Alsisy & Alsewiket, 2020).

One of the most prominent contributions to national identity is the National Day celebration (the country's first secular celebration). Secular celebrations such as National Day have divided public opinion. However, the Saudi government supports the celebration and considers it more than just a national holiday. Following the proliferation of this concept, National Day celebrations have been marked by entertainment and consumption.

The key challenges faced by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in strengthening its national identity include transitioning from traditional conservatism to modernity (Vision 2030, n.d.), navigating this significant societal shift poses challenges in reinforcing a cohesive national identity, enhancing national identity celebrations, overcoming any initial resistance or rejection of these celebratory practices would be a challenge the Kingdom faces, balancing tradition and progress, striking the right balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing progress is likely a key challenge, addressing diversity and inclusivity with any nation-building process, ensuring a sense of belonging and representation across diverse segments of the population can be a challenge in strengthening a unified national identity.

The annual celebration of Saudi National Day on September, 23rd provides a useful case study for analyzing theoretical questions around nationalism and state power. As a highly centralized monarchy, the Saudi state plays a dominant role in defining the country's national narrative and symbols (Lacroix, 2011). The elaborate festivities and patriotic displays associated with National Day can be viewed as part of the government's efforts to foster a sense of Saudi national identity and loyalty to the ruling House of Saud (Yamani, 2009). Scholars have debated the extent to which such state-led nation-building projects are successful in generating genuine popular attachment, or whether they merely represent a veneer of unity masking deeper sociopolitical divisions (Aarts & Nonneman, 2005). Additionally, the holiday's celebration of the Kingdom's unification under a single monarch invites analysis of how national narratives can enhance the diversity of Saudi society and the complexities of the country's historical development (Kostiner, 1993). Overall, Saudi National Day provides a useful lens for examining theoretical questions about the construction of national identity and the role of the state in shaping it (Gause, 2011).

The current article discusses the initial rejection and the subsequent acceptance of the National Day celebration. The activities of the day are also described. Thus, the article seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the debates surrounding celebrating Saudi National Day as an element of Saudi Vision 2030?
2. What are the aspects of Saudi National Day celebration practices?
3. What are the consequential trends related to the celebration of Saudi National Day?

Significance

Most publications on Saudi National Day have been from news organizations reporting celebration practices and those previous scholarly articles have focused on Vision 2030. Moreover, these earlier studies of Vision 2030 have stressed economic, social, and political issues (for instance, educational reform and sustainability). Consequently, this research is considered one of the fewest studies examining Saudi National Day as an element of Vision 2030 by shedding light on social processes related to Saudi national identity, and it reviews the transformation of Saudi society from traditional conservatism to modernity.

Objectives

This article aims to provide a scholarly review based on the literature related to the implantation of Saudi Vision 2030 and its direct link to celebrating Saudi National Day. It sheds light on the debates on Saudi National Day including the initial refusal of celebrating, approval of National Day celebration, celebration practices, and connections to consumer culture.

Methodology

The article adopts the descriptive research design to suit its nature. The literature review of this article used data collected from a variety of newspapers, periodicals, publications, published access journals, and government and public portals. The period was from August 2019 to November 2019.

Definition of Terms

Identity

Identity refers to an individual's sense of self, including their characteristics, beliefs, values, and affiliations (Castells, 2010). It is how a person or group defines and expresses themselves, often about others (Woodward, 2002). Identity can be based on factors such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, culture, gender, or personal experiences, and is a dynamic and multi-faceted concept that shapes an individual's or group's perceptions, behaviors, and interactions (Lacroix, 2011).

In the context of Saudi National Day, identity can be defined operationally as the Saudi citizens' collective sense of belonging, shared cultural values, and national pride that is reinforced and expressed through commemorative events and activities.

Nationalism

Brubaker (2011) defined it as the belief in and promotion of the interests of one's nation, often characterized by a strong identification with the nation's history, culture, and political aspirations. Nationalism in the Saudi National Day celebrations manifests through the emphasis on Saudi history, traditions, and the country's development under the leadership of the ruling monarchy. The celebrations cultivate a sense of patriotism and national unity among the Saudi populace.

Sectarianism

Sectarianism refers to the deep-rooted divisions and conflicts that arise from the differences between various religious or ethnic sects within a society (Wehrey, 2014). In the context of Saudi National Day celebrations, sectarianism is not a prominent feature, as the celebrations are largely focused on promoting a unifying national identity and downplaying any potential religious or ethnic divisions within Saudi society.

Literature Review

Theme One: Literature Related to the Debates on Celebrating Saudi National Day as an Element of Saudi Vision 2030

Islam Versus Secularism. Islam has affected Saudi Arabian culture, making its historical development and traditions unique from those of other cultures. The most prominent part of Saudi Arabia's cultural identity is Islam and its teachings. Due to the presence of the Two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Al-Medina, the Saudi people are proud to be Muslims and that their country is the birthplace of Islam (Alsisy & Alsewiket, 2020).

Saudi Arabia may face a clash of civilizations as a result of globalization because of its fear of cultural collapse, the dominance of a foreign culture, and the growth

of international companies, social media, and mass media (Saudi Arabia versus globalization, 2001). Therefore, Islamic institutions in Saudi Arabia have indeed undergone extensive reform as the monarchy consolidates its vision for the future of the nation. Although these reforms are gradual and reversible, taken as a whole they represent a systematic restructuring of the role of religion in Saudi Arabia.

With the advent of Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the country's governing structure is being centralized and remodelled. The religious doctrine is no longer committed blindly to any certain religious school or scholars. This trend started a few years ago before the Crown Prince had his modern viewpoints, and now it is accelerating. The role of Islam in Saudi States and public life is being revolutionized by a combination of procedural reforms and personal changes in the jurisdiction. Most of the changes are technical adjustments, and distribution of duties (Farouk & Brown, 2021).

While Saudi religious institutions are being reorganized, their tools are being reduced to improve political and governance efficiency. These modifications appear to have distinct goals: more vital state centralized control; and removing obstacles to desired political, social, and economic developments (Lacroix, 2019). Many Salafi Muslim scholars believe that all Muslim celebrations should be the same worldwide. Muslims should participate only in religious celebrations. They should reject any celebrations that are irrelevant to Islam (Kreil, 2016).

Islam was not the only religion to reject European secularism; so, did other Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions, which called for implementing religious teachings in overall policies and all social laws. Canceran (2016) states that Christians in the Philippines feel the existence of God in their practices and are in a state of worship, not only mentally or through doctrinal synching, but also in emotional engagement with God. Similarly, Ray (2015) has revealed the kind of celebrations during the new Swahili year in Wamiji in Mombasa, where people celebrate Prophet Muhammad's birthday, which many East African Muslims intuitively consider to be an Islamic occasion. On the other hand, there are many discrepancies in Muslim society between secular traditions in governance and society and Islamic rejections of secularism, in addition to the separation of social and political rules from Islam.

The debates surrounding the relationship between national identity and Islamic identity have been a longstanding and complex issue within Muslim intellectual discourse. According to the research, there are a few key points to consider:

1. Tensions between national identity and Islamic unity. The concept of national identity has been viewed by some Islamic intellectuals as a potential threat to the unity of the broader Islamic community (Davis-Packard, 2017). There is a concern that the promotion of distinct national identities can lead to social divisions and the separation of Islamic communities.
2. The historical context of the rise of nation-states. The emergence of the nation-state system, following the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate, has been a significant factor in the development of distinct national identities among Muslim-majority countries (Belkeziz, 2016). This transition from the caliphate to the nation-state model has sparked debates among Muslim scholars and intellectuals.

3. The Egyptian example. The case of Egypt illustrates how the articulation of a distinct national identity, by intellectuals like Refaa Al-Tahtawi, has been a contentious issue (Elsässer, 2014). While some have argued for an Egyptian nationalism consistent with Arab and religious backgrounds, others have viewed this as a departure from a more unified Islamic identity.
4. Balancing national and Islamic identity. The debates surrounding the relationship between national identity and Islamic identity reflect the broader challenge of balancing the need for a distinct national identity with the preservation of a shared Islamic community and values (Davis-Packard, 2017). This delicate balance is an ongoing discussion and contention among Muslim thinkers and scholars.

In summary, the debates over the role of national identity in the context of Islamic communities and the broader Muslim world have deep historical roots and continue to be a subject of significant intellectual discourse and debate.

The conflict of uniting the religious and the national identity was not controversial until the oil boom. At that point, the country took a precise turn between the modern national trend and the Islamic trend. Despite Saudi Arabia, as a conservative Muslim culture with strong Islamic traditions that should be maintained, Islam allows Muslims the freedom to engage and work with people around the world. Hossain (2016) has stressed that radical secularism is undesirable in Islamic societies. History recounts the attempts that failed to impose extreme secularism in Egypt, Iraq, and Tunisia. However, secularism has been more successful when Islam could contribute to national affairs within a democratic framework that merges identities and ethnicities.

Secular ideas have gained acceptance around the world as the governing logic by which differences can be overcome and integration can be pursued. The promise of the secular is that it lessens social divisions and provides a framework for constructing contemporary state issues. Religion has the potential to be a crucial tool for negotiating spatial regimes in daily life. More particular, religion provides people with how they can effectively change their morals and construct new ones (Woods, 2023).

The reason for the tension, anxiety, and instability of values in the Arab community is probably modernity. Arab countries (e.g., Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) have not yet modernized their social, political, or economic systems; however, they are trying to incorporate their religious beliefs and traditions into flexible social, political, and economic systems but they are secular (Estes, 2000).

The Islamic Resistance to the Celebration of Saudi National Day. The National Day in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia dates back to the reign of the founder King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud. This day was known during his reign by several names in various sources (Al-Shammari, 2021). According to the Opinions of the Gulf Journal research (Hī't t-thrīr, 2015), the recovery of King Abdulaziz in Riyadh and the re-establishment of the Saudi state is a major turning point in the history of the region, as it resulted in a comprehensive renaissance and building an integrated state. It also indicated that since the issuance of the royal decree announcing the unification of the country and naming it after the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this day has become a national day for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It led to major political reforms through which it has expanded popular participation.

After the announcement of the renaming of the Kingdom of Hijaz, Najd, and its Dependencies to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on September 23rd, 1932, this day became National Day. All territories and cities had been ruled by the King since 1344H (1925 G) after their citizens pledged their allegiance to him. A Riyadh journal mentioned in (Al-Assaf, 2011) published the details of the Kingdom's new name:

On the 12th of Jumada-al-Awwal, 1351H (18-9-1932 G), some citizens in Taif and some members of the Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura) found a necessity to draw up a petition for changing the Kingdom's label into "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." This petition was sent to King Abdulaziz who approved it after receiving many other similar ones with the same regard. The Kingdom's elite, scholars, and intellectuals wrote the petition collaboratively. On the 17th of Jumada-al-Awwal, 1351H (23-9-1932 G), King Abdulaziz issued a royal decree no. (2716) that states the following:

With reliance on Allah and the basis of the received dispatches from all our subjects in the Kingdom of the Hijaz, Najd and Its Dependencies, and yielding to the desire of the public opinion in our land, and wishing to unite the parts of the Arab Kingdom, we have ordered the following: Article 1. The name of the Kingdom of the Hijaz, Najd, and Its Dependencies shall be changed to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and our title shall be King of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (Al-Assaf, 2011)

Unifying celebrations on some occasions among Muslims, and preventing others, has become more complicated now, due to the emergence of national social and cultural entities. Islamists view nationalism as a barrier to the unification of all Muslims (Kreil, 2016). This is why Islamic countries like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have not developed a sense of nationalism. Only in the 21st century, schools begin to teach courses on nationalism and nationalistic values. Furthermore, National Day became an official holiday, something that many Islamists disapproved of. There was no official celebration or commemoration of the occasion when the Arabian Peninsula was united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Suleiman, 2003).

Islam and Salafism reject the idea of commemoration of social events, limiting celebrations to the annual religious feasts of Al-Fitr and Al-Adha (Al-Malki, 2016). Other celebrations would lead to undesirable religious innovations. Saudi culture prohibits celebrations other than Al-Fitr and Al-Adha. Many devout Muslims believe that other celebrations are unacceptable because they are not mentioned in Islamic texts. This was announced by the Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Ifta' (Al-Dawish, 2010) in its fatwa, in which National Day was denounced as a religious innovation that must not be celebrated (Al-Dawish, 2010). This celebration is the essence of establishing a national country that expands beyond a Muslim national identity. The religious stream rejects the establishment of a national or ethnic country except for the Islamic country, and any celebration related to one country is a distinction that should be avoided (Aldossry & Varul, 2016).

Solarz (2020) in her distinguished article "Religion and International Relations in the Middle East as a Challenge for International Relations (IR) Studies" addressed that

the appropriate Place of religion in international relations begins with the social changes of the world. She mentioned that the presence of religion extends consideration to the spiritual dimensions of security as they are beginning to be recognized. She also explained how religion is present in international relations at all levels of analysis.

National Day Supporters as a Symbol of National Identity. Modernity is a cultural pattern that enhances the national identity of the countries that fought colonization; it is not necessarily related to Islamic identity or Arabism. Elson (2010) has shown that in some countries, like Indonesia, after independence, despite the deep roots of religion in the national identity, there is a distinction between religious and personal spheres, where the Islamic identity does not interfere with the social organization either directly or in the law. According to Podeh (2011), many researchers agreed that analyzing national celebrations is important for understanding the political and social workings, but they differ in the role that celebrations and ceremonies have played in history. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in its pursuit of modernity, administrative, scientific, and technical progress, has become more resolute in strengthening the Saudi identity. This is achieved by emphasizing the unity of the Kingdom and its people, and by fostering a cohesive national identity, despite the diversity of religious beliefs within the country.

Al-Harbash (2020) showed that the National Day for the Unification of the Kingdom is on September 23rd as a march of growth and glory referring to the Kingdom's goal to achieve sustainable development. National Days are an important means of emphasizing the personal nature of nationalism of countries. This transformative path to nationalism in Saudi Arabia took place after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 amid demands from modernists to ignore all things or issues irrelevant to Saudi society. The government supported the religious, traditional, and modern uniqueness of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its people. On September 23rd, 2005, following the Western model, a royal decree was issued declaring the day a national holiday. The holiday was not for Muslims, as those who celebrated it held liberal views (Aldossry, 2015). Many countries celebrate their national day as a symbol of national unity and solidarity. Independence Day is a day to celebrate national identity, unity, and collaboration. Around the world, national days are dedicated to remembering a country's history, glory, and progress. The national day is an official holiday for all citizens (Edu-Buandoh & Nkansah, 2018).

Promoting inclusiveness and pluralism, eliminating discrimination within the existing citizenship model, and embracing previously marginalized identities are all necessary for the development of strong citizenship with a unified national identity. This view is supported by several scholars in nationalism and citizenship studies. Scholars argue that building a cohesive national identity requires the state to move beyond exclusionary and discriminatory citizenship policies (Kymlicka, 1995). Inclusive citizenship that recognizes and accommodates diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious identities can foster a greater sense of belonging and investment in the nation (Taylor, 1994). Relatedly, the active inclusion of marginalized groups, such as religious or ethnic minorities, can help strengthen the legitimacy of the state and its nation-building project (Gellner, 1983).

Conversely, the failure to address discrimination and embrace pluralism can undermine national unity and lead to the alienation of certain segments of the population (Brubaker, 1992). A unified national identity is more likely to emerge when the state actively promotes equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their background (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000). In the context of Saudi Arabia, scholars have highlighted the need for the government to adopt more inclusive citizenship policies and accommodate the diverse identities within the Kingdom to build a stronger sense of national belonging (Lacroix, 2011; Nonneman, 2001). Embracing pluralism and eliminating discrimination would be crucial steps toward developing a unified national identity that resonates with all Saudi citizens.

The reinforcement of national identity in Saudi Arabia should take precedence over other sub-identities, such as tribal affiliations. Regardless of race, gender, or sectarian background, all citizens should have a rightful claim over their country. At the same time, it is emphasized that the national identity should be flexible enough to accommodate the diverse identities of its citizens (Al-Malki, 2016). Identity is not given once and for all. It is not fixed and it is built up and changes throughout a person's lifetime (Maalouf, 2011). According to Custers (2020) in the context of Muslim national identity, Saudi Arabia is undergoing several social, economic, and cultural changes.

Saudi Arabia's recent legislative efforts have focused on promoting the country's national identity and cultural heritage, rather than solely emphasizing its religious foundations. The government has implemented various investments and initiatives aimed at displaying contemporary and historical Saudi culture, as well as the Kingdom's long history as a nation. Furthermore, more investments are shown clearly in the country's cultural heritage and infrastructure. Culture, according to the Saudi Vision 2030 is indispensable to the quality of life, and therefore the Kingdom aims to increase the quality and quantity of its cultural activities. The new Saudi identity was evident from the change from a state with a religious identity to a national identity in which all Saudis are included (University of Exeter, 2022).

Saudi nationalism manifests itself in the government's approval of the introduction of the celebration under a legal cloak. It is a symbol of the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the announcement of its title as a country of full independence and sovereignty, rather than being a day of Independence, as is the case in other Arab countries (Al-Qhatani, 2019).

Theme Two: The Aspects of Saudi National Day Celebration Practices

There is a clear difference between religious and secular celebrations. The Al-Fitr feast is held to make Muslims happy and to praise Allah at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. The Al-Adha feast celebrates the replacement of the Prophet Abraham's son Ismail with a lamb (Aldossry, 2012). In contrast, secular celebrations, whether National Day or Valentine's Day, are created by cultural patterns (Kreil, 2016). Secular celebrations are encouraged by society.

Celebrations in the Gulf States are not inherently different, given the countries' shared religion, ethnicity, language, and ruling system. This similarity creates a

cultural and social pattern. In Gulf communities, celebrations of the National Day involve singing national songs, flying flags, and marching in parades.

The conference *Social Change in the Gulf Societies in the 21st Century* (n.d.) aimed to explore how economic transformational educational reforms, social media, and rapid urbanization have changed in Gulf societies. The nature of the scope of employment in the Gulf has changed significantly as a result of more men and women joining formal jobs. Interestingly, the economic benefits of gender diversity in the workplace constitute a strong case for work participation that liberates males and females from traditional jobs that provide disposable income that leads to significant social change.

Despite the acceptance of National Day as an official holiday, there have not been many celebrations. The Kingdom has sought to sanctify nationalism by asserting its identity, creating a sense of belonging, and holding its celebrations. The Kingdom has a great interest in establishing a national identity, which is apparent in the cultural and social changes. Along with that, consumer goods play a similar role to religious rituals due to the formation of collective identities through nationalism and religion (Varul, 2008).

Celebrations in Gulf communities differ only in respect of their duration and number. The traditions are not different, for they include family gatherings and social habits. Like other Gulf societies, Saudi society does not prescribe any special social pattern for National Day (Koch, 2016). Since National Day does not coincide with the summer vacation or with any of the endorsed holy feasts that rely on the Hijri calendar, many Saudis use the day to visit relatives or run errands. Families gather and raise the flags of the Kingdom.

Saudi liberals see National Day as a step in the direction of modernity, while conservatives consider it a non-Islamic innovation. However, the opposition has little weight against the royal decree of approval (Aldossry, 2015). Like other social events held by the Kingdom, National Day is an official event. Economic reform in developing countries requires radical cultural and social changes, which can only be introduced from above.

The government has held many big events and festivals around the Kingdom. The media covers these events, to create a new social pattern. In 2019, the General Entertainment Authority held new festivals. The Kingdom hopes to make these festivals part of an annual National Day event. However, it is not easy to evaluate the experience because of its novelty and the fact that it requires many years to instill new social habits (Al-Qhatani, 2019).

Aldossry (2015) investigated the importance of social and religious celebrations and festivals in the KSA and how and what these changes have been influenced by the growing impact of Western consumer culture. He discovered that there has been a major change in Saudi Arabian families' celebrations, both in terms of their nature and the importance assigned to them. The research revealed significant concerns arising from these changes and innovations as threats to traditional beliefs and values, as well as to the stability of the family and, consequently, the entire social fabric. While Al-Qhatani (2019) investigated the manifestations of youth behavior associated with

the celebrations of the National Day which aimed to find out the patterns of youth behavior associated with the Saudi National Day celebrations in Riyadh. The findings indicated positive aspects of youth behavior associated with the celebrations of the Saudi National Day, represented in the reinforcement and consolidation of citizenship values and the implantation of love of the homeland among youths. The findings also indicated negative aspects of youth behavior associated with the Saudi National Day celebrations represented in the tampering with public and private property as well as national acquisitions; violations of ethical behavior; violations of traffic regulations and abuse of social regulations.

Al-Enezi and Al-Qassas (2014) aimed to construct a proposal to encourage innovative initiatives for Saudi university youth to invest in the National Day from a planning perspective. The proposal managed to develop the spirit of belonging to the homeland and remove the obstacles that prevent young people from being able to put forward their ideas and initiatives.

It is obvious from the literature review that the Kingdom is looking forward to involving the private sector, which is reflected in the concern of the business sector to make National Day an occasion for Saudis to go shopping. Commercials accompanied by national songs offer discounts or offers as a way to increase participation in the celebration. This result is consistent with the findings reported in the studies by Aldossry (2015), Al-Enezi & Al-Qassa (2014), Al-Misbahi (2017), and Al-Qhatani (2019).

Theme Three: The Consequential Trend Related to the Celebration of Saudi National Day

Towards Consumerism. The celebration of Saudi National Day is not solely on the day of celebration, but rather on the year of commemoration. Consequently, the date of the celebration is not fixed but instead changes annually. This contrasts with the approach of many other countries, where the national day is observed on the same calendar date each year, such as the United States' Independence Day on July 4th. A significant aspect of the Saudi National Day celebration is the widespread involvement of companies and institutions, which often link their pricing and promotional offers to the occasion. For example, in 2017, to commemorate the 87th National Day, numerous businesses announced special discounts and offers of up to 87% to encourage public participation in the festivities (Al-Misbahi, 2017).

Celebrations of the National Day are similar worldwide. Consumerism has become the main stimulus in marketing products and added a consumerist attitude to the features in this day. Many companies display their products on this day and families race to shop as a way to celebrate this day. There had previously been no special celebrations for Saudi families outside of family gatherings or dance festivals (Aldossry, 2015).

Despite the possibility of increased activity, Saudi Arabian consumers continue to be cautious with their spending. The major GCC marketplaces have been under the intense scrutiny of the global consulting firm Kearney, which has been tracking spending patterns and delving deeper for a detailed breakdown by category, channel, sentiment, and motivation (Al-Khatib et al., 2005).

Nearly 60% of Saudi Arabian consumers expect the economic impact of the pandemic to last for the next six months, and their purchasing patterns reflect this outlook. Since the pandemic began, spending on non-essentials has decreased by more than 25% while spending on necessities has decreased by about 18%. Food, groceries, medications, and health are the main topics. It is interesting to note that expenditure in this category appears to be increasing, with 45% of Saudi customers willing to pay more for better health care and, in certain cases, social responsibility. The expense of non-essentials like clothing and accessories has decreased over the past year. Lockdowns during this time compelled customers to make their purchases online. Although the convenience, range, and cost-effectiveness have made people enamored of a developed e-commerce landscape, this has dominated in offering a higher sense of comfort when purchasing necessary things online (The changing consumer shopping habits in Saudi Arabia, 2021).

In most Western countries, the peak of consumer spending comes at Christmas time, when people exchange gifts. The Christmas season, Birthdays, Mother's Day, and Valentine's Day, are associated with shopping. In contrast, in Saudi Arabia, the access points for consumption practices are Islamic feasts and traditional celebrations (Aldossry & Varul, 2016).

The Kingdom's entertainment sector has become influential on National Day, because of the musical performances, carnivals, and other activities that had never been seen before. These shows and festivals have become the hallmark of National Day celebrations, where the only traditional customs are to attend carnivals and shop the sales. Interestingly, celebrations of National Day have become international, with the presence of Western offers and commercials. In other words, National Day is no longer exclusive to the traditional character of the Kingdom: for example, it features both Arab and Western performers, such as France's Cirque du Soleil.

Ibn Hillel and Ibrahim (2020) asserted that the empowerment of women has been receiving attention on both the national and international levels. The study lies in shedding light on the role of the influential fashion of elite women who enjoy social and political weight in promoting the national identity. Consequently, the active participation of Saudi youth in the carnivals and celebrations surrounding Saudi National Day, as well as their interest in global trends and fashions, suggests a strong sense of belonging and national identity, while also reflecting the influence of worldwide cultural and social developments on this demographic. The link between cultural and economic progress caused by world consumerism can distort the self-representation of Saudi modernity, which has aimed to maintain economic and technological development, as well as spiritual, cultural, and intellectual life (Aldossry, 2012).

Results

Answering the First Question "What Are the Debates Surrounding Celebrating Saudi National Day as an Element of Saudi Vision 2030?"

The literature review reveals that the debates surrounding the celebration of Saudi National Day have evolved significantly. Initially, the commemoration of this national

holiday was viewed within the context of Saudi Vision 2030, leading to some theoretical objections. However, over time, this has shifted to an ultimate acceptance and embrace of the Saudi National Day celebrations among the country's citizens. This transition reflects the government's successful efforts to promote a strong sense of national identity and belonging through these public festivities and events. This result is consistent with the findings of Al-Qhatani (2019), Edu-Buandoh & Nkansah (2018), Hayday (2010), Matei (2013), and Oltean (2018) who examined the importance of National Days to the national identity.

Answering the Second Question “What Are the Aspects of Saudi National Day Celebration Practices?”

As it follows from the literature review, the Kingdom is looking forward to involve the private sector, which is reflected in the concern of the business sector to make National Day an occasion for Saudis to go shopping. Saudi businesses and companies have leveraged commercials accompanied by patriotic national songs to offer discounts and special deals as a means of encouraging greater public participation in the celebration of Saudi National Day. This result is consistent with (Al-Anazi & Al-Qassas, 2014; Aldossry, 2015; Al-Misbahi, 2017; Al-Qhatani, 2019).

Answering the Third Question “What Are the Consequential Trends Related to the Celebration of Saudi National Day?”

The literature related to the consequential trend concerning the celebration of Saudi National Day demonstrates the transformation of Saudi society from traditional conservatism to modernity as an element of Saudi Vision 2030. This result is consistent with the findings reported in the studies by Al-Anazi & Al-Qassas (2014), Aldossry (2015), Al-Misbahi (2017), and Al-Qhatani (2019).

Discussion

Nationalism is no longer problematic in many Arab and Islamic countries, such as Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, and Egypt, as it distinguishes their citizens. Other countries that work with Islamic law, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, have struggled to facilitate the co-existence of Islamic and national identities, despite the opposition of Islamists.

The Celebration of Saudi society with National Day is still limited to what the public and private sectors provide. In the future, we expect to see new cultural habits, whether consumptive or not, concerning National Day celebrations. Despite the recent surge in the celebration of Saudi National Day compared to neighboring countries, the Kingdom's efforts to foster a strong sense of nationalism and national identity continue. While other nations in the region may have a longer history of grappling with issues related to nationalism, Saudi Arabia's relatively more recent embrace of national celebrations reflects its ongoing journey to understand and solidify the concept of the nation as a whole. This is evidenced by the government's investments in promoting contemporary and historical Saudi culture, as well as the Kingdom's history, through various legislative initiatives and public events.

Despite Islamic scholars' rejection of National Day, the Saudi government is determined to mark it. This determination has granted many Saudis the ability to overcome barriers and obstacles and express themselves as Saudis, and not just as Muslims or Arabs. Many Saudis now look forward to National Day and the sales associated with it. National Day, like other religious or secular celebrations, is expected to increase consumerism, due to the sales and discounts offered. To sum up, the trend towards national and social reform is inevitable to keep pace with Saudi Vision 2030 and ensure national identity.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the article recommends encouraging public-private partnerships to develop innovative programs that promote cultural heritage and national identity as part of the Saudi Vision 2030 initiatives, establishing national recognition and reward systems to celebrate individuals and organizations that make exceptional contributions towards the realization of Saudi Vision 2030, integrating the theme of national unity and pride into the design and content of Saudi National Day celebrations to foster a stronger sense of belonging among citizens, leveraging digital platforms and technologies to create immersive, interactive experiences that engage the public, especially the youth, in celebrating Saudi identity and culture, and conducting regular surveys and feedback mechanisms to assess the evolving perceptions and attitudes of the Saudi public towards the national day celebrations and Saudi Vision 2030.

Suggestions for Further Research

The current article presents some suggestions for further research including examining the role of public-private partnerships in driving cultural and social changes under Saudi Vision 2030, conducting quasi-experimental and comparative studies to investigate the effect of implementing Saudi Vision 2030 on improving the quality of life in its various aspects, conducting longitudinal studies to track the evolving perceptions and attitudes of the Saudi public towards the national day celebrations and Saudi Vision 2030 over time, investigating the economic and financial implications of the cultural and social changes associated with Saudi Vision 2030, and conduct further research related to Saudi Flag Day and Saudi Founding Day as one of the new non-religious legal holidays.

Conclusion

This article aims to provide a scholarly review of the literature on the implantation of Saudi Vision 2030 and its direct connection to the celebration of Saudi National Day. It explored the debates surrounding Saudi National Day, including the initial refusal to celebrate it, the eventual approval of the celebration, the celebration practices, and their links to consumer culture. This article examined the transformation of Saudi society from traditional conservatism to modernity as an element of Saudi Vision

2030. It revealed that the rejection of celebrating Saudi National Day gave way to ultimate acceptance among Saudi citizens, with the private sector actively involved in making National Day an occasion for Saudis to go shopping, incorporating national songs and promotional offers. This led to the transformation of Saudi society from traditional conservatism to modernity as an element of Saudi Vision 2030. The researcher suggested increasing public awareness of adhering to Saudi Vision 2030 for national reform.

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