



Tourism Policy and Service Quality Management in Business
Conference Tourism in Saudi Arabia

Submitted by:

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Abstract

This study assesses tourism policy and service quality management in business and conference tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), examining the capacity of KSA to become an international business conference tourism destination. It considers the factors that could favour or hinder the expansion of the conference industry in (KSA), Research was conducted through mixed methods, the fact that qualitative and quantitative designs complement each other – each covering for the weakness of the other including original data drawn from interviews and questionnaires.

The target respondents are officials from the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau, which is the government organisation responsible for conferences, drawn from the public sector, and staff and managers of tourism companies drawn from the private sector. Understanding these factors is vital to enable stakeholders to address the opportunities and challenges that may emerge. Substantial analysis of the interviews and questionnaires brings out both important recurring themes and specific detail. The personal views of the participants reflect optimism for the sector's current performance and its prospects in the future. The participants also noted that the continuous increase of the sector's performance in KSA has been secured mostly due to the government's support.

It demonstrated that there are several positive factors about KSA that may promote a thriving conference tourism sector. This is contrary to the expectations that global issues such as terrorism, and the negative images they have painted of the Arab world from the Western perspective, which have increased safety concerns for delegates visiting KSA.

A further objective was to analyse the quality of service and its effects on business conference tourism in (KSA). This facilitates the rating of the current condition of facilities used in conference tourism, as well as the status of supporting industries such as hospitality. Respondents in this context include external delegates who use these services and can give a first-hand account of their experiences. From these responses, it was established that that a large percentage of external delegates preferred staying in 4- and 5-star hotels. The fact that these hotels were available for these delegates meant that the hospitality industry in KSA is large enough to accommodate conferences and also that the

level of customer satisfaction that they offer is relatively high. A further objective was to explore the social and political feasibility of KSA developing as a business conference tourism destination. This objective was addressed using the responses of internal conference delegates to evaluate

how the social and political characteristics and perceptions of KSA may influence the future conditions of conference tourism in the country. The data gathered shows that there is a close relationship between social and political factors, and the performance of business and conference tourism in KSA. Several elements of the social and political environment have a bearing, not only tourism but also on other sectors in the country

One of these is infrastructure; with appropriate infrastructure, which can only be attained with responsible political planning, the running of many industries will be smooth. This study has established that KSA has the infrastructural capability for hosting international conferences, and its organizational capabilities are good. The themes uncovered have pointed out that the Saudi tradition is significant in the development of Saudi Arabia as a business and conference tourism destination. Culture has been shown to be significant determinant of the sector. It is thus important to consider the cultural attributes that act as obstacles to KSA gaining a position as a business and conference tourism destination, while also noting that the themes have pointed out that several socio-political challenges surround the development of Saudi Arabia as a business and conference tourism destination.

Dedication

First, thanks to my other half, my wife Abrar Al Homaïd for her kindness and devotion, and for her endless support; also, for having such patience with me, especially as she has been working on her own PhD. thesis at the same time. We took on the challenge of completing our goals together, sharing the demands of studying and raising a family, as well as the joys.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| KSA | Kingdom of Saudi Arabia |
| SCTA | Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities |
| SCT | Supreme Commission for Tourism |
| SCTH | Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage |
| SECB | Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau |
| MICE | Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions |
| WTTC | World Travel and Tourism Council |
| GCC | Gulf Corporation Council |
| PTO | Provisional Tourism Organisations |
| GPD | Gross Domestic Product |
| MNC | Multinational corporation |
| SMART | Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time bound |
| CSR | Corporate social responsibility |
| HR | Human resource |
| HRM | Human resource management |

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

International tourism has become a major industry worldwide; travel and tourism activities generated US \$7.6 trillion in 2016 (Davidson, 2005; World Travel Tourism Council, 2017). It was estimated in 2016 that the industry contributed to employment by directly employing over 108 million people, offering an employment of over 292 million jobs both directly and indirectly (WTTC, 2017). Tourism contributes to more than one job in ten at the global level. For many countries, it has become an important source of economic growth. The UN World Tourism Organisation estimates that there are about 700 million international travellers in the year 2000, reaching one billion by 2010. The tourism industry created 245 million jobs worldwide directly and indirectly, as well as more than US\$ 5 trillion in terms of economic growth in 2000 (Trade Forum, 2008). Developing nations have sought to take advantage of this strong upward trend, prompted by an appreciation of tourism's positive economic consequences, which include income and employment creation, foreign exchange earnings and inward investment. Tourism is vigorously pursued as a catalyst to general growth and means of diversification, despite its disadvantages as a vehicle for economic development. As mentioned by Kreishan (2015, p. 1), "It is beginning to play an important role in the economic development of many developing countries.

The UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2005:10) defines tourists as: "*Travelling to and staying in places outside your usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.*" Millions of tourists traveling around the world have an impact on the income level of countries through almost all other sectors in a given economy". In addition, Sinclair-Maragh and Gursoy (2015, p.5) argue that "Developing countries depend on tourism as a main economic industry as its development enhances the lives of residents in their community". Tourists are unevenly distributed around the globe, however, and Europe and America continue to dominate the industry as both generators and destinations. The Middle East recorded 53.6 million international arrivals in 2016, a slight fall from the arrivals in 2015, which stood at 55.6 million out of these 2016 arrivals, 18 millions were to Saudi Arabia (WTO, 2017). This is quite a small fraction of the 1.235 billion arrivals recorded globally. The stark difference that exists between the Middle Eastern and Western societies has been cited as one of the reasons why its appeal to Western tourists is limited (Avraham & Ketter, 2016). These differences mainly lie in the religious and cultural beliefs and practices of these regions, which are reflected in many other aspects of people's lives. As mentioned by Cohen and Cohen (2015, p. 159), "The alleged differences between the cultural contexts, motivations, perceptions and practices of 'Western'

tourists and those from the emerging world regions have provoked a growing critique of an allegedly dominant Eurocentric perspective in the prevailing paradigmatic approaches or theoretical traditions in the study of tourism”.

Saudi Arabia originally devoted little attention to conventional international leisure tourism, for a combination of social, political and economic reasons. There were few financial incentives to do so; given the wealth it accrued from the discovery and exploitation of oil reserves and the fourfold increase in oil prices in the 1970s. In addition, the central role of religious tourism must be stressed, with millions of people traveling annually for the Hajj (Alsumairi & Tsui, 2017) which requires a massive organisational effort by the authorities. The Hajj is a pilgrimage to Mecca which all Muslims are expected to make, if their circumstances permit, at least once in a lifetime. It also involves a visit to the holy cities but is not restricted to a specific date and may be undertaken on numerous occasions (Fazel, 2016). Those on the Hajj and Umrah together accounted for 5.6 million of the 18 million tourists between 2015 and 2016, which made up a major fraction of tourism expenditure and revenues (World Bank, 2017a). The pilgrimage events are held in high regard by Muslims across the globe. As stated by El-Gohary (2014, p. 253), “They are, arguably, ‘from the furthest corners of the world’, another Quranic reference when they respond to the annual call to perform the Hajj in Mecca. Muslims also claim that they have the Quranic miracle – the ‘coming together of the two oceans – being the Indian and Atlantic oceans, an idyllic experience that inspires faith”.

Comparing pilgrimages and business tourism, much lower resources are allocated to the latter in Saudi Arabia, even with the efforts that are underway to ensure that this sector grows (Alsumairi & Tsui, 2017). Although support for the tourism industry has been limited, Saudi Arabia was a leading Middle East destination by the beginning of the new millennium, when it was drawing 27.1% of regional tourists and 29% of receipts and this continues to be the case as established by a survey by WTO (2017). Most of the tourists, however visit the kingdom for religious tourism. Compared to religious tourism, the tourists that visit Saudi Arabia for business conferences are fewer. There has been a great development since then and, as mentioned by Euromonitor International (2017), “...domestic tourism is to receive a new meaning with the creation of new entertainment cities, theme parks and camping spots initiated by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH)”. Several developments have taken place in the entertainment industry with the objective of increasing revenue that is collected from both local and international tourists. For instance, according to Alkhalisi (2017b), the government has invested close to \$2.7 billion to develop new entertainment projects, such as entertainment

complexes. Construction of resorts, hotels and residential units along the country's coastline is also underway, expected to be completed in 2022. This is one of the efforts that are being put in place to ensure that the tourist numbers grow to 30 million by 2030 (Alkhalisi, 2017b). Tourism is now Saudi Arabia's third largest industry after energy and manufacturing and has recently emerged as the second most important in terms of foreign exchange earnings and job creation. By 2020, revenue from the tourism industry could exceed SR86 billion (US\$22.93 billion) (WTTC, 2017). The contribution of tourism to the economy is emphasized by Kreishan (2015, p. 5), who pointed out that "the contribution of the tourism sector towards an economy of a country cannot be denied as this sector may have indirect effect towards economic growth as such". Therefore, rather than rely entirely on the oil and gas sector whose revenues are continuously dwindling, Saudi Arabia has seen the need to revamp the tourism industry so as to benefit from the high revenues associated with it.

Greater official interest has thus been expressed in tourism in recent years with the formation of specific policies and an administrative framework. There had been no formal agency devoted to tourism prior to 1999, when the Supreme Commission for Tourism (SCT) was established in 2000 to promote the sector, chaired by Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz (SCT, 2017). It is tasked with developing the tourism industry, implementing the recommendations of earlier studies, and preserving key archaeological sites and monuments. Seminars and discussion forums on tourism and its future prospects have also been organized, additional evidence of its higher priority. A long-term tourism master plan was prepared by the SCT and is now being implemented, while provincial plans are about to be drawn up. The intention is to attract 10.9 million by 2020, 3 million of whom will come from outside Arab areas and the countries of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council, whose members are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) (SCT, 2017). The principal target markets will be Saudi residents and expatriates living in the kingdom, followed by Muslims worldwide and then niches of those interested in culture and heritage, ecotourism and pursuits such as diving and trekking

1.2. Business Tourism in Saudi Arabia

Business tourism is also known as business travel and refers to people travelling for work-related purposes (Bhatia, 2012). Business tourism is defined as trips that people undertake to participate in conferences, seminars, and other similar events. Business trips can be conducted in conjunction with other types of tourism (Devashish, 2011). According to Maitland and Richie (2009), it refers to travel that is associated with attending corporate meetings, seminars, conferences, or public or trade exhibitions, amongst others. Business tourism is also commonly known as MICE (meetings,

incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) (Guliani, 2016). The elements of MICE tourism can be further described as follows: The term “Meeting” is used in the specific case of referring to a meeting in the context of which “professionals or association members” share their knowledge and views in regard to issues related to the meeting’s subject (Altareri, 2016, p. 10). The term “Incentives” reflects the “travel packages” offered to employees, either to motivate them to perform better, or to reward them for their past performance (Altareri, 2016, p. 11). The term “Conference” describes “an event organised by an organisation” for initiating “discussion and consultation” on a specific issue (Altareri, 2016, p. 11).

It is a formal meeting that consists of people who discuss and listen to experts on topics of interest. People attending a conference may be businesspeople, members of a political party, or scientists working on a subject (Norton & Ivanovic, 2008). The term “Exhibitions” refers to the display of products/ services to people who would be interested in buying them, or who would like to ask information about them (Altareri, 2016). Conversely, an exposition is a large event that presents products that are displayed and sold, whilst an exhibition is the display of items (e.g. artworks or historical objects) to be shown or sold. A convention is a large gathering that consists of people who share the same interests, ideas, or profession. Examples of this are a convention of doctors, or of people collecting comic books (Norton & Ivanovic, 2008).

Business tourism involves people attending a wide variety of events, such as conferences, exhibitions, meetings, conventions, training courses, incentive travel, and product launches, which are of great importance to a country socially, culturally, commercially and politically. Meetings, according to Gustafson (2012), refer to organised events that bring people together in order to discuss a topic of shared interest. Business tourism in the Middle East is a relatively new market hence very little research has been conducted on this topic. This is due to the limited official data gathering systems and organisations available to conduct research on the sector. However, according to a research conducted in 2008 by Rogers (2013), the Middle East region came second amongst the destinations chosen by buyers as the prime global places for events, with Europe considered the first destination and Asia third (Rogers, 2013). This shows that business tourists have a growing confidence in the Middle East as the region with the most potential for growth in business tourism. According to Abulibdeh and Zaidan (2017), the three most preferred destinations in the Middle East are Dubai, Egypt and Abu Dhabi. Suppliers argue that they prefer

Dubai because it is the most productive region based on the high demand and purchasing power of clients in the region, and this can help them to enhance their business (Abulibdeh & Zaidan, 2017).

Altareri (2016) indicates that the most popular events conducted in the Middle East are usually meetings, followed by incentive travel, events and finally conventions, conferences and congresses. Altareri also explains that Saudi Arabia is beginning to focus on business travel, although it is yet to become a major destination for business tourists compared to Dubai and Abu Dhabi. In 2009, of all the destinations used by tourists for events, Saudi Arabia only received 9% of them though by 2016, the figure had increased by 12% (Al-Saadi, 2017). Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia is still in the top ten amongst the 23 destinations in the Middle East, Gulf and North African countries., business tourists attending conferences and exhibitions in Saudi Arabia represent about 15% of the total tourism in the country, which is an indication of growth in the sector.

1.2.1. Factors that influence business tourism

There are several factors that determine whether a region is favourable for business tourism or not, such as location factors, venue factors, and accessibility factors (Dale, 2016). According to Chatzigeorgiou, Christou and Simeli (2017), the characteristics of a location that may influence a potential conference participant are similar to those of holidaymakers, such as safety of the location, climate, and activities, amongst others. Other factors, such as the political environment of a place, the culture, sightseeing, historical attractions, the availability of recreation facilities and the popular image of the location also influence the decision-making for a potential conference participant (Whitfield *et al.*, 2014)

Venue factors also influence international conference attendance. Mair (2012) reported that the venue of the event, whether for a meeting facility or accommodation, is an important attribute when planning a conference. Variables that impact the criteria used to select the venue for a conference depend on political, economic, social and technological factors (Smiljanić *et al.*, 2016). The variables also depend on whether the conference is organised by the association sector or by the corporate sector. This is an important factor because associations tend to focus more on value for money while the corporate sector focuses on high quality premises, that is, the quality of the conference facilities. The availability of the venue also influences the decision to select a venue for an international conference (Rogers & Davidson, 2015). It is important that the venue matches the requirements of the meeting in regards to facilities and their size. Furthermore, satisfaction with the venue in terms of service quality and adequate standard of furnishings and facilities are also important factors considered by conference participants. Mair (2012) believes

that it is important to ensure that conference participants get good facilities and excellent service quality based on their needs and expectations to ensure satisfaction.

Another important factor that leads to delegates attending conferences in a particular region is accessibility of the venue. Whitfield *et al.* (2014) argue that accessibility is considered more important than the attractiveness of a region when choosing a location to hold a conference. Some of the accessibility factors considered include the ease of visa applications, the distance of the trip, the time available to travel, and the convenience, availability and frequency of direct flights. However, according to Mair (2012), the ease, speed and cost of accessing a particular conference destination are more important than the distance of the travel. This therefore means that the geographical location of a region does not matter as much as efficient transport infrastructure in regards to international conferences. The quality and availability of airline services is however very important in the business tourism industry since most international conference delegates travel by air (Coleman, 2013).

Cost also plays a major role because the conference planners need to work within the budget set by the organisation or association. The size of the budget usually depends on the type of the organisation as well as the capacity of the attending members and potential delegates to pay if they are required to do so (Whitfield *et al.*, 2014). For instance, the budget for a group of surgeons attending a meeting in Saudi Arabia may not be the same as that of members of a charity organisation since the former may stay in a three-star accommodation while the latter opt for modestly-priced accommodation. Hence, in terms of cost, travellers consider factors such as cost of accommodation, cost of travel and accessibility, and cost of meeting facilities amongst others (Dioko & Whitfield, 2015).

There are several factors that delegates consider when choosing a destination to hold a conference or exhibition. For instance, they often consider the location based on factors like climate of the region, culture and security. They also consider how accessible the location is, the travel costs, political environment and social activities amongst others. Understanding these factors helps to shed light on the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international business conference tourism destination. This is because if potential business tourists consider some of the factors as unfavourable, they may avoid the region and opt for one where they feel their needs will be met. Such unfavourable factors include insecurity, unfavourable prices, possible discrimination from the local population, or lack of amenities such as well-equipped hotels.

1.3. Conference Tourism in Saudi Arabia

With the current dips and fluctuations experienced in the oil and gas prices, Saudi Arabia has seen the need to look for ways to address the economic vulnerability it encounters due to its reliance on oil as its only economic source. Its rapidly growing population has led to an increase in demand for housing as well as services infrastructure and unemployment, resulting in immense pressure on the government to create alternative sources of generating revenue and creating employment (Antonakakis *et al.*, 2017). The government as a result identified business conference tourism as one of the priority area for investment, whose benefits are expected to be felt by 2020 (Alkhalisi, 2017b). This is based on the fact that business tourism can lead to increased inward investment as stated by Becker (2016). According to Becker, if a business tourist who owns an enterprise visits a destination for a conference and likes the business environment in the region, he or she may decide to set up a new business or even transfer their business to the region (2016). This will not only bring revenue to the country but also create employment for the residents. The conference tourism sector has firmly placed itself at the centre of the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia. Within the past decade, Saudi has experienced an increase in the number of conferences held in the region. This is supported by a recent report by the Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage, which stated that the number of conferences and exhibitions in Saudi Arabia in 2016 increased by about 12% from 2015 (Al-Saadi, 2017).

As previously mentioned, the government has begun making significant investments in the sector with a vision that Saudi Arabia will become the main destination for exhibitions and conferences in the Middle East by 2020. By 2019, the government estimates that it will have invested about \$1.6 billion in conference tourism (Chiu & Ananzeh, 2012).

According to Al-Saadi (2017), Saudi Arabia has seen a remarkable growth in the field of business conference tourism. This is based on the fact that in 2016, Saudi Arabia received estimated at 4,413,396, across a total of 8758 licensed business events (SECB, 2016). As reported by the Saudi Exhibition and Conventions Bureau (SECB), which is affiliated with the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH). This was a 12% increase in the number of licensed activities held in 2015 and this is expected to have increased by 20% in 2017 (Al-Saadi, 2017). The majority of these activities took place in the Eastern Province, Mecca and Riyadh. Riyadh hosted 48% of the activities, almost a half of all the events. According to Antonakakis *et al.* (2017), this is because the Riyadh International Exhibition Centre is a global exhibition complex that can hold up to 10,000 people, due to its large exhibition space of about 15,000 square metres. In 2016, for instance, it was established that there were approximately 231 consumer exhibitions held, 2004

training courses, 2985 workshops, 3301 meetings, 13 career exhibitions, 28 charity exhibitions, 50 product launches, 57 trade exhibitions, 13 conventions, 47 conferences and 29 forums.

This progressive trend is also evident in the 2018 first quarter statistics, and even though they are not full year statistics, there have already been many meetings held across the country courtesy of SECB. So far, there have already been 97 consumer exhibitions since the beginning of the year, 683 training courses, 1081 workshops, 1044 meetings, 5 forums, 1 career exhibition, 54 charity exhibitions, 20 trade exhibitions, 24 conferences, and 413 conventions (SECB, 2018). The distributions of these business events in terms of their locations in the country have, however, not changed much compared to 2016: Riyadh hosted 49% of the meetings, 30% were organised in Makkah and 15% took place in Eastern Province. Overall, compared to the 2016 and 2017 first quarters, there is a growth of 32% and 21% respectfully (SECB, 2018), and this shows that progress is being made.

In order to achieve and maintain this, the Saudi government has been striving to keep on strengthening its conference tourism sector by establishing more exhibition and conference venues, improving relevant regulation and governmental procedures, hotels and airport facilities, and developing the marketing and human resources capacities of the tourism sector. Amongst the notable developments in Saudi's business tourism industry is the establishment of the Supreme Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA), which is responsible for supervising the accommodation sector, the development of a Strategy of National and Sustainable Tourism, Issuance of the developed organisation of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA), and development of businessman visa procedures (Damanhour, 2016). Furthermore, the government has established Tourism Development Councils and Provisional Tourism Organisations (PTOs), and assigned the Council of Commercial Chambers the duty of coordinating the conferences. A committee for exhibitions and conferences in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has also been formed. SCTA has approved an internal project for business tourism development in Saudi along with its partners. A team has also been set up for business tourism establishments, events and institutions, which consists of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Council of the Saudi Chambers, SCTA, and the private sector (Al-Fadhel, 2012).

According to a report by the Strategy and Action Plan for the Development of Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Events (MICE) Market in Saudi Arabia, the majority of business events held in KSA are conducted by Saudi nationals (Altareri, 2016). This shows that conference tourism in the region is focused more on domestic than international markets. The government is

however planning to move into the international meetings industry, which may require a great deal more time and effort to implement. Currently, there are reasonable support structures for exhibitions, conferences and meetings within Saudi in regards to airports, hotels, and professional organisers, with 55 principal venues based in Jeddah and Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia is growing as a destination for business tourism, as seen in this section, which shows that its capacity to become an international destination for business tourism is also growing. The support structures being established by the government such as good infrastructure and conference halls are making the Kingdom look more attractive to conference tourists.

1.3.1. Positive and negative factors affecting the growth of conference tourism in Saudi Arabia

A range of factors have contributed to the growth of business tourism in Saudi. As previously mentioned, for example, the Saudi Arabia government has begun to constantly support tourism development in general by investing in good infrastructure for the MICE market (Damanhour, 2016). The promising investment capabilities in the establishments of the market, the high quality hotels in strategic locations, experience in hosting large numbers of tourists and its new and promising market that is expected to keep growing have also influenced the rapid growth of business tourism in the kingdom. This effort is exemplified by the construction underway of Abraj Kudai, a hotel that is expected to be the largest in the world, with a ring of 12 towers 45 storeys high, 70 restaurants, 10 thousand bedrooms, and several roof helipads, at a cost of £2.25bn (Smith, 2016). Other factors include availability of establishments and support services, and the growing private sector which targets the business tourism market (Mair, 2012). The private sector in Saudi is capable of engaging in the conference and exhibition sector by supporting the economic development activities initiated by the government.

Saudi Arabia presents several opportunities for the growth of business tourism. For instance, it is the largest country in the Gulf region in regards to its economic power and population. It has the highest GDP, too, in both the Middle East and the Gulf region and is the largest producer of oil in the world. It also covers a very wide geographic area with a population of 32.5 million in 2017 (General Authority for Statistics, 2018). Furthermore, Saudi has strong communication and transport infrastructure both locally and internationally. Damanhour (2016) explains that Saudi Arabia is competent in specialised economic sectors like water treatment, oil information technology and communication. The Kingdom is also considered the cradle of Islam and hence it is a cherished destination for Muslims from across the world, as well as for Arabs who consider it their place of origin. The region also has numerous academic institutions.

However, there are several challenges to conference tourism faced in Saudi Arabia, which can be linked to socio-political factors. Such factors include gender segregation, domestic security, religious beliefs, strict entry requirements and complex procedures for organising a conference in the country, amongst others. Saudi Arabia strives very hard to maintain its domestic security (Stephenson, 2014). In order to achieve this, the government ensures that its domestic society is protected from the outside world so as to prevent outsiders from influencing its citizens and exercising too much control over its people. Sharif (2015) claims that Saudi's discouragement of foreign visitors, especially from the West, is not only driven by the desire to prevent social disturbance but also from the belief that Western ideas and modes of behaviour are fundamentally incompatible with those of the Islamic religion and their way of life .

Thus, according to a study by Sharif (2015), Saudi Arabia is not open to outside influence, which creates a strong sense of uncertainty amongst conference delegates regarding whether the Kingdom is a good destination for holding international conferences and exhibitions.

Damanhour (2016) argues that the tourism industry as a whole exerts a powerful influence on cultural reinvention and hence various elements such as people, images and objects are considered to be symbols of cultural change and external influence, which is likely to result in social change. External influence leading to cultural, social and political change is what Saudi Arabia has been struggling to avoid for many years. Therefore, this is likely to be a hindrance or challenge for KSA's ability to develop as an international conference destination.

In Saudi Arabia, gender segregation is enforced in all aspects of social, cultural and political life. Women are supposed to remain hidden away from the eyes of the public and particularly outsiders, while the public domain is exclusively for men (Damanhour, 2016). Powerful religious leaders support the concept of gender segregation even amongst visitors, which means that delegates holding conferences in the Kingdom must strictly adhere to the rules both inside and outside the conference halls. However, the feminist movement in Saudi is slowly gaining ground as women are being encouraged to become more vocal as well as stand for themselves. Sharman (2017) explains that in early 2017, the Saudi government started making plans to give women more control over their lives through work, study without seeking permission from their men. This aims to allow women to benefit from government services such as education without necessarily getting the consent of a male guardian.

As discussed earlier, the factors that influence conference participants' decisions to choose a particular region are similar to those of holidaymakers. Thus, entertainment and extra-

conference activities are important to conference delegates. Discussion of some of the positive and negative factors that affect the growth of conference tourism in Saudi Arabia provides a better understanding of the social and political environment of Saudi Arabia and its impact on the Kingdom's ability to become an international conference tourism destination. For instance, the government's effort to invest in good infrastructure in the region is a positive factor that shows support for tourism development. The country's establishment of high quality hotels located in very strategic places as well as its experience in hosting high number of tourists over the years has increased its capacity to host even larger events. The private sector support for economic development activities including the conference tourism sector is also playing a significant role in the growth of the industry. On the other hand, socio-political factors have a negative impact on Saudi's ability to develop as an international conference destination. Saudi Arabia has strict religious beliefs which they expect their international visitors to observe. This greatly affects the ability of conference delegates to choose certain aspects of the meetings as well as the forms of entertainment they want while in the country. The government also exercises strict domestic security as a way of preventing unwanted control on the society from the outside world. Thus, visitors are not highly welcome into the Kingdom, which is a big challenge for business tourists because visa entry requirement are quite strict.

1.3.2. The impact of business and conference tourism on Saudi Arabia

The impact of business conference tourism in KSA can be discussed based on its influence on the social, economic, cultural and political status of the country. According to Khizindar (2012), there is a strong connection between conference tourism and national economy of the host country. This is because business tourism as a whole enhances communication channels and improves the quality of manpower in different economic sectors, such as petroleum, communication, agriculture, education and training, health and tourism sectors. Business conference tourism also creates both permanent and temporary jobs, especially in the field of organisation and management, events supply chain and the accompanying services (Henderson, 2015). The transport and tourism services and residence expenses that are paid by the international attendants of conferences and exhibitions bring revenue that helps to create more investments in business tourism to enhance the growth of the sector. However, the hotels and travel companies tend to benefit the most, yet most of them are not owned by local entrepreneurs. This means revenue earned through conference tourism may not benefit the country as much as the government expect. In Saudi Arabia, conference tourism has led to a growth in investments in business tourism, such as the establishment of conference and exhibition facilities, creation of companies that organise events, establishment of city centres, suppliers of events, companies for

organising conference and exhibition centres, and destination management companies, amongst others. In addition, conference tourism promotes trade exchange and deals during conferences and exhibitions thereby enabling international trade between countries (Kovjanić, 2014).). There is no accessible statistical information on direct and indirect employment specifically in the conference tourism sector in Saudi Arabia. However, the overall tourism sector in the kingdom provided 603,500 jobs directly and over 500,000 jobs indirectly. On combining the direct and indirect employment in the tourism sector in 2016, it made up 9.7% of the total employment (WTTC, 2017).

Conference tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has also had a positive impact on the overall tourism industry. This is because hotels, travel agencies and tour operators also benefit from international conference visitors. Meeting halls in hotels are usually the main facilities used by the visitors to hold conferences and meetings while the participants reside in those hotels as well. Kovjanić (2014) believes that most countries tend to associate their tourism strategies with strategies of business tourism development. This is based on the fact that tourism travels made for the purpose of attending exhibitions and conferences accounts for more than 15% of total tourism across the world (Henderson, 2017). Therefore, Saudi's tourism benefits from conference tourism through the increase in demand for tourism services and products as a result of the exhibitions and conferences. Also, conference and exhibition tourists are likely to spend more compared to other tourists since they have a high purchase power.

Despite the negative influence over the Saudi Arabia culture that conference tourism is believed to bring to the kingdom, conference tourism is said to boost the exchange of knowledge and information amongst the countries involved. Henderson (2017) explains that conferences, forums, and seminars are significant ways to develop manpower in different public and private sectors. They are also an effective means of experience exchange, where traditions and heritage are revived and cultures highlighted (Henderson, 2017). This is likely to be enhanced with the increase in the number of conferences that are held annually in Saudi's major cities. These not only increase the networking and expertise of the attendees, but also contribute towards increasing the revenue from tourism (All Conference Alert, 2017).

Business conference tourism as seen in this section has both positive and negative considerations for KSA. It influences the cultural, political, social and economic environment of the country. For instance, it improves the quality of manpower in different sectors, creates jobs for the residents, creates more investment opportunities, and encourages trade exchange. However, the downside is that most of the revenue is earned by hotels and transport operations that may not

be owned by the local entrepreneurs .There has been growing interest amongst researchers in Saudi Arabia's economy, many of whom have established the overreliance of the country on oil and gas, and have recommended that it focuses on other viable sources of revenue to shield it from adversity brought about by the dips in oil prices being experienced. Whilst many of them have mentioned suggested tourism as an alternative, there has been minimal focus on conference tourism, which limits the available information on its current status and future prospects. By focusing tourism, this study will contribute towards filling this current research gap.

1.4. Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research study is to assess the potential for Saudi Arabia to become a business tourism and international conference destination. This research focuses on establishing how viable the conference tourism sector is by examining the existing opportunities and challenges that may be faced in the development of the industry. It also intends to assess tourism policy and service quality management in business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. In order to effectively address this research aim, four specific objectives have been formulated. They are as outlined below.

- 1.** To examine the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international business conference tourism destination. This objective examines the factors that may favour or hinder the expansion of the conference industry in Saudi Arabia. The target respondents are officials from the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau drawn from the public sector.
- 2.** To understand the positive and negative factors affecting the business tourism and business tourism policy of Saudi Arabia. The respondents used to meet this objective are staff and managers of tourism companies drawn from the private sector. Understanding these factors is vital to enable stakeholders to prepare how to address the opportunities and threats that may emerge.
- 3.** To analyse the quality of service and its effects on business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. This objective facilitates the rating of the current condition of facilities used in conference tourism in Saudi Arabia, as well as the status of supporting industries such as hospitality. In so doing, recommendations for what can be improved can be made. Respondents for this objective include external delegates who use these services and can give a first-hand account of their experiences.
- 4.** To explore the social and political feasibility of Saudi Arabia developing as a business conference tourism destination. Internal delegates at business conferences are the ideal respondents for addressing this objective. It relies on these responses to evaluate how the politics

and social characteristics of Saudi Arabia may influence the future conditions of conference tourism in the country.

1.5. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is made up of eight chapters, which present a broad range of information, from the background of the research to the conclusion of the dissertation. Chapter 1 presents the background of the research, which provides information on the conference industry in Saudi Arabia and the factors that determine the growth of this sector. It also outlines the objectives of the research.

Chapter 2 then provides a critical review of previous literature published regarding business tourism in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the chapter provides a thematic analysis of the themes related to the economic, social, cultural and political environment in Saudi Arabia and its influence on business tourism in the Kingdom. Some of the themes discussed include economic diversification, government support, culture and social groups, and organisational practices such as service quality in Saudi Arabia .

Chapter 3 aims at presenting an overview of business tourism in Saudi Arabia by referring to relevant publications. The chapter begins with a review of the current status of tourism in Saudi Arabia, followed by a review of business tourism in The Kingdom and service quality management. Furthermore, the chapter presents a review of business tourism policy in Saudi Arabia and the factors that affect such policies.

Chapter 4 presents the methodological approaches used to gather data for the study. It presents a discussion of the research philosophy used, the research design utilised, sampling technique, data collection instruments, a discussion of the pilot study, data analysis, and ethical issues observed throughout the study. The research methodologies that are discussed in this chapter are accompanied by justifications for why they were selected over the available alternatives.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the first two research objectives, one of these being to examine the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international destination for business conference tourism, and the second being to understand the positive and negative factors affecting business, tourism and the business tourism policy of Saudi Arabia. These two objectives sought to answer the first research question. These objectives were addressed using a qualitative approach and thus, themes that emerged from the interview responses are presented in this chapter.

Chapter 6 presents the quantitative results and analysis of the third research objective, which sought to analyse the quality of service and its effects on business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. In addressing this objective, a quantitative research approach was used. Therefore, this section presents results in form of Tables and charts generated with the help of the SPSS software. Discussions of these results are also presented.

Chapter 7 presents the results of the fourth objective. The objective sought to explore the social and political feasibility of Saudi Arabia developing as an international business conference tourism destination. This involves the presentation and discussion of themes that emerged from interviews conducted with the internal conference delegates as respondents.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusion based on the results of the study. A summary of the main results will be presented relating to the four objectives. This chapter also presents the recommendations that should be implemented in the business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia so as to promote growth of the sector.

Chapter 2: The Tourism Industry in Saudi Arabia

2.1 Introduction

This chapter covers a discussion of business tourism as a growing sector in Saudi Arabia, and themes from the meta-analysis that include economic diversification, government support, culture, social groups, and organisational practices. The purpose is to provide evidence to support the relevance of the research problem (Rose *et al.*, 2015).

This chapter focuses on service quality management in the tourism sector of Saudi Arabia, with a particular emphasis on business and conference tourism. Accordingly, it will present the literature related to the tourism industry in general and in Saudi Arabia; the country's business tourism and tourism policy; the role of business tourism and its contribution to the economy; business tourism and tourism policy assumptions; service quality management and business and conference tourism and cultural issues.

The purpose of the review is to identify the ways in which the government in Saudi Arabia can improve the business environment in the Kingdom, especially in regard to conference and business tourism. Moreover, the chapter aims to show the research gap relating to service quality management parameters in the context of business and conference tourism.

2.2 Studies Covered by the Review

The literature review presented in this chapter is based on articles that have been chosen according to their relevance to the study's themes. These articles have been critically reviewed in this section by comparing and analysing the ideas and concepts presented in them. The key elements of these articles are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Meta-analysis of literature

| Year of Publication | Names of Researchers | Name of Article | Name of Journal / Publisher | Themes |
|---------------------|----------------------|---|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2005 | Al-Kawaz | Forward-looking approach for fiscal sustainability: A | <i>OPEC Review: Energy</i> | Economic diversification |

| | | | | |
|-------------|------------------|---|---|--|
| | | case of Egypt, Indonesia, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates | <i>Economics & Related Issues</i> | |
| 2007 | Burns | From Hajj to Hedonism? Paradoxes of Developing Tourism in Saudi Arabia | <i>Channel View Publications</i> | Tourism development in Saudi Arabia |
| 2007 | Frahm and Brown | First steps: Linking change communication to change receptivity | <i>Journal of Organizational Change</i> | Organisational practices/ Stakeholders |
| 2007 | Ogbasli | The Islamic City and Tourism: Managing Conservation and Tourism in Traditional Neighbourhoods | <i>Channel View Publications</i> | Conservation and tourism management of traditional communities |
| 2010 | Ali | Managing MNC-government negotiations in Saudi Arabia: The key role of elites | <i>Journal of Promotion Management</i> | Culture Social groups |
| 2010 | Graetz and Smith | Managing organizational change: A | <i>Journal of Change Management</i> | Organisational practices/ |

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|--|---|--|
| | | philosophies of change approach | | Management of change Service quality |
| 2010 | Salazar <i>et al.</i> | A service quality evaluation scale for the hospitality sector: Dimensions, attributes and behavioural intentions | <i>Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes</i> | Organisational practices/ Service quality |
| 2010 | Petrini and Pozzebon | Integrating sustainability into business practices: Learning from Brazilian firms | <i>Brazilian Administration Review</i> | Organisational practices/ Sustainability |
| 2010 | Ellinger <i>et al.</i> | The empowerment of frontline service staff in 3PL companies | <i>Journal of Business Logistics</i> | Organisational practices/ Human Resource Management |
| 2010 | Zamani-Farahani and Henderson | Islamic Tourism and Managing Tourism Development in Islamic Societies: The Cases of Iran and Saudi Arabia | <i>Tourism Research</i> | Tourism Management and Development |
| 2011 | Abdullah | An investigation into the current state of international conference tourism in Saudi Arabia and | <i>PhD Thesis, University of Exeter</i> | Governmental support Organisational practices |

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------------------------|--|---|--|
| | | an assessment of its future development possibilities | | |
| 2012 | Appelbaum <i>et al.</i> | Back to the future: Revisiting Kotter's 1996 change model | <i>Journal of Management Development</i> | Organisational practices/ Management of change |
| 2012 | Thompson <i>et al.</i> | Saudi Arabia's economic diversification: A case study in entrepreneurship | <i>Journal of Management & Business Research</i> | Economic diversification |
| 2013 | Ageli | Tourism economics in Saudi Arabia: PP-VAR approach | <i>Asian Journal of Business and Management</i> | Organisational practices/ Service quality |
| 2013 | El-Garaihy | Developing and validating a hospitality service quality scale in Saudi Arabia (HOSP-SQ): A structural equation model | <i>International Journal of Business and Social Science</i> | Organisational practices/ Service quality Governmental support |
| 2014 | Jankal | Software support of quality management in the service sector | <i>Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences</i> | Organisational practices/ HRM Stakeholders |
| 2014 | Al-Rasheed | The evaluation of customers services quality in five-star | <i>International Journal of Academic</i> | Culture Organisational practices/ |

| | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| | | hotels in the city of Riyadh | <i>Research in Accounting, Finance and Management Sciences</i> | Stakeholders |
| 2015 | Andrews and Playfoot | Building human capacity in Saudi Arabia: The impact of government initiatives on the oil and gas workforce | <i>Education and Training for the Oil and Gas Industry</i> | Organisational practices/ HRM |
| 2015 | Dellner | Cultural Dimensions: the Five-Dimensions-Model According to Geert Hofstede | <i>GRIN Verlag</i> | Hofstede's Theory of Cultural Dimensions |
| 2016 | Al-Ababneh | Employees' perspectives of service quality in hotels | <i>Research in Hospitality Management</i> | Service quality |
| 2016 | Jeddah Chamber | Tourism in Saudi Arabia April 2016 | <i>Jeddah Chamber</i> | Governmental support |
| 2016 | Horner and Swarbrooke | Consumer behaviour in tourism | <i>Routledge</i> | Organisational practices/ Stakeholders |
| 2016 | Zakir Hussain | Saudi Arabia in a Multipolar World: Changing dynamics | <i>Routledge</i> | Culture |
| 2016 | Burton, E. | | <i>Wiley</i> | |

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| | | Business and Entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia: Opportunities for Partnering and Investing in Emerging Businesses | | Business and entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia |
| 2016 | Altareri | Development of Multicultural MICE Tourism in the Middle East the case of Saudi Arabia | <i>PhD Thesis</i> , College of Business Victoria University (VU) June 2016 | Culture and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions |
| 2016 | Damanhour | Study of the Social and Cultural Aspects of Saudi Tourists and Evaluate the Services Provided to Tourist and Saudi – An Applied Study for the Tourism Sector in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia | International Business Research | Saudi tourism social and cultural aspects |
| 2017 | Al-dweeri <i>et al.</i> | The Impact of E-Service Quality and E-Loyalty on Online Shopping: Moderating Effect | International Journal of Marketing Studies | Online satisfaction and e-trust |

| | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| | | of E-Satisfaction and E-Trust. | | |
| 2017 | Almhrzi <i>et al.</i> | Tourism in the Arab World: An Industry Perspective | <i>Channel View Publications</i> | Tourism in the Arab region |
| 2017 | Alhaj | Sustainable Tourism in Saudi Arabia: Factors affecting Tourism awareness of Saudi Citizens | <i>Journal of Tourism Research & Hospitality</i> | Sustainable tourism and tourism awareness |
| 2017 | Sohail and Jang | Understanding the Relationships Among Internal Marketing Practices, Job Satisfaction, Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction: An Empirical Investigation of Saudi Arabia's Service Employees. | <i>International Journal of Tourism Sciences</i> | Internal marketing services and service employees in Saudi Arabia |
| | | | | |

Source: Author

Table 2.1 displays the link of each study with each research theme. As shown in the Table, there are studies that are related to more than one theme. The symbol “/” is used in the table to show the sub-categories of a theme. it should be noted that the themes of the table reflect the factors that influence tourism policy and service quality management in the business conference

sector of Saudi Arabia. The articles are reviewed and their results are categorised into themes, as already explained. The above results are critically discussed in this study using appropriate literature, as available, so that all aspects of the study's subject are addressed. The categories resulting from the thematic analysis have the following titles, as these titles are used in the sub-sections of section 2.4: Economic diversification, governmental support, culture, social groups, organisational practices (stakeholders, management of change, service quality, sustainability, human resource management) and legal environment. Each of these categories is discussed by referring to the material of the reviewed articles involved as well as to additional literature, so that the quality of critical analysis is secured. The discussion on the results of the review is supported by relevant theory, as presented in this chapter. In the conclusion section of the chapter, the potential of the reviewed articles to cover the study's themes and the gaps in the literature are discussed.

2.3 Themes Resulting from Meta-Analysis

2.3.1 The link between tourism and the economy

In any country, economic progress cannot be achieved without securing fiscal sustainability. The discussions presented by Al-Kawaz (2005) and El-Garaihy (2013) show the extent of the importance of tourism to economic development, and are therefore relevant to this study. Al-Kawaz (2005) identifies the importance of adopting a respective decision model to ensure fiscal sustainability in Saudi Arabia, as such model is also applicable in the tourism sector. Such sustainability is measured by various indicators, which are found plausible in the context of Saudi business tourism. In addition, it has become important to expand the horizons of economic diversification for the Kingdom despite the fact that it is an oil-dependent economy (El-Garaihy, 2013). Tourism is a sustainable alternative with the potential of replacing oil as the main source of income for the Kingdom. The rapid growth in tourism and its future potential makes tourism an important source of income for the economy .

Furthermore, Abdullah (2011) points out that the evaluation of the current state of business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia is rather promising, saved for a few restrictions currently in place in Saudi Arabia. In this context, it can be indicated that the prospects of commencing business conference activities in Saudi Arabia might be limited to a certain extent (Ageli, 2013). At the same time, Abdullah (2011) recognises the possibilities for Saudi Arabia to develop different sources of employment, which might expand the potential of the country to enhance its business conference tourism sector. The fact that the Kingdom joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2005 indicates that it is committed to the goals of liberalisation of its markets, as this is perceived

as a solid step towards opening up the economy to positive Western business influences (Ali, 2010). In addition, such a fact is closely linked to the creation of adequate investment and business opportunities that are likely to change the image of Saudi Arabia in the international tourism sector. Moreover, the increased importance of conference tourism as part of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector is reflected by the participation of the country's Exhibition and Convention Bureau in IMEX 2017, Frankfurt (ITCM, 2017). The Bureau was formed in 2013 with an aim of supporting the growth of The Kingdom's tourism industry (ITCM, 2017). These links clearly support Abdullah's (2011) assertion about the flourishing state of business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia.

It is important to note that the development of international conference tourism in Saudi Arabia is seen as a strategy to comply with the current domestic and global aspects of the tourism field. Irrespective of the challenges present at the respective sector, Saudi Arabia organisations are on the right course for developing competitive tourist products and services to address the evolving needs of clients (Abdullah, 2011). New markets are constantly supported by the growing popularity of international business conferences, as Saudi Arabia plays a key role in providing flexible opportunities for investors from all over the world. It is important the country takes the chance to make a significant impact on the business tourism sector. This would result in facilitating the image of the Kingdom, as many individuals would rethink and reassess the tourism possibilities provided by the country (Ageli, 2013). Saudi Arabia has the potential of creating an environment that would facilitate business tourism despite its cultural differences with the Western world. This discussion provides an insight into the measures that the Kingdom has pursued in order to overcome the cultural differences prevailing between Saudi Arabia and other regions, which only attests to the ubiquitous nature of business tourism in the Kingdom.

According to the above, the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia is intended to enhance the stability of the national economy as well as to reduce the Kingdom's economic dependency on the oil sector. Could tourism respond to the above expectations and support economic development in Saudi Arabia? This issue would be effectively addressed by referring to the current performance of the country's tourism sector and the involvement of the sector in the development of the Saudi Arabian economy. It would be also necessary to check the value of the tourism sector as a tool of economic growth in the global market and the sector's trend worldwide. In Ohlan's (2017) article, the co-integration of tourism and economic development is highlighted, along with the necessity of promoting policies to attract more international tourists. Moreover, Henderson (2011) asserts that Saudi Arabia, being a semi-developed country, has consistently placed itself in a position where it takes full advantage of the tourism industry. With the dwindling income from oil and as the Kingdom engages in plans to diversify its economy with the Vision 2030 project, the tourism

industry presents it with an opportunity to generate more income. It should be noted that Saudi Arabia has previously paid insufficient attention to developing a relevant tourism infrastructure based on social, political and economic factors. Business and conference travel represented approximately 17% of spending in the country (Al-Kawaz, 2005). Yet the tourism sector has extensively progressed in Saudi Arabia, becoming the third largest industry after the energy and manufacturing sectors. In 2016, the contribution of the travel and tourism sector to its GDP reached 10.2%, while for 2017; the relevant increase was estimated at 6.4% (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). A prediction was made in 2006 that between 2007 and 2017, the contribution of the sector to the country's GDP would have been between 4.7% and 11.1% (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). At the same time, in 2016, the internal trips of tourists in Saudi Arabia increased by 2.3% (Hotel & Tourism, 2017). Particular attention should be given to the fact that domestic trips represent the high majority of tourism trips in Saudi Arabia; indeed, in 2016, the domestic trips in the Kingdom reached 49.9 million, up from 46.5 million in 2015 (MAS Centre, 2016a). By comparison, the inbound trips were estimated at 19.1 million in 2016, up from 18 million in 2015, and the outbound trips were 21 million in 2016, up from 20.8 million in 2015 (MAS Centre, 2016a). It may be observed that an increasing trend is arising in travel tourism in the Kingdom, which is a positive indication for the sector.

In general, there exists a direct relationship between business tourism and national economy (Henderson, 2011). Business tourism promotes national industry and manpower, and enhances communication, in addition to being a major creator of both temporary and permanent jobs in the service sector. As such it is extremely important that Saudi organisations recognise the importance of business tourism and then position themselves strategically in order to be able to benefit from it (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016). It should be noted though that the contribution of foreign tourism to the country's GDP is 54%, higher than that of domestic tourism, which has been estimated to 46% (JEG, 2016). Moreover, Saudi Arabia benefits from its historical, religious, and heritage attractions, as shown by its 15.8% share of the total international tourism in the Middle East region (Al Faris & Soto, 2016). It can therefore be noted that despite the prevailing cultural distance between Saudi Arabia and the Western world, the Kingdom is still able to turn its diverse culture into historical, religious, and heritage attractions.

Saudi Arabia's business tourism is on the rise because of extensive investments in construction, oil and gas industries (Townsend, 2016). In any case, the tourism industry has developed substantially along with other industries in the Saudi Arabian economic sector, even though the respective industry has not been properly standardised (Al-Kawaz, 2005). Yousif and

Bakr (2017) argue that the effects of the tourism industry on Saudi Arabia's economy are both direct and indirect: the direct effects refer to the income of the country from tourism activities, such as travel and hotel-booking, while the indirect effects refer to the benefits for sectors dependent on tourism, such as the construction and manufacturing sectors.

Despite the efforts made for the development of the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia, the growth of the sector is rather slow. The Kingdom may further develop its tourism sector by offering a well-researched, reliable plan of action focused on the industry, targeting both domestic residents and expatriates living in Saudi Arabia (Ali, 2010). The 49,000 new hotels that are going to be incorporated into the country's hospitality industry in the near future could effectively support the growth of the travel sector; such support is valuable if considering that by 2020 the arrivals of tourists in Saudi Arabia are expected to reach 20 million (Oxford Business Group, 2016; Simpson, 2016).

In the global market, the performance of the tourism sector seems to be impressive, enhancing the value of the sector for economic growth at the national level. Indeed, the literature available in this field indicates that the global tourism industry has experienced growth and diversification to become one of the fastest growing industries worldwide. According to Zuelow (2015) there is a close link between modern tourism and development as new tourist destinations continue to emerge, making the tourism industry an important factor for facilitating socio-economic development. Sharpley and Telfer (2015) support this by asserting that the volume of modern day tourism has equalled or even surpassed that of automobiles, oil exports or food products. Developing countries have persistently tried to take advantage of this important trend, guided by the positive economic consequences implied by global tourism. It has been identified that one of the preconditions for success in this industry sector is diversification of travel and tourism activities, especially in countries of the Middle East (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012).

2.3.2 Government support

The tourism industry is an important sector for the business, cultural, and social development of Saudi Arabia. As a tourism destination, Saudi Arabia is highly popular for its 'archaeological sites and its diving facilities' (Stankati, 2016); the local government has tried to enhance the sector's performance by focusing on different aspects of tourism, especially business and conference tourism (Stankati, 2016). In 2016, the government of Saudi Arabia published Vision 2030, a document showing the goals of the country in regard to its economy and its society up to 2030 (Oxford Business Group, 2016). The Vision 2030 serves as a blanket term that describes the things that the Kingdom wants to pursue for its economic reinvention and diversification. This is

from being an oil-dependent economy to becoming a state capitalist economy. The Vision 2030 was therefore conceptualised as a way of creating an economic roadmap for the Kingdom's future and for establishing an institutional capability to achieve its ambitious goals (Cowan, 2018). With the dwindling incomes from oil and as the Kingdom engages plans to diversify its economy with the Vision 2030 project, the tourism industry presents it with an opportunity to generate more income. According to the specific document, the development of the travel and tourism sector in Saudi Arabia will be supported by the following initiatives: reductions in visa restrictions, empowerment of business travel/ tourism, and the improvement of the sector's infrastructure (Oxford Business Group, 2016). The Saudi Arabia government intends to spend substantial amounts to stimulate the development of business tourism. The business tourism policy works in the hospitality industry, as well as in the education and health sectors in Saudi Arabia, due to restricted visa considerations (Graetz & Smith, 2010). Researchers have indicated that the government of Saudi Arabia has been engaged in various initiatives to support tourism (Graetz & Smith, 2010). The Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) aims to help businesses by deregulating the syndication position of Saudi Arabia Airlines, and welcoming neighbourhood and outside aerial transports to work in the country. It likewise intensely advances nearby destinations and regular urban cities, such as Abha, for domestic tourism. These changes will benefit the tourism sector owing to the close connection between the aviation industry and the tourism industry. On the other hand, the use of conventional measures in the domain of Saudi business tourism might appear inappropriate in the long term, considering the constant technological advancements pursued by oil-rich countries. As such, there is need for the government to adopt modern ways of improving the experience of tourists in terms of hospitality, communication and travel in order to develop and maintain a competitive advantage over the other tourist destinations in the region.

2.3.3 Culture

The literature demonstrates that tourism reflects elements of interaction amongst people coming from various cultural backgrounds. The binary relationship between tourism and culture has been reflected in the formation of rather positive attitudes towards the entire hospitality industry, which has turned out to be attractive to people due to the aspect of high quality attached to services offered (Cohen, 2010). A strong sense of interaction amongst different communities has been evident in the hospitality industry; thereby it acquired an experiential marketing basis or platform through which customers can freely express their thoughts and feelings. Service organisations are committed to providing various flexible services to customers, as indicated in research (Kandampully, 2001). The importance of different cultural values has been reflected in various

areas of life, including lifestyle, activities, appearance, value judgements, cultural beliefs, and building relationships, among others (Wilson & Ypeij, 2012). Exploring the traveller's experience through the lens of Hofstede's theory of cultural differences is a significant part of this study, in order to provide an adequate explanation of the interrelations between cultural identity, travel experience and tourism. Hofstede *et al.* (2010) explain national culture as the norms and values shared by people from a specific nation, distinguishing it from other nations. Moreover, the shared learned beliefs, values, and norms of the particular culture are believed to be the influencing factors that affect how organisations operate within a cultural setting (Hofstede, 1984).

2.3.3.1 Hofstede's theory applied to tourism in Saudi Arabia

Hofstede's (1984) theory of culture is linked to tourism and has been widely studied. The applicability of Hofstede's (1984) framework for cultural differences between Western and Eastern tourists is evident in the present study (Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010). Travel behaviours and experiences can be adequately explained within the dimensions of this framework, as it allows individuals to focus on the various cultural aspects that form an essential part of tourists' perceptions of a certain destination (Schein, 2010).

Hofstede's theory involves six cultural dimensions, which are power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term/short-term orientations, and the indulgence-restraint dimension (Dellner, 2014; Hofstede, 1984). Differences between Western and Eastern tourists have been consistently outlined in the research because the idea is to demonstrate how different individuals have different opinions and perspectives related to their own experience of tourism (Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010). Power distance relates to the extent of interactions and relationships in society. A high score for power distance indicates an unequal distribution of power in various social hierarchies, whilst a low score indicates the opposite (Delener, 2017). Societies with a high power distance are also inclined to allow considerable differences in wealth, prestige and power (Kuzluvan, 2003). Saudi Arabia is a country with high power distance (Alexander *et al.*, 2017), which means that power is unequally distributed within the Kingdom's social hierarchical continuum. Kuzluvan (2003) mentions that tourism workers in cultures with high power have been observed to show great emotional displays in order to sell tourists products. Based on this assertion, it may be inferred that the same is taking place in the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia. Hofstede's theory provides us with an understanding of how Saudis deal with tourism using the lens of power distance. It provides a culture-based consideration of how Saudis can be generally examined as tourists in relation to their general regard for power,

wealth and prestige. Hence, the power distance dimension can be used by tourism and hospitality providers to improve their tourism approaches and promotions in Saudi Arabia.

Uncertainty avoidance refers instead to people's perceptions of apparent threats and risks brought about by ambiguous circumstances (Buafai & Khunon, 2016). It pertains to the extent of a society's tolerance for uncertainty (Dellner, 2014). In their study, Buafai and Khunon (2016) found a significant relationship between tourist behaviour and uncertainty avoidance. People with a high level of uncertainty avoidance appear to obtain travel information from friends and relatives, whilst those with a low level of uncertainty avoidance tend to obtain such information from the Internet or print media. Saudi Arabia is found to have high uncertainty avoidance (Bush & Coleman, 2000).

Based on this information, one may conclude that Saudis tend to obtain information from friends and family rather than from online sources or travel magazines when planning a business trip. This is, however, not to say that those with high uncertainty avoidance tend to be satisfied with the event they are attending; Kozak (2001) found no relationship between uncertainty avoidance and tourist satisfaction when examining sporting events. Although Hofstede's theory is clear according to each country's uncertainty avoidance, there are some aspects of the applicability of the theory that need further investigation, such as that suggested by Kozak (2001), where uncertainty avoidance is correlated against tourist satisfaction. What is certain is that the theory provides a clearer understanding of how Saudis approach tourism based on their underlying culture.

Meanwhile, the individualism-collectivism dimension refers to a person's level of attachment to his/her family, friends, and other groups. Individualism refers to a preference for a loosely-knit social setting where people are assumed to be more concerned with themselves alone and their immediate families. In contrast, collectivism indicates a preference for a tightly-knit setting where people are expected to take care of their relatives or members of a specific in-group (Hofstede, 1984; Moore, 2002). Eastern people tend to be more collectivistic than Western people (Krassner *et al.*, 2017). The research focus has concentrated on individualistic versus collectivistic cultures, as both cultural systems represent the application of different principles, standards and values (Cohen, 2010). Saudi Arabia's score in this dimension shows that it is a collectivist country (Abadeer, 2015). Buafai and Khunon (2016) state that tourists with a high score on the individualism-collectivism index are likely to be individualistic, which means that they have no strong attachment to their society or groups. However, this is not the case with Saudi Arabia; instead, Saudis are socially attached to their society and the social groups to which they belong because of their collectivist culture. With regard to tourism, the high level of collectivism has tended

to lead Saudi tourists to demonstrate group-orientated behaviour with a strong commitment to the welfare of their in-groups (e.g. family, relatives, and friends) but not to out-groups (Arlt, 2006).

What can be drawn from this is that Saudi people whose family members or friends are travelling abroad will be expected to demonstrate commitment to their welfare and will give important information about travelling to the best of their ability. Hence, an implication of this for the tourism sector is that tourism and hospitality providers may offer promotions that take into account the views of families and friends: the collectivist culture of Saudis is even reflected in the tourist industry. This reliance on family and friends, rather than on online or print information, regarding tourism is also explained by Aldraehim (2013), in that collectivist cultures such as Saudi Arabia are less likely to use technology for this purpose. While people in individualist societies tend to express their viewpoints with the help of technology, collectivist societies tend not to use available technology to air their opinions or to search for information. Khashman (2014) claims that collectivist cultures place high importance on physical conditions, skills, and the intrinsic rewards of mastery.

Indeed, it has been found that tourists' behaviour is considerably associated with the uncertainty avoidance dimension. For example, Manrai and Manrai (2011) found that the behaviour of tourists before, during, and after a trip differed significantly in relation to the application of Hofstede's theory. The authors found three kinds of behavioural patterns pertaining to travel behaviours: social interaction, risk propensities, and collectivity direction. The pervading cultural values relating to social interaction are masculinity-femininity, individualism-collectivism, and power distance. These three dimensions operate either independently or in pairs. On the other hand, risk propensities are associated with the utilisation of travel products during travel, whilst collectivity direction is associated with the build up of travel preferences before travelling. Moreover, uncertainty avoidance and individualism-collectivism have an interactive effect and are related to both risk propensities and collectivity direction. The intention of uncertainty avoidance for risk propensities ascertains the outcome of individualism-collectivism, whilst the opposite is true for collectivity direction, wherein the outcome of uncertainty avoidance is ascertained by the individualism-collectivism dimension. This discussion is important in investigating business tourism in Saudi Arabia to an in-depth level.

The masculinity-femininity index pertains to the dynamics of gender power in a particular society (Delener, 2017). It also refers to the extent to which a society places emphasis on achievement or nurture (Dellner, 2014). People in Western societies experience more equality of gender rights than people in Eastern societies, where males are generally given more power than

females. People with a high masculinity-femininity index place emphasis on competition and achievement, whilst those with low index give more value to quality of life (Van den Bos *et al.*, 2010). Al Dabal (2001) found that Saudi Arabia has the highest masculinity score amongst the Arab countries. This would mean that Saudis tend to pay more attention to competition, achievement, and success, over quality of life. What can be drawn from this in relation to tourism is that people who travel for business-related activities do so not for leisure as their main motive, but for work and achievement. Since Saudis have high masculinity, the same conclusion can be applied to them. Based on this, Hofstede's theory provides a relevant way to assess a country's general view of masculinity and femininity, which the tourism sector can utilise through tourism promotions.

A further dimension, long-term orientation, pertains to a focus on the future and a willingness to delay short-term success or emotional gratification. The opposite of this is short-term orientation (Dellner, 2014; Hofstede, 1984; Moore, 2002). A high score in long-term orientation means that the person focuses more on the future and tries to achieve their goals by perseverance and working hard (Cavusgil *et al.*, 2013). A low score in long-term orientation indicates that the person relies on himself/herself rather than on some external forces or groups; they also respect tradition and focus more on the past and the present rather than on the future (Buafai & Khunon, 2016). Saudi Arabia is a short-term oriented culture, which means that for its people, the immediacy of outcomes and goal-achievement is of high importance (Alexander *et al.*, 2017). With regard to tourism, the issue of the tourist's temporary ownership of a hotel room or an airline seat corresponds to short-term orientation. The short-term orientation of tourism is also seen in the seasonal and cyclical character of the business (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). Koc (2017) explains that a traveler with a long-term orientation may opt for a long-term relationship with a tour agency compared to a traveller with a short-term orientation who tends to seek immediate gratification. Taking on board this point of view, tourism and hospitality providers in Saudi Arabia should concentrate on how they can obtain Saudi tourists' loyalty, not based on establishing meaningful and lasting relationships with them, but on how to significantly engage them in immediately gratifying their needs or preference for a good tourism service.

Irrespective of the precise culture type, it is apparent that customers are naturally attracted to the culture providing them with multiple options to expand their tourism experience; therefore, dimensions of service quality are most important. Hofstede's indulgence-restraint paradigm is congruent with this premise. This paradigm, which was an addition to the original five dimensions of culture, explains that indulgence is when people tend to fulfil their natural desires freely and enjoy their lives. Restraint, on the other hand, refers to a tendency of people to regard life's natural

desires and enjoyment as ones that should be regulated strictly by social norms (Koc, 2017). A culture that allows fulfilling people's basic and natural desires through service quality can be analysed as having a high degree of indulgence over restraint. Amer and Awad (2016) stressed that Saudi Arabia has a mid-scale (52%) score for the indulgence-restraint dimension, indicating moderation. This has a relevant implication for tourism in the Kingdom with regard to service quality and customer satisfaction.

In this paper, Hofstede's theory has served as a useful avenue for thoroughly examining the cultural dimensions of Saudi Arabia and the significance of these dimensions to tourism. However, Mcsweeney (2002) critiqued Hofstede's theory by stating that its characterisation of culture is limited – that it is confined within the territory of states, and that it has methodological flaws. He describes the theory's identification claims as being fundamentally defective and the ascriptions of national level actions to national cultures as a weak predictor. He further argues that if the objective is to understand national cultures, then what should be emphasised is the richness and differences of national practices rather than the assumed uniformity of cultures and the predetermined "national cultural cause" (Mcsweeney, 2002, p. 109). However, it may be judicious to assess whether the Hofstede reference is necessary and to what extent its ideas are indeed significant to the present research. Despite the criticisms posed by Mcsweeney (2002), the theory can still be utilised in tourism management according to what has been discussed earlier for each of its cultural dimensions, as long as it is used to discuss general patterns in the industry, rather than to predict the behaviour of individuals.

It can be argued that Hofstede's discussion of cultural dimensions is a fitting one with regard to this current research, as it allows a further understanding of the culture of the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia, and several of the dimensions are usefully indicative of the opportunities and challenges of the society's relationship with tourism, although some scholars in the management literature have criticised Hofstede's theory of cultural differences (Yukl, 2012).

These criticisms are (Needle, 2010):

(1) The source of Hofstede's data was an attitude survey for a company-sponsored project and these data were merely re-interpreted.

(2) Hofstede's culture-based differences might have had other causes. Culture was only pinpointed as a causal factor because of a failure to cite other explanations.

(3) Hofstede's model is criticised for its limited number of variables. Other variables, such as were considered in the GLOBE project, should have been included.

(4) The conclusions made on cultural dimensions were generated from a limited sample and from a single company (IBM).

(5) Hofstede overemphasised the cultural similarities of IBM in various countries, and these similarities, rather than those attributed to national cultures, were reflected in the questionnaire.

Hence, although Hofstede has provided valuable ideas about the dynamics of cross-cultural relationships, his work has been criticised by academics, which discredit his work in part or in whole. However, overall, there are in fact more scholars who support Hofstede's cultural theory than don't (Jones, 2007), and treated as a guide rather than a fixed truth, it can be of considerable value to research.

2.3.3.2 Culture-based decision making in tourism

Altareri (2016) showed the criteria used by "Muslims and non-Muslims" for deciding whether to visit Saudi Arabia in the context of MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions). The first important issue highlighted in the study is that business-related tourism can have many aspects. The second issue, equally critical, is that people with different cultural backgrounds are likely to use different criteria for choosing destinations for tourism purposes. Altareri (2016) used a survey amongst participants in 10 MICE events held in Saudi Arabia from November 2014 to February 2015; the final sample was extensive, including 493 participants (Altareri, 2016: III). The survey revealed the important differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in regard to their perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a MICE tourism destination. More specifically, the people of the first group, Muslims, are likely to consider Saudi Arabia as an ideal MICE tourism destination based on the fact that the country is close to their culture and traditions. By contrast, non-Muslims tend to perceive the country a very good MICE tourism destination due to its high performance in terms of "safety, cleanliness and friendly environment" (Altareri, 2016, p. 182). Still, the motivation of both groups to visit Saudi Arabia as a MICE tourism destination and their attitudes towards the country present several similarities: both groups would be motivated to visit Saudi Arabia for MICE tourism purposes, mostly for "ensuring professional development" (Altareri, 2016, p. 182). Additionally, the attitudes of both groups in regard to the performance of Saudi Arabia as a MICE tourism destination are similar: both groups noted that the country is characterised by a "strong sense of community, full support to visitors and high quality of services", characteristics that make the country an ideal MICE tourism destination (Altareri, 2016:182-283). It can be inferred from the above that culture can be an important factor for choosing a MICE tourism destination, and it would be worth investigating the extent of the power of culture in influencing the popularity of a region as a MICE tourism destination.

In a research by Bellini (2007), the focus is on the relevant characteristics of culture that are properly translated into local communities, as the basic idea is to exchange important information amongst different participants in relation to cultural interactions. Therefore, the tourist's cultural perspectives in tourism experience management can provide a better understanding of the dimensions of quality and unique experience in the field of business and conference tourism (Cohen, 2010). As a result, the field of destination management has been enriched due to the inclusion of different attractive destinations, as this aspect is closely linked to increasing competitiveness of hospitality organisations as well (Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010). As mentioned earlier, according to Hofstede's theory, a high indulgence score over restraint indicates a traveller's preference for good service quality (Koc, 2017). Bellini's (2007) study can be further understood on this basis.

Furthermore, the impact of culture on tourism is verified through the following fact: the performance of the tourism sector, as part of a country's economy, has been often related to the potential of the sector to secure self-fulfilment. In fact, the importance of self-fulfilment emerges as an indicator of adequate tourist experiences. In the context of Western cultures, self-fulfilment is positively associated with visiting the destination again. An increased value of self-fulfilment implies a proper level of content and comfort related to experiencing a particular tourist destination (Schein, 2010). Tourist excitement and enthusiasm to visit particular places depend on the implementation of appropriate marketing and management strategies introduced by service organisations in the hospitality industry (Kumar *et al.*, 2018). The sense of accomplishment also appears a significant indicator of Western individuals' determination to visit a certain destination (Cohen, 2010). The researcher points out that a high level of accomplishment means greater likelihood of revisiting the destination. The aspect of security/ safety for Western cultures implies that representatives from these countries do not tend to moderate the relationship between security/ safety and revisiting the destination.

For representatives of Eastern cultures, revisiting a particular tourist destination does not suggest moderation of the relationship between sense of belonging and visiting the location again. The same statement is relevant for the aspect of fun and enjoyment for Eastern tourists (Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010). When it comes to the importance of maintaining a warm relationship with locals/ tourists, representatives from Eastern cultures tend to express rather positive views. However, some of the participants in the study are more likely to demonstrate conservative views regarding cultural differences, as this could be explained with the respective culture to which they belong (Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010). Yet when the warm relationship with locals/ tourists

intensifies, this eventually leads to the likelihood of revisiting the tourist destination. For instance, with social media, people are able to easily share their experiences about a certain destination and such information spreads very fast. Therefore, it is extremely important to ensure that the tourists get positive experiences so that they not only return but also influence the others to visit as well.

The dimension of self-fulfilment does not appear to be a very important indicator of Eastern tourists' preferences in terms of travelling to a new or a previously visited destination. In this sense, visiting the destination previously cannot moderate the relationship between self-fulfilment and the desire to visit that location again (Cohen, 2010). Excitement also plays an essential role in determining Eastern tourists' willingness to revisit a certain location. Likewise, the sense of accomplishment is found to be irrelevant for Eastern individuals to consider visiting a tourist destination again (Yukl, 2012). Eventually, previous visits to a specific location by Eastern tourists do not seem to moderate the relationship between security/ safety and revisiting the destination.

The cultural differences explored in this study imply the strong impact of culture on the formation of certain expectations, as well as on quality perceptions of the tourism experience (Yukl, 2012). It appears that tourists coming from Western countries demonstrate a better knowledge and awareness of the specificity of their tourist needs and expectations compared to tourists from Eastern countries (Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010). In an attempt to compare Western and Eastern cultural experiences of tourists, it is important to mention that biased attitude should be avoided at its best. The way people perceive others plays a crucial role in the formation of perceptions about tourist destinations.

Based on the results of the study, significant conclusions can be presented regarding the role of cultural identity and travel experience in tourism management. For instance, representatives from Western countries tend to live in space and demonstrate value of different activities, whereas Eastern tourists are more likely to live in time and value rest (Cohen, 2010). In addition, Western cultures emerge as assertive versus the contemplative aspects of Eastern cultures (Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010). While Western tourists are more inclined towards seeking change in their tourist experiences, Eastern tourists accept their reality as what it is.

It is apparent that tourists' thoughts, beliefs and perceptions reflect their cultural backgrounds and values. One of the inferences demonstrated in this study is the strong association between the tourist's expectations and perceptions and their culture (Schein, 2010). Thus, the field of tourism management demonstrates its persistent concerns about the needs and expectations of both Western and Eastern tourists in order to provide them with quality tourist

experiences (Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010). The needs and expectations of tourists vary, but the most important aspect is to meet their basic needs for service quality in the respective industry sector. When such needs are met, this can definitely ensure positive tourist perceptions.

As it is evident from the present study, different individuals tend to define and conceptualize culture and major cultural values in various ways. From the perspective of implicit culture, the participants in the study appear to represent their distinct thoughts, beliefs and actions regarding specific tourist experiences (Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010). In fact, the individuals participating in the study demonstrate the basic idea that culture is a complex mental process, as identified by Hofstede (Hofstede, 1984; Schein, 2010).

Dimensions of explicit cultural implications have been introduced in order to bring the attention of the audience to essential aspects of culture that are interrelated with tourist expectations for quality (Kumar, 2018). The motivation of people's behaviour differs based on their dominant cultural values as pertaining to contemporary tourism (Cohen, 2010). The impact of specific cultural values has been demonstrated as an essential reason to explain the tendency of Western and Eastern tourists to make different decisions.

2.3.4 Social groups

As pointed out in research by Ali (2010), included in the meta-analysis presented in this literature review, the management of MNC-government negotiations in Saudi Arabia is closely linked to the essential role of political elites in the country. In this way, it can be argued that politics and religion are important in determining particular tourism tendencies in the Kingdom. However, the role of Saudi political elites is related to the impact produced by local businesses, which are oriented towards the redefinition of the tourism potential of the country (El-Garaihy, 2013). Yet it has been identified that Saudi organisations fail to recognise the importance of business tourism, which can be developed into completely new dimensions to promote issues of sustainability and a significant competitive advantage. However, this propensity is changing, as exemplified by one Saudi company which became a recipient of the "Best Tour Operator award at the Excellence in Tourism Award under the Saudi Travel and Tourism Investment Market (STIMM) in 2011" (Burton, 2016:140). The STIMM was sponsored by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA). Burton stated that in his interview with the award's recipient, the recipient was optimistic of the future prospects of the tourism industry in the Kingdom. The present value of Saudi Arabia's travel and tourism industry is placed at USD \$45.3 billion, and a strong long-term growth is foreseen, considering the planned construction in the Kingdom. The growth of the Saudi market involves the important role played by small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In 2017, Saudi Arabia's GDP was placed at USD \$683.83 billion, representing a GDP value of 1.10% of the global

economy (Trading Economics, 2018). Travel and tourism made up 34% of Saudi Arabia's total GDP, and was predicted to increase by 3.7% in 2018 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018).

2.3.5 Organisational practices

This section covers subtopics on stakeholders, change management, service quality, sustainability, and human resource management within the framework of tourism. These topics are being covered because discussing them can provide a more comprehensive view of tourism from different aspects. It is important to identify and discuss the stakeholders in tourism development because doing so will highlight the significance of stakeholder involvement in its development (Abdulla, 2013). Change management is also tackled here, because the field of tourism development is characterised by change, and is based on seasonality. Service quality should be covered because the field of tourism is inherently service-based. Sustainability is considered because it will enable the study to look at how tourist businesses have been trying to lower their impact on the environment (Jenkins and Schroder, 2013). Furthermore, human resource management is a relevant topic because it is imperative to look at how tourism organisations are recruiting and retaining talent (Lee-Ross & Pryce, 2010).

2.3.5.1 Stakeholders

In order to achieve their objectives, organisations need to ensure quality in communication with their stakeholders. Based on this view, Jankal (2014) suggested the use of IT systems for the improvement of communication between organisations and their stakeholders. The above study focuses especially on employees and customers. According to Jankal (2014) organisational performance can benefit significantly from the use of communication software available to employees and customers. Moreover, Jankal (2014) noted that the management of customer relationship within each organisation should be based on a process management approach. This approach requires an emphasis on customers' needs and expectations (Jankal, 2014). However, this approach can be criticised for following reason: employees and other stakeholders should be supported by the organisation equally with employees at high levels of the organisational hierarchy, such as managers, directors and partners (Jankal, 2014). Horner and Swarbrooke (2016) explain that the role of stakeholders is critical in organisational success. In the above study, the tourism industry is used as the basis for exploring the characteristics of consumer behaviour. Horner and Swarbrooke (2016) further suggest that in the context of the modern market it is quite difficult for firms to keep their competitiveness. A lack of effective communication with clients is considered as an example for highlighting the above issue. It should be noted that stakeholders' interests are exposed to the following risks: exposure to internal/organisational conflicts and

changing external environments. In such environments it would be quite difficult to define stakeholders' interests with accuracy (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2016).

2.3.5.2 Management of change

In line with the information represented in the meta-analysis Table, it has been argued that a distinct approach to organisational change, which is identified as a linear method, may have critical implications (Graetz & Smith, 2010). In fact, the examination of various organisational change philosophies, as linked to the field of business tourism in Saudi Arabia, is found useful in demonstrating a coherent view of the strengths and challenges encountered by local tourist organisations. As a result, it appears that the adoption of a rational decision model may produce positive outcomes to enhance the business tourism potential of the country (Ageli, 2013). According to the rational decision model, decisions should be made based on facts and analysis. The model follows each step at a time, from problem identification to generation of solutions (Mowforth & Munt, 2015). As such, it is a fact-based model that the organisations can adopt in generating the desired outcomes. The top management officials within tourism organisations in the Saudi Arabia are expected to address the problems of complacency and inertia in order to move their enterprises in the right direction.

Several organisations in Saudi Arabia are likely to manage change by employing a change communication platform; in the tourism sector, this platform could facilitate change receptivity amongst major players (Farah & Brown, 2007). It is important to note that change receptivity emerges as a significant factor contributing to the effectiveness of organisational change strategies. The latter are considered important for tourist organisations to ensure a high level of service quality management for clients (Andrews & Playfoot, 2015). At the same time, this concept is associated with sufficient openness and flexibility in terms of applicability in various business and cultural contexts across Saudi Arabia. It is essential to demonstrate smooth patterns of communication with all stakeholders in the business tourism field in the Saudi Arabia as part of the overall concept of service quality management. In turn, this will be reflected in the attraction of many clients who may consider the benefits of participating in business tourism meetings in the country (Ageli, 2013).

2.3.5.3 Service quality

Service quality is an important concept in in business tourism, which will be tackled in this section. Scholars have identified that service quality focuses on two main factors, outlined as material quality and interactive quality, emphasising different outputs provided by tourist and service organisations in the country (Graetz & Smith, 2010; Nilanjan, 2015). Service quality management

is the process of managing the quality of a service based on the requirements of the customer (Sparks *et al.*, 2001). Services play a crucial role in the tourism industry. Quality services enable businesses to retain customers and to attract new ones. According to Serra (2006, p. 26): “A quality service only exists as much as the visitor perceives it to meet their expectations and requirements. It is important therefore to take into account all aspects of the visitor experience, from initial planning through travel, destination information, accommodation to the ‘after-sales’”. Blazquez *et al.*(2012) note that the tourism market has grown to be more competitive than in previous years, owing to the emergence of new tourist destinations and changes in tourists’ roles, where their preference is towards individualised experiences. All of these points have contributed to turning tourism into one of the fastest evolving industries in recent years. Casedesus *et al.* (2010) state that as the tourism sector continues to pay attention to the importance of quality management, it likewise becomes common for this sector to implement standardised quality management systems. They point out that, currently, tourist organisations continue to adopt ISO 9001 and ISO 14001, thereby signaling what is likely to take place in the tourism sector as a whole from a global perspective. ISO 9001 refers to the international quality management standard, requiring an organisation to maintain its quality in order to be certified (Inkson & Minnaert, 2012). ISO 14001 refers to the international standard that an organisation should maintain in order to have an effective environmental management system (Choi, 2017). Choi (2017) concludes that tourism management will continue to adopt standardised quality management in the coming years.

Customers expect a very high level of service from the tourism industry. Competition is intense and therefore service quality has become an important dimension in terms of adding value (Kandampully *et al.* 2001). Hence, managing service quality is a very important area for businesses operating in the tourist industry. Managers need to identify crucial aspects of service quality, measure performance, and evaluate their contribution to profits and customer retention. Research has shown that customer satisfaction, retention and word-of-mouth advertising is very effective in the travel and tourism industry. The aim should be to exceed customer expectations, continuously improve quality, regularly train employees, empower service-oriented employees, research best practices via benchmarking, and achieve quality accreditations such as ISO (Kapiki, 2012). It should be noted though that the expectations of customers with regard to service quality are not standardised (Uzunboylu, 2016), a fact that which should be taken into consideration by policy makers in Saudi Arabia.

Kapiki (2012) clarifies how service quality management is carried out in the tourism industry, including by consistently delivering products and services based on the expectations and

requirements of the customer. Service quality management is also considered one of the major challenges in tourism management, being an important factor for success within the competitive global tourism and hospitality industry. The outcomes of Kapiki's (2012) survey place an emphasis on quality of service; customer retention by exceeding guests' expectations; incessant quality improvement; and regular training of staff, amongst others. On a similar note, value creation through customer service is clearly seen in the hotel business, which is facing intense competition. Hotels offer various amenities to add value and thus attract customers. Free amenities are found to be an important element in guests' decision to decide to stay in a hotel (Kandampully *et al.*, 2003). This is a clear example of the effort made to ensure service quality mentioned by Kapiki (2012) and Sparks *et al.* (2001).

From the perspective of tourism development, it is necessary for a country to have steady economic growth (Frahm & Brown, 2007). For tourism, consumers are also likely to check the parameters of service quality provided by companies, as this dimension tends to increase customer satisfaction. It can be stated that both exogenous and market factors play an important role in shaping the growth of the tourism industry. Major exogenous factors relate to economic and monetary development, demographic elements, social change, culture and norms, technological development, transport infrastructure development, and trading development, as these factors contribute towards adequately shaping the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia (Frahm & Brown, 2007).

In the Kingdom, services are generally provided to customers within specific facilities to satisfy their evolving needs (Ageli, 2013). There are only a limited number of professionally qualified event managers working in Saudi Arabia. Most event organisers therefore rely in practice on their acquired expertise, rather than drawing on professional qualifications. This leads to poor quality in connection to sustainability practices in the tourism industry (Almuhrzi *et al.*, 2017). Sohail and Jang (2017) noted the important link between service quality and employee satisfaction, which may result in customer satisfaction, in Saudi tourism sector. Every organisation in the Kingdom strives to improve its service to increase the aspect of customer satisfaction. Therefore, the study of service quality management is highlighted to uncover the basic dimensions of service in management, with the idea to train employees to provide adequate services to the customers, so as to satisfy their expectations. Researchers have focused on the issues of measuring service management quality and elements of administration quality in the tourism industry (Salazar *et al.*, 2010). It is important to note that Saudi Arabia has put up 63

tourism schools which are managed by American, Canadian, and Australian institutions to ensure quality education in its tourism sector (Almuhzzi *et al.*, 2017).

Service quality seems to play a critical role in the development of the tourism industry. Countries such as Saudi Arabia have been rapidly turning into digitally connected societies, with more than 60% web infiltration reached in 2013 (Ageli, 2013). With high web infiltration and a huge young population, travel and tourism organisations have focused on enhancing their online capacity to pull in more clients through energising advancements and providing helpful data. For instance, Nasair and other online offices, or organisations like Flyin.com and Booking.com, have assumed a dynamic responsibility in this respect (Ali, 2010). The model of hospitality service quality, advocated by El-Garaihy (2013), as illustrated in Table 2.1, aims to enable adequate credibility and responsiveness in the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia. The dimensions of repeat purchasing behaviours have been explored in the industry in an attempt to create a foundation for the development of a competitive tourism sector in Saudi Arabia (Ageli, 2013). It has been indicated that the promotion of a sustainable competitive advantage is associated with the use of effective strategies pertaining to marketing and advertising the business tourism potential of the Kingdom. Damanhour's (2016) study provides an evaluation of tourism services in Saudi Arabia and measures the tourists' satisfaction levels. The results state that the tourists have rated excellent satisfaction to some variables; however, there are also some factors which should be paid attention to by the authority.

Ensuring quality is a major challenge for organisational leaders. Still, there are several tools available to organisations for ensuring high performance in regard to quality. Arabia organisations are likely to support quality by focusing on total quality management; amongst these organisations, quality management frameworks such as Six Sigma that focus on the importance of quality service and transactional initiatives, are quite popular (Abdullah, 2011). The lean management approach is another framework used by Arabia organisations for promoting quality. However, the approaches of Six Sigma and lean methodology fail to ensure adequate power and relevant focus in the long term because they may create bureaucracy and rigidity, which can lead to delays and stifle innovation; however, they are still very effective approaches as they enable organisations to rectify inefficiencies in their operations (Ageli, 2013). The main benefit of this approach refers to the fact that it is customer driven, which indicates a solid focus on customisation of services provided to individuals and organisations in the industry.

It has been indicated that organisations have achieved significant progress in recent years with the help of quality assurance tools to ensure that customers have the best quality in the

industry, are satisfied in terms of safety and affordability of prices, and that the company's latest initiatives rest on these principles (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012). Some considerations are still needed in service quality management in relation to the successful launch of companies' SMART (Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time bound) evaluation processes, and with the pointed turndown in buyer concerns about the increase in speed. Therefore, organisations extensively focus on the specificity of the SMART process as well as the promotion of teamwork so that members of the organisation can deal successfully with various customer issues (Salazar *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, the use of the SMART process can improve the company's actions in terms of information implementation, evaluation potential, and customer management.

Other important quality tools utilised by service organisations include Pareto charts and Baldrige awards. A Pareto diagram is a tool that enables an organisation to identify the factors that contribute most to an effect and as such warrant more attention. The Baldrige awards are given by the president of the United States to outstanding organisations annually (Norman *et al.* 2013). Pareto charts are used when executives aim at analysing data about the frequency of problems (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). Professionals in the companies must demonstrate adequate methods of collecting data and record specific categories each time. The quality tool of the Baldrige awards also contributes to enhancing the performance of the organisations at different levels. In fact, the Baldrige awards represent important criteria for performance excellence, and thus it is possible to understand the specificity of performance management within companies in the context of Saudi Arabia (Ageli, 2013). However, the Baldrige approach has been criticised for its emphasis on processes instead of results, even though its award criteria are claimed to be customer-driven. It is also said to be associated with acceptable quality levels (AQL) in ISO 9000. However, the emphasis of the Baldrige criteria is not on AQL but on continuous improvement (Crosby & Reimann, 1991). Crosby and Reimann point out that the Baldrige approach may entice managers to detach themselves from quality programmes; however, other authors see it as having management's commitment to quality as its main focus.

It has been emphasised that a significant objective of service quality management is to maintain a proper management system and corporate culture by embracing the principles of customer satisfaction and product and service innovation. These aspects are usually emphasised when it comes to defining various principles and norms of organisational behaviour (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). Service quality departments in organisations are expected to demonstrate much more concentration on quality assurance of the service before introducing it in the tourism sector of Saudi Arabia, to ensure that they meet the required standards. Therefore, skilled quality managers

can only enhance the mentioned activity. The current management of companies needs to adopt different techniques, such as Six Sigma. The principles that have been promoted are customer focus, continuous improvement, and cooperation (Salazar *et al.*, 2010). Quality assurance indicates that service organisations extensively rely on the potential of people to complete their quality objectives. Moreover, in terms of culture, companies persistently rely on efficiency and productivity. As a result, organisations aim at reducing inventory, identifying certain quality issues, and solving them in a timely manner. It is expected that employees demonstrate adequate teamwork, communication, research and time management skills at all levels of the organisations. For that reason, the companies adopt specific principles related to initiating direct contact with clients, detailed process study, and group skill training opportunities conducted on a regular basis (El-Garaihy, 2013).

These dimensions are put into practice through various approaches, including quality function deployment, control charts, corporate diagrams, and Six Sigma. Although corporate executives tend to address the aspects of service quality management, fundamental assumptions could be appropriate to enhance the role of strategic alliances (Al-Rasheed, 2014). It has been outlined that major service quality management principles in the organisations relate to cooperation and innovation. Therefore, by adopting an institutional perspective to exploring managerial innovation, individuals may emphasise the organisation's assurance to customers through various problem-solving techniques that may extensively empower employees to perform at their best (Jankal, 2014).

The evaluation of service quality implications within the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia may present new opportunities to reassess the potential of the country to respond to the latest developments and innovations in the field. Both tangible and intangible dimensions of the tourism sector can be evaluated in order to provide a proper account of how well Saudi Arabia is prepared to adopt specific changes that may facilitate the delivery of service quality outcomes to clients. These aspects have been discussed in a study by Salazar *et al.* (2010), which is included in the meta-analysis Table in the respective literature review. The focus on those dimensions indicates that researchers in the field are concerned with finding an optimal solution to the challenges experienced by service organisations in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the adoption of a realistic and accurate tool of measurement may contribute to the delivery of relevant outcomes for all stakeholders involved in the industry (Ali, 2010). The component of behavioural intentions was included in the study by Salazar *et al.* (2010) in order to determine the precise extent to which

individuals are prepared to assess the service quality framework in the tourism sector of Saudi Arabia.

The influence of service quality on customer satisfaction, as related to organisational performance, has been verified in the literature. Kim (2016, p. 111) conducted a survey amongst 380 employees in Korean organisations. It was found that Total Quality Management (TQM), if used in an organisation, highly increases customer satisfaction; however, it was also revealed that such benefit can be achieved only through effective leadership and high employee commitment (Kim, 2016). The survey of Yarhands *et al.* (2016) amongst customers of an electricity company in Ghana further verified the strong relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Gupta (2017) argued that in Indian hotels, customer satisfaction is highly affected by service quality; a conclusion reached through research of secondary data. Ramseook–Munhurrun *et al.* (2016) conducted interviews with international tourists in Mauritius, aiming to understand the factors that influence visitor's perception of service quality. It was found that for tourists, service quality is mostly related to people's/ employees' behaviour, food and accommodation, and infrastructure/ transportation (Ramseook–Munhurrun *et al.*, 2016). In addition, Zairi and Alsughayir (2011) cite total quality management (TQM) as a leading strategy that organisations use to improve organisational performance and outcomes. However, many fail in its implementation, often incurring significant costs as a result. In Witt and Muhlemann (1994), the effectiveness of TQM applications in the tourism sector were assessed to develop a combined picture of the steps to be pursued for successful TQM in this context. These steps are expected to help tourist organisations in the adoption of TQM, specifically in carrying out the process and decreasing the likelihood of failure. Zairi and Alsughayir (2011) claim that a hindrance to successful TQM adoption is the lack of clear implementation guidelines, specifically for organisations situated in regions in which traditional business approaches are implemented and differ from those upheld by TQM. The Baldrige framework is an important reference with regard to this, as it directs the organisation and all of its aims and objectives to meet its mission and vision. Using independent examiner feedback, this framework reveals the organisation's strengths and weaknesses and fosters learning and improvement. The Baldrige framework usually produces the most benefits through the integration dimension, which the organisation achieves by operating in a fully interconnected unit (Kilbride, 2015). Kim's (2016) claim for effective leadership and high employee commitment to implement TQM successfully is congruent to this.

It is necessary to tackle the cost-quality nexus vis-à-vis TQM in tourism. Whilst service organisations have acknowledged a need to improve quality and many have brought in service quality programmes, service quality remains a key problem that should be dealt with for several

reasons. One of these is that many managers have a short-term perspective on the picture of service quality, especially when the organisation focuses on rewarding short-term achievements rather than long-term ones (Mok *et al.*, 2009). Quality programmes have corresponding costs, including financial and human resources, which becomes an important problem when such resources are scarce, as is the case for many tourism and hospitality organisations. Moreover, when faced with a limited budget, the organisation might succumb to scaling back activities, which can be very difficult and may necessitate considerable organisational restructuring, which is a costly thing, both financially and from the perspective of human resources (Mok *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, Katanic *et al.* (2017) point out that a high-quality company leads to lower costs and high efficiency. A hotel that adopts quality service, for example, contributes to its competitive advantage in two ways: through high sales prices brought about by the market situation, and through low operating costs brought about by internal efficiency. Kapiki (2012) points out that in the implementation of TQM in the tourism sector, the impact of cost-profit should be recorded and prioritised whilst facilitating the quality improvement process.

The expectations and needs of tourists are certain aspects that have been emphasised in the literature, especially from the perspective of tourism management practices (Cohen, 2010). Innovation is quite important in the hospitality industry as it is related to the notion of experiential marketing, with the purpose of enhancing customers' experiences of different tourism products and services (Schein, 2010). As a result, the field of tourism has demonstrated a strong foundation of a distinct identity that should be continuously redefined. By adopting a cross-disciplinary approach dominated by a sociological cultural perspective, this study presents the significant practical implications of such a post-disciplinary method on the design of a culturally diverse tourism experience. Destination management has enabled customers to view tourism in different ways, mainly through highlighting to its dynamic nature.

The online survey developed by Romiti & Sarti (2016) revealed that customer satisfaction and loyalty are highly influenced by aesthetics in regard to a site/ destination. It is implied that by emphasising the above factors, governments and tourism organisations could ensure high levels of customer satisfaction. On the other hand, the survey of Al-Ababneh (2016) amongst 238 employees of Jordan hotels revealed that service quality is dependent on the availability of funds for supporting the quality of food and accommodation. More specifically, in the above study it was found that the 5-star hotels have achieved higher level of service quality compared to 4-star hotels (Al-Ababneh, 2016). Al-dweeri *et al.* (2017) highlighted an important issue: the potential use of the Internet by companies to keep customer satisfaction high. Indeed, by ensuring the high quality of

their online services, companies can build trust in their relationship with customers; customer loyalty is then more easily achieved (Al-dweeri *et al.*, 2017).

It should be noted that organisations tend to use various approaches for ensuring quality in regard to their products and services. The quality philosophy adopted by tourist organisations is about effective management and leadership. Scholars have placed great significance and dependability on management, in an attempt to ensure equality at all levels of the organisations because of the general belief that management is mostly responsible for the occurrence of certain quality issues (Salazar *et al.*, 2010). Such companies demonstrate concerns in two main areas: constant improvement and value for the customers. The principles for constant improvement refer to visualisation, working on tests, continual innovation, and exploring the source of the precise problem. The principles related to value for the customers include ways of building value and teamwork (Petrini & Pozzebon, 2010).

Organisations in the tourism industry sector tend to adopt the philosophy to communicate with their employees. Therefore, quality management needs to present appropriately planned quality actions, which is key for obtaining a competitive advantage (Salazar *et al.*, 2010). The principles in this strategy encourage workers, despite the interfering processes imposed by managers, as employees feel empowered to address various quality issues, even if this means pausing the manufacturing process; this indicates the point that quality takes a priority within the overall production system of the company (Frahm & Brown, 2007).

Some other quality philosophies relate to enhancing knowledge transfer within the company and in the global context. One of these important aspects is the organisational climate that presents the relevance of particular values such as on-going teamwork, flexible communication, and exchange of ideas (Ageli, 2013). Other philosophical values include team meetings, demonstrations of various products, innovative activities related to quality management, and programs that increase customers' awareness of the company's products and services. This is how service organisations in Saudi Arabia communicate with their employees to ensure adequate concentration on the quality of the products and services they offer (Abdullah, 2011).

As implied by Petrini and Pozzebon (2010), service organisations should learn important lessons from the practice of Brazilian firms. The service sector is the main contributor to Brazil's GDP. Brazilian service organisations have optimised their operations and as such have been able to improve the value for the consumers as well as the working environment. It has been specified in the meta-analysis conducted in this literature review that sustainability should be extensively

integrated into business practices, as this apparently includes the performance of tourism organisations as well.

The potential of Saudi Arabia to secure quality of services in regard to its tourism sector would be also explored by reviewing the country's infrastructure/ facilities as related to tourism; in 2016, Saudi Arabia's total room capacity reached 421,943 rooms available in different types of accommodation units, including about 1746 hotels, apartments about 4,463, and inns about 60 (MAS Centre, 2016b). Tourists in Saudi Arabia could also find luxury accommodation available in the country's 13 resorts (MAS Centre, 2016b). It should be noted that 600 of the country's hotels have reached the level of first class, being able to provide accommodation of high quality, a term which is particularly important in business and conference tourism (ITCM, 2017).

The study reveals that tourism management is a quite complex phenomenon that is relevant to the contemporary era of globalization. Therefore, individuals need to demonstrate better awareness mechanisms regarding the fundamental role of culture in the formation of cultural identity and experience notion in the dynamic field of tourism (Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010). It is clear that people coming from diverse cultural backgrounds demonstrate different ideas about tourism, especially when it comes to their own experience of tourist-related activities (Cohen, 2010). The focus is on expanding cultural awareness of diverse tourism experiences, indicating the importance of reducing cultural boundaries between different cultural communities. The sufficient number of individuals participating in this study provides the researcher with an opportunity to focus on the explored issue from culturally diverse perspectives.

2.3.5.4 Sustainability

Sustainability, as an element of the organisational environment, emphasises the use of business practices that promote the public interest, as these interests are related to the economic and social life of people in a specific region (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). The practices used by businesses for promoting sustainability can vary but need to ensure the effective control of risks related to business activities, such as the risks related to the natural environment and those related to health and safety in the workplace (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). Consumer behaviour and preferences can have considerable effects on the practices of businesses in the business tourism sector of Saudi Arabia (Andrews & Playfoot, 2015). In particular, the choice to purchase certain products and services and to accept certain lifestyles can have constructive and negative economic, environmental and social consequences, which in turn create opportunities and challenges for companies (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices have appeared in recent years as a key force in the sustainability performance of the Saudi Arabia

economy because more companies are appreciating the need to improve their economic, environmental and socio-cultural practices, which are the three pillars of sustainability. Many companies have confirmed that efficiency and environmental and social performance gains have improved since incorporating CSR practices into business and change-management policies (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). Figure 2.1 shows a framework for the theory of shareholder value. It illustrates that shareholder value consists of innovation, operational excellence, capital discipline and acquisition as its shareholder value drivers. Innovation constitutes employee culture and customer attentiveness. On the other hand, operational excellence consists of risk management. Capital discipline constitutes capital structure, while acquisition incorporates the long-term perspective. Figure 2.1 shows a framework for the theory of shareholder value. It illustrates that shareholder value consists of innovation, operational excellence, capital discipline and acquisition as its shareholder value drivers. Innovation constitutes employee culture and customer attentiveness. On the other hand, operational excellence consists of risk management. Capital discipline constitutes capital structure, while acquisition incorporates the long-term perspective.

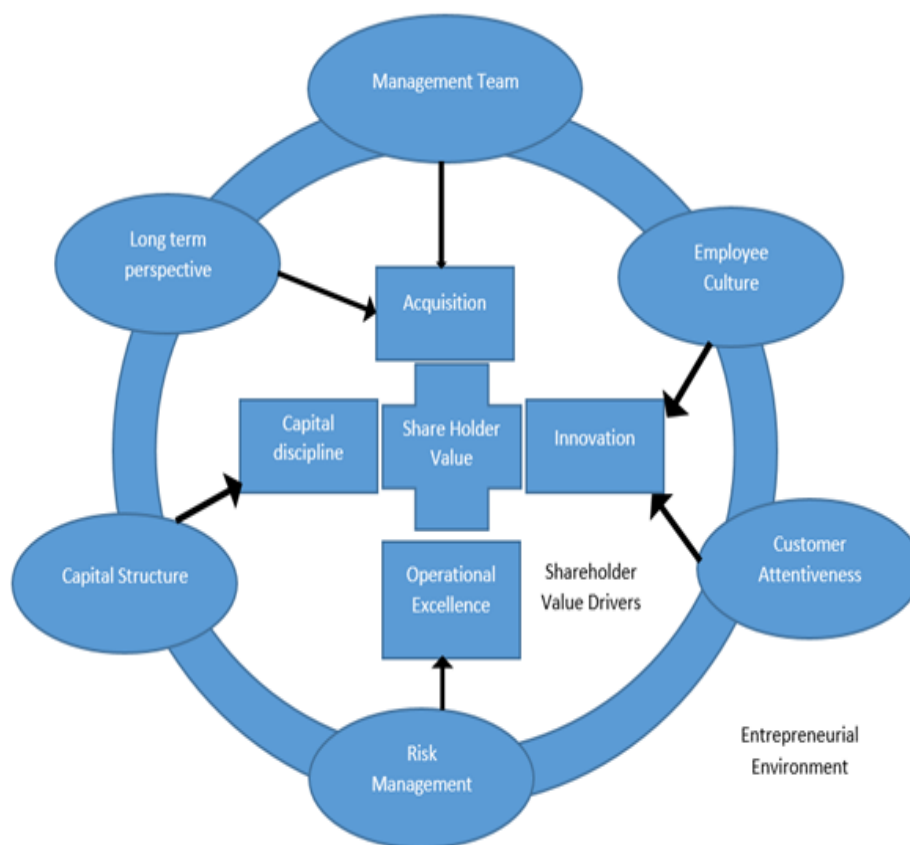


Figure 2.1: A framework for the Theory of Shareholder Value (Civil Service India, 2017)

When analysts and researchers relate employee engagement in sustainability, they normally reflect the idea to establish green or ecological teams, though sustainable initiatives are about far more than employee engagement (Andrews & Playfoot, 2015). Traditional green or

ecological teams frequently have little or no involvement in the senior management efforts towards sustainability (Frahm & Brown, 2007). They are normally classified as environmentally-minded individuals who are determined to promote an ecological environment in their lives at home and at work. While contemporary sustainability teams have created adequate results, full employee engagement needs a much broader business strategy in order to tackle cultural issues (Petrini & Pozzebon, 2010).

The theory of shareholder value (Figure 2.1), which is based on attaining optimal final outcomes in regard to different aspects of the organisation, as presented in the figure above, is increasingly being strengthened by including non-financial aspects in firm performance, such as employee training and development, creating a sense of urgency or following Kotter's eight steps model to fulfil sustainable economic development and social responsibilities (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012; Kotter, 2012). Kotter (2012) identifies the stages in creating major change, such as: instituting a sense of need, forming the guiding coalition, developing a sense of direction and strategy, and conveying the change vision, to name a few.

A number of Saudi Arabia companies have also taken considerable steps to advance accountability and transparency to shareholders by publicly reporting their sustainability business performance indicators (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). The local government has a systematic and progressive role to play in further circulating tools and practices related to sustainable improvement and service quality management, and in corporate social responsibility and economic development (Ellinger *et al.*, 2010). These tools and practices may allow companies to advance their business performance and fulfil consumer demands by introducing more sustainable products.

The local government helps business development through the provision of important services such as security and other infrastructure that supports business, such as maintaining roads and providing a clean environment (Ali, 2010). The local government also promotes CSR in the following ways: by sponsoring corporate responsibility and economic sustainability at conferences, workshops and seminars following the capacity and superiority of corporate sustainability reporting by Saudi Arabia companies, and by collaborating with enterprises and industry sector levels to widen a federal and national perspective on corporate responsibility and sustainable business performance and service quality management (Ali, 2010). The government establishes and improves the CSR websites, recognising best practices to improve sustainable relationships and human capital for the Saudi Arabia tourism industry (Andrews & Playfoot, 2015). The Saudi Arabia government collaborates on at least one initiative to widen its tools for recovering the knowledge base and skills of managers, supervisors and employees (Thompson *et al.*, 2012).

In Figure 2.2, sustainability is illustrated as an over-arching process of social equity, environmental accountability, and economic efficiency.

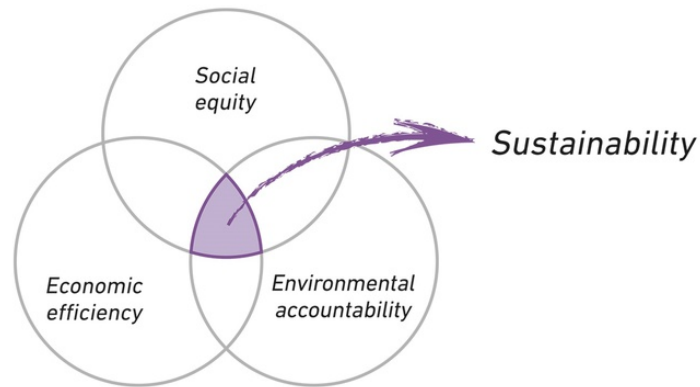


Figure 2.2: Development of Sustainable Services (Mazars, 2017)

Saudi Arabian companies aim to promote a sense of urgency to understand sustainable consumption recognition and service quality management within the growing tourism industry. They are focused on improving operational visibility in order to implement best practices for sustainable business in the industry sector. The current efforts of Saudi Arabia companies to develop sustainable services are based on the following approach: equal emphasis is given to innovation, to public health and to the protection of the natural environment, in an approach similar to that presented in Figure 2.2. This shows one of the approaches currently being used for achieving sustainability in the services sector of South Africa.

Emphasising the development of sustainable services could help Saudi Arabia companies to increase the knowledge base of employees to recognise consumer preferences and behaviours, a fact that would enhance the companies' market competitiveness (Petrini & Pozzebon, 2010). Change management and service quality management initiatives can establish R&D and business models in order to develop new sustainable products and services to satisfy global economic demands. As indicated in the above figure, the development of sustainable services is the focus of tourist organisations in the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia companies have made prominent gains in the area of CSR over the past decade and have used these achievements, in some circumstances, to enhance their financial and sustainable business performance in the business tourism sector of the country (Ali, 2010). However, companies in Saudi Arabia are still experiencing operational challenges in terms of using information more efficiently to respond to

the government call to integrate global economic components into their operations (Ellinger *et al.*, 2010). A situation of inadequate information in the market may lead companies to use sustainable resources inefficiently. Accessibility of resources and useful sustainable business approaches may contribute to decrease business risks, manage change, enhance productivity and support service quality management. Researchers have characterised the perceived quality of service as an essential customer interest, which has subsequently gained wide consideration, particularly in the zones of computer systems and on-going media framework research, and in business advertising as well (Andrews & Playfoot, 2015).

To promote sustainability, companies need to create opportunities; it has been reported that some Saudi Arabia companies sponsor employees to participate in sustainability planning and execution. This will help employees to develop business projects and report results in an effective way (Graetz & Smith, 2010). Organisations need to develop informal cross-functional teams to offer education and assist brainstorm issues/solutions. Saudi Arabia companies have developed continuous improvement programs to review sustainable business processes in the business tourism sector, including business issues and prioritising new sustainable business initiatives (Ali, 2010). Furthermore, some actions are considered to be important in order to tackle organisational cultural issues, as companies needing to establish a community or practice centre to check sustainability practices and to share or develop best practices (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). Management also needs to provide the necessary resources to support employee engagement through change management initiatives that support service quality management at the core. One of the most important aspects of promoting sustainability in the organisations in Saudi Arabia is through motivation. Management needs to inspire or energise its employees to commit to the core strategy, so they must provide them with benefits and emphasise the significance of their contributions (Graetz & Smith, 2010). It is important to seek and address employee questions and concerns as well as reward management, which is needed to support sustainable business practices and service quality management in the tourism sector in the country (Thompson *et al.*, 2012).

At this point, the following issue appears: which criteria should be used to measure the performance of the tourism sector in a country? The main indicator is the development of the flow of visitors, as related to the different types of tourism organised in a country (Ali, 2010). Visitor satisfaction has been described as repeat visit to a certain tourist destination. It is a predictor of tourist behaviour. It has been found that a correlation exists between visitor satisfaction and

tourism spending at the destination, which serves as the basis for developing and implementing relevant policies by stakeholders in these destinations (Cardenas-Garcia *et al.*, 2015).

One of the specific visits made to Saudi Arabia is religious because of the importance Muslims give to Umrah and Hajj. Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state, and the majority of people from other countries visit the Kingdom to perform Hajj, which is one of the pillars of Islam. Hajj is a procedure of pilgrimage to Mecca that occurs annually in the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, identified as a holy month; Muslims are expected to do Hajj at least once in their lifetime, if they are able. The largest gathering of Muslims in the world occurs in Mecca during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah. In addition, Muslims tend to visit Mecca for Umrah, which includes performing Tawaf around the Holy Kaaba. Other than this, people prefer to come to Saudi Arabia to visit Jeddah, which is a modern city and considered the business hub of the country. Research shows that the majority of people travel to Saudi Arabia to visit the holy places identified as involving religious pilgrimages. For instance, Mecca receives over nine million pilgrims annually (Frahm & Brown, 2007). Yet there are certain implications for increasing the importance of business tourism in the country. All visitors to the Kingdom require a visa for entry. There are two main categories of visas to the Kingdom, namely, pilgrim and business visas. Business reasons for visiting the country include various corporate meetings or inspection procedures, implying that only selective visas are allowed (Ali, 2010).

In line with the economic reforms that the Kingdom is making, Vision 2030 aims to move the economy away from oil dependence, and the government is making reforms aimed at relaxing visa restrictions for Muslim pilgrims, to enable them to extend their stay and visit other sites that are non-religious. This would be a huge boost for the tourism industry as the tourists will be able to spend more time in the Kingdom and visit the other tourist sites. The investment, so far, of about \$7 billion on the development of tourism in Saudi Arabia as part of the country's Vision 2030 framework, denotes the willingness of the government to enhance tourism (Gould, 2017). In the context of Vision 2030, the Saudi Arabian government aims to fund a total of around 755 tourism-related initiatives in the period from 2016 to 2020; the cost of these initiatives has been estimated at \$100 billion (ITCM, 2017). So far, however, the strict visa rules have kept the attractiveness of Saudi Arabia as a tourism destination quite low (Gould, 2017). This is a part of sustainability because, as illustrated in Figure 2.2, sustainability also involves economic efficiency (Mazars, 2017).

2.3.5.5 Human resource management

The hospitality industry has been adequately enhanced over the past decade to emphasise the delivery of high-quality outcomes. Aspects of service quality management have been used by service organisations in the industry in order to ensure compliance with strict principles and standards (Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010). The role of HR in the hospitality industry has mainly been reflected in the adoption of proper control measures oriented towards the formation of a highly consistent employee system (Aspridis & Kyriakou, 2012). The HR department has been found to play an important role in delivering high-quality services to customers in the industry. From the perspective of employees, it has been indicated that they represent a significant asset in the hospitality industry sector (Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010). Employees are largely found to be competent, but their potential should be properly utilised by service organisations so that high standards of service quality are maintained in an efficient and timely manner.

According to Kandampully (2001), certain challenges may emerge in the process of discussing HRM practices in the hospitality industry. The recruitment of talented employees has become a priority for many service organisations (Yukl, 2012). Moreover, irrelevant HRM practices have been found to decrease service quality of hospitality organisations, which further leads to a substantial reduction of customer loyalty and trust. Different problematic areas have been identified, such as insufficient employee motivation and inadequate loyalty manifested by employees towards a particular organisation. Thus, it has been recommended that service organisations should demonstrate more consistent efforts to increase service quality management standards, which would attract a greater number of customers in the long term (Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010). This would definitely help service organisation become adequately competitive in the future.

The use of employee engagement as a vehicle for securing sustainability could be criticised, in terms of its effectiveness. An employee engagement initiative will not be successful without establishing the change management and service quality management infrastructure to support sustainable business practices. This means incorporating sustainability into the overall strategic policy, with clear vision, goals and objectives (Ali, 2010). It means that strong management sponsorship and a combined governance structure for decision making and resource distribution is required. It also requires companies to enhance rewards and recognition programs to sustain and promote sustainable organisational culture and behaviours (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). Companies also require the establishment of a project management formation to implement an operational sustainability strategy and allow the initiatives to modify organisational

culture (Graetz & Smith, 2010). With such a sustainable structure in place, companies will be able to widen a strategy that fully supports employees and service quality management.

With the foundation established, the next action for companies is to create the keystone of their employee engagement strategy. Management needs to provide and promote the right direction by highlighting the vision for sustainability, why it is important for the company, and how employees need to act to support it (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, companies need to share performance expectations about how employee progress can be measured. Transforming the organisational culture also requires building competencies, which include clarifying roles and competencies with employees to manage and sustain sustainability initiatives (Petrini & Pozzebon, 2010). The actions also include educating and training employees on sustainability to strengthen their technical and business collaboration, and innovation and project skills (Ali, 2010).

2.4 Summary

This chapter provided a literature review of the issues of business tourism and tourism policy in the context of Saudi Arabia. The results of the literature review, as presented above, verify the importance of the tourism sector in a country's growth. In fact, it seems that tourism is one of the fundamental elements contributing to an economy's development; however, its growth is dependent on the development of transportation businesses, communications technologies and the overall economic condition of the country. These aspects are reinforced by monetary funding and the distribution of particular companies such as hotel chains, airlines, transportation, communication, food and other packages.

The review of the literature, as developed for this study, revealed that the growth of the tourism sector in any country is likely to be influenced by specific factors, and these factors are reflected in the themes of the thematic analysis. However, in practice there are several issues that need to be taken into consideration when having to evaluate the perspectives of a country's tourism sector. Scholars have argued that from the perspective of market forces, the tourism industry is expected to contribute to the growth of the country in terms of destination product or service, advertising, reservation, databases and operator products, as these are associated with the diversity in tourism markets and options provided to customers in Saudi Arabia. It has been proposed by researchers that in the process of globalisation, tourism is considered a main component that may further facilitate the outcomes of globalisation.

Another substantial part of the review covered aspects related to service quality management, applied to the organisational culture and climate of various Saudi Arabia companies. A meta-analysis (Table 2.1) of major studies that were reviewed in the chapter through applying

an analytical approach. This analysis indicates that organisations in Saudi Arabia possess a high level of readiness to embrace change and innovation, especially in relation to the expansion of the business tourism sector. However, the review shows that there is still a gap in research in terms of what the government should do to enable these organisations to take full advantage of the opportunities in the tourism industry. This study explores some of the measures that the government should take to improve the competitiveness of the tourism industry. Three key assumptions are derived from this review: a) in Saudi Arabia, the tourism industry is highly appreciated as a tool for enhancing economic growth and for securing economic diversification; b) most organisations in the tourism sector of the country are well prepared to meet the sector's needs; and c) several strategic tools and approaches are available to the sector's managers for improving the performance of their firms in the long term. Sustainability has been found to be a critical approach for achieving the above targets. Moreover, the country's government has emphasised tourism as an industry for achieving economic stability at the national level. Still, the effectiveness of the government's efforts in regard to the promotion of the tourism industry has not been fully known. In general, the review has revealed the lack of studies focusing on service quality management in business and conference tourism. More specifically, existing literature seems to concentrate on specific aspects of tourism, such as its role in economic diversification, its support from the government, its relationship to culture, and its potential to adopt sustainable practices. Additionally, the literature review highlighted the approaches used by organisations in the tourism sector to respond to the changing market trends and to secure their market position. However, the studies focusing on the relevant issues of the business and conference tourism sector are quite limited, while the sector's performance and approaches in regard to quality management is discussed very briefly. This study will contribute to covering this gap by synthesising existing material so that the actual performance and the perspectives of this industry, especially in regard to quality management, are measured and evaluated.

Chapter 3: Review of Business Tourism in Saudi Arabia

3.1 Introduction

The travel and tourism market is quite competitive, and therefore introducing strategies that reflect international trends and preferences should be its priority in order to attract business travellers from around the globe. This review investigates business tourism policy and service quality management in Saudi Arabia. This section reviews both aspects in terms of their benefits to the tourism sector of Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom enjoys technological advancements, political stability, economic growth, a rich heritage and a strong culture. All these make it an ideal country for tourism. However, there are still many areas of concern that need to be improved, such as the strict policies related to travelling to the Kingdom.

3.2 Business Tourism in the Kingdom

Business tourism is growing globally. This mode of tourism is often combined with leisure, a trend that shows signs of continuous expansion globally (Burkhard, 2016). In 2016, the amount spent on business travel worldwide reached 23%, whilst the rest of 77% was spent on travel for leisure (WTTC, 2017). In 2010, the percentage of business tourists amongst inbound tourists in the EU was estimated at 16% (European Commission, 2016). In the UK, the number of inbound business travellers between 2016 and 2017 decreased by 2% (Office for National Statistics, 2017). It can be said from the above figure that business tourism is not all that powerful at the moment, but its potential for growth in the long term is significant. At the same time, international travel remains at high levels, showing clearly increasing trends (IPK International, 2016).

According to Daher (2007:1), “tourism is becoming an increasingly global and complex phenomenon, with political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and educational dimensions.” It is regarded as one of the most wide-ranging multi-national activities. The mobility that tourism creates impacts on almost everyone everywhere. Daher points out that tourism in the Middle East can have the potential to become the driving force of important opportunities, which could lead to progress and development. This statement stresses the possibilities that tourism has the potential to create, fuelling the further development of Saudi Arabia. Business travellers account for 20.3% of travel and tourism (Turner, 2018). Business travel refers to a kind of travel which is undertaken for the purpose of work or business (Beaverstock *et al.*, 2017). Business travel is defined as “*leisure activities in conjunction with business travel*” (Trade Forum, 2008, p. 4). Business travellers engage in activities such as meetings, inspections and/or consultations. They can also engage in dining out, shopping, sightseeing, recreation, meeting others, and the

like (Lennon, 2006). These tourists are not as sensitive to cost compared to leisure travellers. They are estimated to spend twice as much per day on average. Their main purpose is to efficiently utilise their time in their business travel schedules (Garrod, 2012); hence, this factor heavily affects their final purchase decisions. About two-thirds of these travellers tend to extend their trip for pleasure purposes if time permits. Therefore, there is great potential for growth in this market. (Kumari, 2013). Developing nations need to enhance individual business travellers' experiences, as well as cater for the meetings and conventions markets if they wish to invest in business tourism for economic growth (Trade Forum, 2008). It is for this reason that the business tourism sector is considered one of the most lucrative businesses, growing at a fast pace (Teare, 2007). Countries aiming at making their destinations cost-effective and exotic where corporative aims can also be met need to offer competitive packages. The ideal package would offer an ideal location for relaxing and utilizing time effectively. There is currently great competition in the tourism market (Arabia Business, 2017). East and South Asia are amongst the fastest growing locations in terms of air travel. This shows how these locations are becoming important places for business from the US and Europe (Thompson. 2013). Figure 3.1 shows the world's fastest growing tourist destinations in 2017:



Figure 3.1: Fastest growing tourist destinations in 2017

From Figure 3.1, it can be seen that the Palestinian territories saw the most growth as tourist destinations in 2017, followed by Egypt, the Northern Mariana Islands, Iceland, Tunisia, Vietnam, Uruguay, Nicaragua, Mongolia, and lastly, Israel.

It must be noted that the tourism industry in the Kingdom has experienced increased development in recent years and is expected to continue in the coming years. The sector went through a major change owing to renewed commitment to improve Saudi Arabia's infrastructure. It must be noted however that the government is allotting only 2% of its funding to the tourism sector; this does not compare favourably with the industrial sector, which receives a greater allocation (Damanhour, 2016). This point is worthy of consideration with regard to examining business tourism in Saudi Arabia.

Business tourism has prospects for future growth. However, such growth will only occur if the sector's issues, which are also present in the tourism industry in general, can be appropriately addressed. For example, failure to secure food safety in hotels used for supporting business conferences could significantly reduce the potential of a country to benefit from business tourism. Thus, exploring the role of service quality management in the development of a country's business tourism sector would be vital for understanding the actual capability of the sector to contribute to the country's growth.

Business tourism in Saudi Arabia is increasingly growing, along with strong economic growth and emphasis on developing other aspects of the economy. At present, business tourism is focused in Riyadh, Mecca, and Eastern Province, which are major cities of the Kingdom. Considering the growing number of business tourists in these cities, luxury brands should likewise continue to flourish. Heavy investment in transport infrastructure is being carried out in order to attract more business tourists, as well as domestic tourists. Additionally, the economy hotel segment has the potential to increase, as the rising number of Asian travelers are becoming more price-sensitive (Aljazira Capital, 2015). If Saudi Arabia wishes to compete with the market leaders, it needs to work towards improving its strategies and raising them to international standards, so that it can attract people to its country. The various reasons why The Kingdom is lagging behind range from inadequate leisure facilities to visa restrictions, all of which are extensively covered in the next section of this review (Arabia Business, 2017). The willingness of the Saudi Arabian government to enhance tourism cannot be doubted; on February 2017, Prince Sultan, as the President of the country's Tourism Commission, declared the intention of the government to transform Saudi Arabia to a top tourism destination (Arabia Business, 2017).

Zamani-Farahani and Henderson's (2010) study is worthy of note as it deals with the impacts of state religion on tourism development in the Kingdom. The authors examined the multifaceted association between Islam and tourism, alongside tourism policies and management. Similarly, Burns (2007) demonstrates how the Kingdom uses Islam to reaffirm Saudi legitimacy and presents a knowledgeable and critical analysis of tourism development in the Kingdom. He evaluated how the official Saudi discourse adopts iconographies to create Saudi legitimacy and rationalisation. By linking tourism developments and processes of Saudisation, Burns encourages new ventures that involve the private sector. This claim could be significantly linked to the potentials seen for Saudi Arabia's tourism development.

On the other hand, Ogbasli (2007) focuses on the impacts and vacillations of tourism, which can be easily absorbed by large cities. Whilst this is so, these impacts can be experienced on a greater scale by small towns. Ogbasli uses Old Jeddah of Saudi Arabia as a good example of a city with heritage tourism development. Although rural settlements can be used as tourism destinations, the diversity of services offered in urban settlements is not always offered there. The character of these settlements is also being modified by the need to adapt to changing agricultural practices. Some settlements are being abandoned for a more convenient setting, especially when there is an influence of transportation development. For example, the village of Dhi Ain is a heritage village in the Al-Baha Region, Saudi Arabia. Despite being picturesque enough to be an attraction for tourism, it rapidly decayed because of abandonment. Despite its attractiveness to visitors, without other economic activities its maintenance would involve a high cost, with very little return (Ogbasli, 2007). These examples provide useful information about the tourism prospects in Saudi Arabia.

Expanding the factors to be considered, Alhaj (2017) stated that Saudi tourism awareness is affected by economic factors, activity programmes, media and information, and the local situation. These considerations are worthy of note in this study's investigation of the potential for Saudi Arabia to become a business tourism and international conference destination. Alhaj's results demonstrate that awareness factors are related to socio-demographic characteristics.

3.3 The Saudi Arabian Market in relation to Business Tourism

So far, the Saudi Arabian economy has been highly dependent on oil production, a condition which would change only by emphasising other sectors, such as tourism (Almajdoub, 2017). Moreover, the performance of the Saudi Arabia economy has reached a more mature level, being characterised by limitations of growth; in fact, for 2017 the growth of the economy is expected to be low, as noted by the IMF (Alkhalisi, 2017a). The reduction of the country's oil and gas reserves has made Saudi Arabia seek for alternative paths of growth (Nereim & Fattah, 2016). In this

context, the following question has appeared: could Saudi Arabia become a 'post-oil economy' without setting its economic growth at risk (Almajdoub, 2017)? The answer seems to be positive. In fact, Saudi Arabia could seek economic growth even without oil and gas, by emphasising its services industry, including the tourism sector (Hobbs, 2017). Saudi Arabia is making numerous efforts to enhance its tourism industry in order to increase tourism-related jobs. The tourism business of Saudi Arabia depends largely on pilgrims and business travellers. As a result of relaxations in the visa policy there has been an increase in religious tourists. In 2013 the number of tourists rose by 10%. About 32 million Saudis travelled inside the country, which is an increase of 7.5%, while 22.5 million travelled outside Saudi Arabia (Sahoo, 2014).

According to Hamad Al Sheikh, the vice president of marketing and programmes at the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, the market is developing at a fast pace, while the demand for quality packages is also on the rise. Demand has increased to such an extent that Saudi Arabia Airlines are suffering from 2 million lost seats due to lack of capacity (Sahoo, 2014). Both domestic and international airline services are being increased to accommodate more people.

Currently, there are 160 tour operators who are responding to the needs of religious travellers to the Kingdom. It is expected that by 2020, the tourism industry will be employing 1.2 million people. Mr. Al Sheikh said that they are trying to move more Saudis into hotels for work. The tourism industry adds about 2.7% of GDP to the Saudi economy (Sahoo, 2014). The government is taking numerous steps to encourage international hotel brands to invest in The Kingdom, such as favourable rules and regulations that encourage investment, becoming more liberal towards international travelling trends, and collaborating with international bodies to encourage business travellers to come to Saudi Arabia for international meetings and conferences. According to STR Global's report, about 17,135 rooms (Sahoo, 2014) are being constructed in the country. Local hotels had 75.4% of their rooms booked during March 2014. The average room rate rose by 3.2% (Sahoo, 2014).

Rashid Aboobacker, a senior consultant with TRI Hospitality Consulting, suggests (Sahoo, 2014, p. 32):

“Developers and operators also see the opportunity for newer and better hotels across the country, as the existing stock is dominated by independently operated and low-quality properties. The high level of liquidity and the excellent return potential are also attracting strong private sector interest in tourism investments in the country now.”

The Saudi Travel and Tourism Investment Market exhibition held in Riyadh has provided a platform for projects as well as vendors from the public and private sectors (Sahoo, 2014).

3.4 How the Business Tourism Policy has been Developed and what Factors Affect these Policies

Numerous factors have contributed towards the development of business tourism policy. Owing to the high volume of pilgrims coming to Mecca and Medina and business tourists coming to Saudi Arabia, the government has developed policies to regulate the tourism industry of the country e.g. the establishment of the Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau (SECB), the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA). And others such as the Saudi Tourist Guide Association for guides, Saudi Accommodation Association for hoteliers and Saudi Travel and Tourism Association for the operators. These bodies monitor performance and provide opportunities for further growth. With developments in communication, transport and technology, more people are coming to the country and therefore a proper system to handle these tourists has become necessary. Different factors affect these policies, such as visa requirements, increasing demand for international hotels and airlines operating in the country, and the need to develop the tourism business because complete dependence on natural resources such as oil is risky, since the resource can become scarce and/or production of natural resources is volatile (Sadi and Henderson, 2005). In other words, in Saudi Arabia the development of tourism has been based on a framework which is aligned with the country's culture and economic characteristics. Styliadis *et al.* (2017) argued that the use of an integrated framework can improve the image of a country as a destination; such a framework would take into consideration the cultural background and the expectations of both the residents and the visitors. In order for the above framework to be effective, it should be supported by appropriate measures and initiatives; the introduction in 2016 by Saudi Arabia of 'welcoming visas', which are visas available to foreign tourists, is an example (Al-Heialy, 2016).

Some important aspects of Saudi Arabia's tourism policy were chosen based on their relative significance to the industry and are discussed below:

3.4.1 SECB (Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau)

The Saudi Council of Ministers (No. 246 Dated 27/05/ 2013Hegira) has made a resolution to set up the Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau (SECB). The purpose is to promote the convention and exhibition sector of Saudi Arabia so that it contributes effectively to The Kingdom's economic growth (SECB, 2013a). It was created in 2013 to govern and develop The Kingdom's MICE sector. It oversees the licensing and development of different areas of the industry such as events and venues. The Supervisory Committee oversees it (Impactpub.com, 2013). The SECB (2018)

highlights KSA's commitment to the development of the exhibition and convention industry, as this is seen as important to the Kingdom's economic diversification, making it less dependent on oil earnings. This industry can greatly contribute to the national GDP of Saudi Arabia and enable it to be the business hub of the Arab region.

The SECB evaluates the performance of the sector and accordingly develops strategies for growth and sustainability (Impactpub.com, 2013).

According to SECB Executive Director, Tariq Al Essa (Meetmiddleest.com, 2014, p.12):

"The bureau's team formed a strategic network of stakeholders, organisations and government agencies even before it was officially opened in September 2013. This network has been invaluable in the establishment of the SECB."

Experts from the private and public sectors related to tourism and travel have been involved in order to seek opinions from experienced personnel. According to Al Essa, Saudi Arabia's convention and exhibition sector has had to face many challenges which have to be adequately addressed in order for the SECB to achieve its intended objectives. One of these challenges is the fact that there is a limited authority and scope of the SEBC and this limits the decisions that it has the autonomy of making in regard to the meetings industry. There is also limited human capacity in the sector and this means that there is a shortage of the skills needed to offer delegates an overall service that is satisfactory. Other challenges include a shortage of venues and insufficient marketing of Saudi Arabia as a destination (SECB, 2016a). In fields such as licensing, processes, accessibility of visas, research and statistics, there are also shortages in the levels of development and effectiveness. Hence, one of the bureau's many objectives is ensuring that it overcomes these problems. It also aims at providing a platform and support system to event organizers. Benchmarking has also been applied in order to find the best practices in the market (Meetmiddleeast.com, 2014).

One of the biggest challenges has been to review and improve the licensing process. The process enables businesses to run their operations in accordance with the law, in order to function smoothly. From compliance with regulations to formalities related to employee standards to processing fees, the licensing process is an important step towards establishing a business in any country (Startupoverseas.co.uk, 2014). The licensing process in the Kingdom has been greatly improved by SECB and as such it is a major boost to the tourism industry. In this area it has made progress; all applications are received online. Applications are dealt with via email and as a result the entire process has become more convenient and efficient. The website is user-friendly and offers adequate information about events and updates. SECB now hopes to create an electronic

gate so that licenses can also be processed online. The website is being integrated with the SECB's CRM and research centre. The SECB is also collaborating with economists and reviewing the implementation of a sound structure that will monitor The Kingdom's MICE sector's contribution to the economy. From the SECB portal, there are several licenses that can be applied for and obtained, and this is quite an improvement compared to 2013 when the bureau was in its initial phase. However, there are still some impediments, such as the time lag between application for the license and holding the event. For instance, when applying for conference and trade exhibitions, organizers are required to apply for the licenses 180 days before the day on which the event will be held, requiring the applicants to wait for five days before the initial approval is granted. Organizers are then required to apply for the license again after getting the initial approval, before being given the final approval (SECB, 2016). Such procedures are quite time-consuming and may limit the flexibility of events by making it hard to change dates, even in situations where it is necessary.

SECB keeps records of performance statistics of the country in regard to the number of meetings held and other activities or metrics that can be used to assess the performance of this sector and the role it has played. In 2013, approximately 3.2 million visitors visited events in the Kingdom, adding about US \$ 2.292 billion to its economy (Impactpub.com, 2013). Evidence of the efforts by the SECB in evaluating the performance of the sector and accordingly developing strategies for growth and sustainability can be seen in the consistent growth of performance indicators of the sector. In 2016, for instance, it was established that there were approximately 231 consumer exhibitions held, 2004 training courses, 2985 workshops, 3301 meetings, 13 career exhibitions, 28 charity exhibitions, 50 product launches, 57 trade exhibitions, 13 conventions, 47 conferences and 29 forums. There were also a high number of visitors to licensed events in 2016, estimated at 4,413,396, and the number of licensed business events stood at 8758 (SECB, 2016). This high number of conferences is an indication that SECB plays its role in growing this sector effectively. Figure 3.2 represents the statics of the Saudi meetings industry in 2016:

Saudi Meetings Industry Statistics 2016



Number of Visitors to Licensed Events
4413396

Total Number of Licensed Business Events
8758

Peak Seasons
May

Growth Percentage in business events number comparing with the 2016
%12

Active economic sectors in business events
Educational - Health Care - Professional services

Peak seasons for business events
Fourth Quarter

Provinces with the largest number of business events
Riyadh Province 48%
Makkah Province 31%
Eastern Province 18%

www.secb.gov.sa

Fig. 3.2: Statistics of the Saudi meetings industry in 2016. Source: SEBC (2016)

This progressive trend is also evident in the 2018 first quarter statistics, and even though they are not full year statistics, there have already been many meetings held across the country courtesy of SECB. So far, there have already been 97 consumer exhibitions since the beginning of the year, 683 training courses, 1081 workshops, 1044 meetings, 5 forums, 1 career exhibition, 54 charity exhibitions, 20 trade exhibitions, 24 conferences, and 413 conventions (SECB, 2018). The distribution of these business events in terms of their locations in the country has, however, not changed much compared to 2016: Riyadh hosted 49% of the meetings, 30% were arranged in Makkah and 15% were hosted in Eastern Province. Compared to the 2016 and 2017 first quarters, this is a growth of 32% and 21% respectfully (SECB, 2018), and this indicates a progressive change.

The SECB also wants to create global awareness about its efforts and developments and enhance The Kingdom's image. SECB is a new organisation in the Kingdom as initially the Ministry of commerce regulated all business events, but now it is independent and staffs itself. It wants to make Saudi Arabia a meeting hub. It is offering support and information to organizers around the globe about new developments. It has joined with the publisher NPI to offer guidance to international firms via brochures and calendars about different events held in Saudi Arabia. The website is also being improved and new sections will be added. It is also sponsoring international events such as the Political Forum. It conducts presentations at different industry events to promote its efforts aggressively. This will eventually bridge the gap between the Kingdom and the international conferences market via directing business opportunities to Saudi Arabia's meetings sector (Meetmiddleest.com, 2014a).

The main objectives of the SECB are to develop and implement licensing policies that are efficient and transparent to encourage investment in this particular sector. Further it works towards the development of service standards, and exhibition and convention venues. It offers research services in order to provide investors and stakeholders with important statistics to evaluate the economic impact of the sector on the Kingdom's GDP. The Bureau provides career opportunities to local people and also offers career development programs. It aims to promote the country as an attractive location for regional as well as international exhibitions and conventions (SECB, 2013a). For example, it is collaborating with different government bodies that can influence stakeholders in the meetings sector. It conducts research to explore the potential of this sector. Venue development is another strategy that is being applied to match venues with existing and future demand (Meetmiddleeast.com, 2014b).

Business Tourism in Saudi Arabia incorporates many events, including exhibitions, conferences, meetings and so on. These events are important from a cultural, social, political and commercial perspective of the nation. Many nations realize the importance of promoting their nation as a business hub in order to attract investment, thus positively affecting the country's image and ultimately GDP (SECB, 2013b). A number of specialized associations have been created to increase employment as well as investment in the sector. Thus, it is gradually adding value to the nation's economy and is becoming an independent industry. The Middle East enjoys a high rate of growth due to urban development, thus providing many facilities to the sector (SECB, 2013b).

3.4.2 SCTA (Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities)

The SCTA underwent numerous changes before becoming the first government agency that looks after the tourism sector of Saudi Arabia. In 2000 the Saudi Council of Ministers issued a resolution and the Supreme Commission for Tourism came into being. The purpose was to boost the tourism industry at the national and international levels. As the Antiquities and Museums sector became important for the tourism industry, another resolution was passed in 2008 and the SCT was converted into the 'Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities' (SCTA) thus combining the Antiquities and Museums sector and the Supreme Commission for Tourism (SCT) into one body. The country has massive archaeological treasures while its historical sites and museums are also one of a kind. The geographical location, landscape, seacoasts along the shores of the Red Sea and Arabia Gulf and varying climate of the country make it an ideal tourism destination. The country is rich in culture, while the people are very hospitable. It also enjoys modern communications, infrastructure and technology. The country is politically stable and economically prospering (SCTA, 2014a). Hence attracting foreign tourists and businesses will not be much of a struggle for The Kingdom, provided it makes its tourism sector strategically strong.

The SCTA has initiated a program called "National Tourism Development Project" to provide a more scientific basis on which to develop the tourism industry to international standards. The purpose is to apply the latest systems, strategies and structures. It also provides guidance and support to local communities, creates jobs and promotes the natural heritage at the national and international levels. The overall strategy addresses the potential of the tourism industry and removes obstacles obscuring its development. After in-depth research and analysis, various plans have been developed for economic, political and administrative reforms to support the efforts of the SCTA. Tourism at the provincial level has also undergone changes via strategy development to promote tourism at the provincial level (SCTA, 2014b). It plans to grow its internal tourism by

5.6% per year at a constant rate and increase expenditure in this sector by US\$34.9 billion by 2015. Given Saudi Arabia's increased commitment to the tourism industry as a way to diversify its economy from over-reliance on oil profits, this is not impossible (SECB, 2018). The Ministry of Commerce and Industry and SCTA (Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities) gives special importance to the exhibition and conference sector (SCTA, 2012) Business tourism is also referred to as the meeting industry, exhibition and conference market, and business events. Specialised associations are established within this sector in Saudi Arabia. At present, it is an important economic resource with an increasing growth in employee strength, alongside growing investments (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2018). Figure 3.3 shows a conference on tourism in Saudi Arabia. It shows Saudi Arabia's continued commitment to enhancing its tourism industry.



Figure 3.3: Conference Held in Saudi Arabia (SCTA, 2012)

The government of Saudi Arabia has decreased the taxes on foreign investment to encourage international hotels and tourism related businesses to invest in The Kingdom (SCTA, 2012). For instance, the government will encourage projects that it believes will create jobs in the Kingdom. The Arab-British Chamber of Commerce is an entity that provides trade opportunities and supports cooperation between the two regions by breaking cultural barriers (Squiresanders.com, 2013).

3.4.3 Other rules and regulations in Saudi Arabia for tourism businesses

Saudi Arabia has strict visa procedures, but inbound tourism shows good potential for growth. The population of the country is growing at a fast pace (Colliers, 2012). However, there are not enough leisure facilities to capitalise on its domestic tourism industry. The affluent younger population have few opportunities for leisure and entertainment. The country's natural heritage has not been properly promoted to attract national and international tourists (Colliers, 2012). The lifestyle of the people in the urban areas has evolved to a point where there is a need to provide more types of leisure activities and entertainment. However, the progression of the provision of facilities remains very slow, and as such, people don't have many options when it comes to leisure activities. The country's business environment is quite competitive and open for partnership with tourism investors, developers and operators from the international market. The dependence of the country on oil is being reduced while tourism is being recognized as an important source of investment and profits (Colliers, 2012). For instance, British Expertise supports British businesses in international markets. It has helped many delegations to explore business opportunities in Saudi Arabia. The UK enjoys strong and lasting friendship with the Arab states. This provides UK businesses with a platform for strengthening ties with the Arab world. The Arab-British Chamber helps British and Arab businesses to develop new and stronger relations (Squiresanders.com, 2013).

In 2017, Saudi Arabia's GDP was placed at USD \$683.83 billion, representing a GDP value of 1.10% of the global economy (Trading Economics, 2018). Travel and tourism made up 34% of Saudi Arabia's total GDP, and it is predicted to increase by 3.7% in 2018 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018).

The government focus is on its religious tourism sector. There were about 4.4m inbound tourists and 5.2m domestic tourists in 2009 coming to Mecca and Medina. The business travel sector is also a well-established sector in Saudi Arabia. However, inbound tourism was about 12.9 m in 2010. This sector can be further developed as there are many opportunities to attract domestic tourists fond of travelling to other countries for leisure. According to SCTA, domestic tourism will enjoy 128m trips and 640m nights by the year 2019 (Colliers, 2012, and Eid, 2015).

The government has also made efforts to deregulate air travel by breaking the monopoly of Saudi Arabia Airlines. It is now encouraging local as well as foreign airlines to operate efficiently in the Kingdom. Historic sites and natural scenic cities, for example, Abha, are also being promoted so that local travellers will avail themselves of local tourism facilities instead of going abroad.

The internet is becoming an important source of sales for the tourism industry. There was internet penetration of 60% in the country in 2013. In 2018, this figure has reached 71.31% (Statista, 2018). Internationally, consumers also use the internet to search for products and services and even for purchasing. Therefore, many travel, and tourism companies are enhancing the online experience for their customers. Flyin.com and Booking.com have played an important role in this area (Euromonitor, 2014).

However, the restriction on tourist visas can be an obstacle in this regard. The promotion and revival of local tourist spots will be restricted to domestic tourists and pilgrims. Its neighbours such as the U.A.E are enjoying high growth rates for their travel and tourism industry as they have more liberal policies for visas (Euromonitor, 2014 and Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). However, these restrictions are either being relaxed or removed altogether in line with Vision 2030, as explained elsewhere in this study, in 2.4 Themes Resulting from Meta-Analysis.

3.5 Service Quality Management and the Saudi Arabian Tourism Industry

Saudi Arabia is working hard to enhance its tourism business. According to Hamad Al Sheikh, the vice-president of marketing and programs at the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (Sahoo, 2014), the market is developing rapidly and there is a continuous demand for the quality of tourism services in The Kingdom, which drives the whole industry. The industry is educating and training young people for the field, as new projects will create many jobs related to travel and tourism. Numerous institutes are offering courses and training programs (Amtul, 2011); some of the institutions offering tourism courses are as shown in Table 3.1 to name a few:

Table 3.1 Public and private colleges in Saudi Arabia offering degrees in tourism and hospitality.

| Name | College | Focus | Location | Year Opened | Public | Private |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------|-------------|--------|---------|
| King Saud University | College of Tourism and Archaeology | Tourism and Hotels | Riyadh | 2006 | X | |
| King Abdulaziz University | Tourism Institute | Hospitality and Tourism | Jeddah | 2007 | X | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|-----------------------------|---------|------|---|---|
| Um Alqura University | College of Tourism and Management | Tourism and Hospitality | Makkah | 2009 | X | |
| Hail University | College of Tourism and Archaeology | Tourism, Hotels, and Events | Hail | 2009 | X | |
| Jizan University | College of Arts and Humanities | Tourism | Jizan | 2009 | X | |
| Technical and Vocational Training Corp | College of Tourism and Hospitality | Hospitality and Tourism | Madinah | 2005 | X | |
| Alfaisal University | College of Tourism and Management | Travel and Tourism | Abha | 2009 | | X |
| Higher Institute | Laureate Riyadh | Tourism and Hospitality | Riyadh | 2013 | | X |
| for Tourism | Tourism and Hospitality College of Excellence | | | | | |
| High Institute for Tourism and Hospitality | Alhokeer High Institute for Hospitality and Tourism Education | Tourism and Hotels | Albaha | 2013 | | X |
| High Institute for Tourism | Alhokeer High Institute for Hospitality | Tourism and Hotels | Riyadh | 2014 | | X |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------|----------|---------|---|---|
| and Hospitality | and Tourism Education | | | | | |
| High Institute for Tourism and Hospitality | Alhokeer High Institute for Hospitality and Tourism Education | Tourism and Hotels | Jizan | 2014 | | X |
| High Institute for Tourism and Hospitality | Alhokeer High Institute for Hospitality and Tourism Education | Tourism and Hotels | Hail | 2014 | | X |
| High Institute for Tourism and Hospitality | Alhokeer High Institute for Hospitality and Tourism Education | Tourism and Hotels | AlKhobar | 2014 | | X |
| | | | | | | |
| High Institute for Tourism and Hospitality | Alhokeer High Institute for Hospitality and Tourism Education | Tourism and Hotels | Jeddah | 2014 | | X |
| Tibah University | College of Tourism | Tourism | Al Ula | 2015-17 | X | |
| King Khalid University | College of Tourism | Tourism | Abha | 2015-17 | X | |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------|-------|---------|---|--|
| University of Tabuk | College of Tourism | Tourism | Tabuk | 2015-17 | X | |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------|-------|---------|---|--|

(Monshi & Scott, 2016)

Efforts to improve the quality of services are a priority for the government, and institutions offering such courses provide a good platform for improving the tourism industry in the Kingdom. Despite the fact that the programmes initially had low rates of enrolment, more students are now enrolling for the courses. As a result of high growth potential and a consistent performance, the tourism industry is contributing to the country's economy significantly. According to Ziyad Bin Mahfouz, President of Elaf Group (Sahoo, 2012),

"We have achieved exceptional results and have surpassed our targets, and this is all attributed to our deep understanding of the needs and requirements of our guests and clients."

Mahfouz is highly ambitious and hopeful of making his company a leading hospitality provider across Saudi Arabia.

The country can further make improvement by introducing tourism-related degrees, offer training and run workshops to produce qualified personnel for the tourism sector. Training should be a continuous process as employees need to keep themselves abreast of new developments in the sector. Learning different languages will also add to the ability of these employees to handle international visitors successfully.

3.6 Service Quality and Business Tourism

Research has shown that business travellers are interested in the following features when travelling across borders (Trade Forum, 2008):

- Accessible and readily available packages customized to meet their needs. For example, business traveller's fond of golf would prefer golfing opportunities during their business visit.
- The quality of services should remain consistent and should be of high quality across all sectors. From the airport to the hotel to the convention or meeting, these travellers want the same high quality of services throughout their trip.
- The ability to transact business conveniently in order to have time for leisure as well is preferred by many business travellers.

- The facility to extend their stay e.g. hotel check-in and check-out policies, visa extensions etc. are also seen as an added value.
- Travellers want to travel and hold meetings on schedule in order to reflect punctuality to business partners.

If service quality remains consistently high over time, business travellers will be retained while new ones can be easily attracted via positive word-of-mouth. In Saudi Arabia there are no difficulties in delivering these services although The Kingdom can do more to maintain its competitive advantage over the other tourist destinations in the region. Service quality can become an important source of competitive advantage (Fuller, 2006). As consumer preferences keep on changing and technology keeps on advancing, offering innovative packages is crucial for sustainable growth in the business tourism industry. Services are seen as a crucial element that differentiates between tourist providers. To serve international businesses Saudi Arabia must provide services of the highest quality and be able to compete at a global level.

3.7 Summary

The tourism industry of Saudi Arabia appears to be a very promising one. Reliance only on its oil reserves can be dangerous as it is a natural resource that can become scarce. It is for this reason that Vision 2030 has provided a framework for moving the economy away from oil dependence. As people from around the globe are interested in touring The Kingdom, the government should make this sector stronger to encourage more businesses in the region. The country enjoys political stability and economic growth, which makes it an attractive destination for business. The reviewed studies have identified the potential of the tourism industry and what The Kingdom has done so far to make it more competitive. However, previous research has failed to identify policies that the government can implement to improve the effectiveness of the industry. This study seeks to investigate the policy frameworks that the government needs to undertake in order to ensure that the tourism industry attains its full potential. The following chapter highlights the methodological framework that the researcher will use to attain the aims and objectives of the study.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Business tourism is becoming increasingly recognised globally, because it demonstrates valuable economic contributions to numerous tourist destinations. As part of the business tourism sector, the conference industry has led to numerous benefits for the respective destinations. Some of the benefits include cultural and social advantages for the tourist destinations, besides enhancing business deals among delegates. Thus, it is quite evident that the conference industry as part of business tourism has significant effects on the tourist destination's economy. This, among other factors, is the reason why many countries across the globe, including Saudi Arabia, are striving to come up with international conferences that have wider economic significance. It was therefore necessary to devise a methodology that would help in analysing the service quality of the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia, besides evaluating the experience that the delegates have had in The Kingdom as a host destination. In Saudi Arabia, the conference tourism sector is in its initial stages of development, implying significant opportunities that might be adequately exploited by local businesses. Carrying out research about this economic sector will therefore be beneficial because it will identify ways in which the opportunities can be exploited to the maximum. This is especially relevant because not much research has been carried out on the conference tourism sector in Saudi Arabia.

The approach that was considered ideal in addressing this research was a mixed research design in which both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were incorporated. The decision of the researcher to implement both qualitative and quantitative research methods is because through combining them, the research gains strength, and it offsets the limitations of each individual research design (Bazeley, 2006; Bowling, 2014). In addition, there are specific research objectives that could be best addressed using a qualitative approach, and others using a quantitative approach. For instance, the second objective entails understanding the positive and negative factors that impact business tourism and business tourism policy in Saudi Arabia, and this objective was addressed using a qualitative approach. The third objective, which involved the analysis of the quality of service and its impacts on business tourism in Saudi Arabia's conference tourism, was evaluated using a quantitative research approach (see Table 4.3). This mixed approach provides the flexibility that ensures that the ideal data required for addressing different research objectives is collected.

This chapter discusses the methodological approaches that were used in the selection of data sources, collection of data, and its analysis. The selection of each element of the research

methods will be justified by referring to the previous literature on research methods. Among the aspects that will be discussed in this section of the methodology are the research approaches used and why they were selected; the research design; techniques used in sampling data sources; instruments used in the collection of data; data analysis; ethical issues, and the research limitations. Table 4.1 summarises the research objectives that were to be addressed in this research.

Table 4.1: Research objectives

| Objectives |
|---|
| 1. To examine the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international business and conference tourism destination |
| 2. To understand the positive and negative factors affecting business tourism and the business tourism policy of Saudi Arabia. |
| 3. To analyse the quality of service and its effect on business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. |
| 4. To explore the social and political feasibility of Saudi Arabia developing as an international business conference tourism destination. |

(Source: Author)

The research onion can be used to provide guidance on the main elements of the methodology that will be considered in the research. It is presented in Figure 4.1:

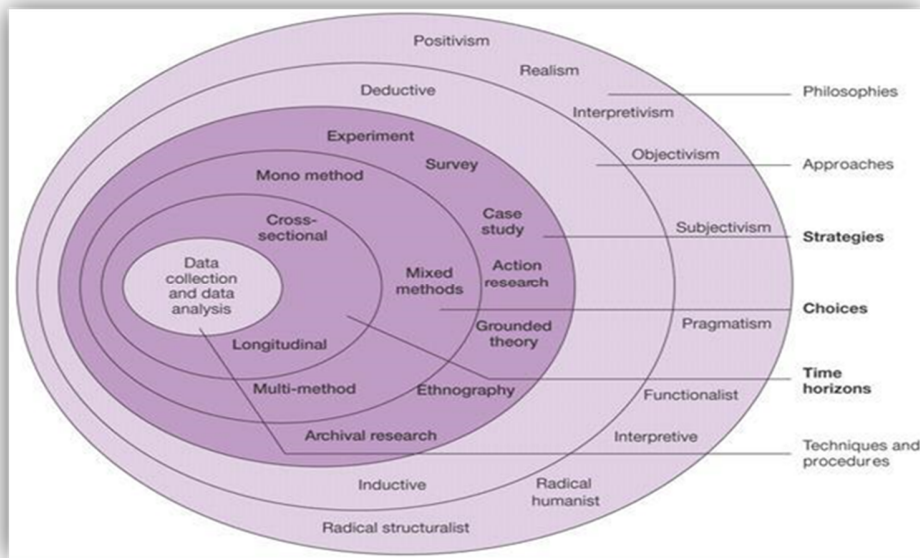


Figure. 4.1: Research Onion (Bryman & Bell, 2015)

4.2 Research Philosophy

This is the theoretical paradigm that guides the approach through which the research addresses its objectives. The research philosophies that are commonly used are positivism and interpretivism (Craver, 2014). In positivism, research is expected to have a scientific or experimental backing. Researchers who are guided by this philosophy are usually interested in examining their research phenomena in an objective manner, and surveys that make use of quantitative data are preferred. Mathematical or statistical approaches are used in the analysis of the research data and in many cases the conclusions drawn from the research are applied in supporting or dispelling existing theories or research hypotheses. It is argued by Creswell (2007) that studies guided by this philosophy are by nature deductive and not inductive.

The interpretivist philosophy on the other hand is quite different, because it argues that not all phenomena can be examined using experimental or scientific approaches (Goldkuhl, 2013). According to this philosophy, reality is relative and multiple, and cannot be effectively examined by strict quantification of variables. It advocates a qualitative approach to inquiry in which varying opinions from respondents can be used in understanding the dynamics of research phenomena. One of the approaches that constitutes interpretivism is phenomenology, which is associated with examining situations in terms of the experience of participants. It aims at knowing the experience

of individuals concerning something, and in this study, the tourism industry is the object (Seidman, 2013). The central aim of a phenomenologically inspired method is to record the lived experience of the subjects, without making any personal assumptions about the correctness or incorrectness of what those subjects believe (Darawsheh, 2014). The phenomenological approach allows the collection of extensive information related to the investigated issue, as well as perceptions; thereby ensuring a strong focus on subjectivity and personal knowledge is maintained. Given that a positivist philosophy recommends a quantitative design and an interpretivist philosophy recommends a qualitative design, both interpretivist and positivist philosophies were applicable in this research and, as shall be outlined in this section, a mixed research design was utilised.

4.3 Research design

This section discusses the different research approaches that are typically used in research, outlining their strengths and weaknesses. There are two main research designs, qualitative and quantitative (Bailey, 2014). This section discusses these research designs, how they were used in the research and the reasons why they were used in addressing the different research objectives.

4.3.1 Quantitative research methods

As part of the researcher's decision about the specific research method to be utilised in the study, it is important to discuss the features of the three main research designs: quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods approach. Quantitative research techniques emphasise rational aspects and data, and might be said to attempt to translate what individuals think into numbers and statistics (Wyatt, 2015). The use of such methods is feasible in the case where the researcher wants to distinguish how many people support a suggested change in products or services and how they may sustain their opinion. Quantitative research usually generates large quantities of numerical data that can be summarised and subjected to statistical analysis (Bailey, 2014). This approach to research gives the researcher an opportunity to identify different variables in the research, establish how they relate to each other and as such, prove or disapprove pre-existing assumptions or hypotheses.

Quantitative research design principally uses structured approaches to data collection, such as questionnaires and surveys that contain specific questions and answers that participants must mark from a predefined list of answers (Devetak *et al.*, 2010). This makes it possible for the researcher to tabulate and quantify the responses in terms of the frequencies with which certain multiple-choice answers were selected by respondents (Bryman, 2004). Specifically, for questionnaires, Likert scale choices are commonly used in order to identify the degree of

agreement or disagreement that the respondents have regarding different statements or questions that are posed to them. This tactic was also used in the development of questionnaires for this research. For instance, respondents were asked to state whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, were neutral, agreed, or strongly agreed with different statements included in the questionnaire. Quantitative research generally relies on a relatively high number of respondents to ensure that the obtained results are statistically significant. This makes it possible for the results to be generalised to the research population or even to other populations whose characteristics are similar to the research population.

There are several advantages that are associated with quantitative research. One of these is the fact that data collection instruments such as questionnaires are often standardized. This makes the collection and analysis of data easier and as argued by Kruger (2003), makes it possible for the research to be replicated on different research samples. Personal bias is also limited in quantitative research because there is often no interaction between the researcher and respondents when collecting data through instruments such as questionnaires. As such, there is minimal researcher influence on the respondents' answers (Bryman, 2012). Even with these advantages, there is a limitation in the research results because the numerical description of data omits a detailed narrative and elaboration of the human perception of the results. The fact that respondents' answers are often limited to multiple choices provided for them in questionnaires by researchers also makes it difficult for respondents to freely express their feelings about the research phenomena. The results are also limited based on the fact that the research relies on numerical descriptions instead of providing in-depth narratives that provide an account of human perception (Yin, 2009). With the right skills, these disadvantages can be highly controlled to give accurate and reliable results. These limitations are complimented by the qualitative research design, as discussed below.

4.3.2 Qualitative research methods

Unlike a quantitative design, which involves collecting numerical information, qualitative research is concerned with how individuals feel and experience what they do, and why they make the decisions they do. For instance, researchers who are concerned with the implementation of a qualitative research approach are interested in exploring the types of reactions and attitudes adopted by individuals on a particular topic (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2013). There are several methods that are used in qualitative research. One such method is observations. Observations involve watching the natural environment of the subject of study where the researcher can make comments that will help in reaching the specified objectives of the study (Yin, 2009). Alternatively,

an interview session can be carried out where the interviewer and the interviewee are present. The interviewer will ask questions for the interviewee to answer, and the interview may be recorded for further reference during the analysis.

There are different categories within the interview method: structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews. The structured interview is where the researcher uses the same questions in a specified order throughout the interview session (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, the interviewer can alter the format of questions so as to obtain the maximum information (Silverman, 2010). Unstructured interviews are held like conversations between the researcher and respondents, without a specific set of questions being adhered to (Jones, 2007); however, to ensure all information is captured during the interview, prearranged interview questions are preferable. During the interview session, the participant is encouraged to reveal their reasons for having certain opinions, which can disclose their primary motivations, links and behavioural causes. Focus groups are also often used in qualitative research (Nissen, 2005). A focus group interview is where a group of people are asked about what they think or feel about the subject of the study. Also, it represents a specific method of collecting information through a semi-structured group interview, as they are adequately moderated by a group leader (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Moreover, the researcher should be aware of any red flags in society. This can be managed by encouraging all the members of the group to give answers. If the focus group is not properly conducted, the researcher may end up interrogating one or two participants only. Like a quantitative research design, a qualitative design has several strengths, one of these is that the data collection methods are not highly structured and restrictive, and as such, more in-depth information is collected from the respondents. There are however several limitations associated with this research, for instance, the depth of the data collected using this approach limits the number of respondents or the sample size. This also limits the generalizability of the results. These and further strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative research design are summarised in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2: Advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research

| Advantages of Qualitative Research | Disadvantages of Qualitative Research |
|---|--|
| In-depth exploration of data | Researcher bias |
| Interviews are not limited to specific questions | Rigour is difficult to maintain |
| The research framework is subjected to revision | Data interpretation is time consuming |
| The data gathered is more compelling than quantitative research because first-hand data is provided | Inability to generalise research results |
| It promotes openness, especially where open-ended questions are used | Difficult to bring out comparisons |

(Marshall *et al.*, 2013)

4.3.3 Mixed methods

Combining these two research approaches can offer benefits for the tourism sector (Bailey, 2014). For instance, before initiating a survey for collecting quantitative results, researchers might first want to discover more about what experts believe to be important. With this in mind, researchers may first conduct qualitative research to help develop questions for a quantitative study (Craver, 2014). The use of a mixed research approach implies a focus on research questions that require an in-depth, contextual understanding of the investigated topic. As a result, the explored issue is framed through theoretical and philosophical assumptions. The major goal of mixed methods research is to investigate a particular research question from all possible relevant angles, as more than one investigative perspective is applied (Goldkuhl, 2013). In essence, when a mixed research design is used, the limitations of either of the component research designs are offset by the other research design. For instance, quantitative research collects shallow but broad data from large research samples, whilst qualitative research collects in-depth data from a small research sample (Bryman, 2012). This means that the shallowness of data collected by the quantitative research is offset by the depth of the qualitative data. This research, as aforementioned, was approached using a mixed research design and in so doing, it was guided by both positivist and interpretivist philosophies.

4.4 Why a Mixed Research Approach is Appropriate for this Study

The fact that qualitative and quantitative designs complement each other – each covering for the weakness of the other – is the main strength associated with this approach (Venkatesh, Brown & Bala, 2013). For instance, quantitative methods tend to involve collecting a large number of responses to questions that have fixed categorical answers. This is advantageous because of the high degree of generalisability of the data collected when compared to a qualitative research design in which data is collected from a small research sample (Fetters, Curry & Creswell, 2013). However, the broad data collected in the quantitative design is not fully capable of offering an in-depth understanding of the research subject. This limitation of the quantitative approach is covered by the qualitative approach, which typically involves only a few, carefully selected participants, allowing for greater depth and the collection of more detail (Darawsheh, 2014; Craver, 2014). This is an example of the advantages brought about by the mixed methods approach.

The first, second and fourth objectives have been addressed in Table 4.3 using just the qualitative approach. The main reason why a qualitative research approach is important in addressing these specific objectives is that it enables the researcher to delve into people's deeper feelings and reactions, rather than generalising and making statistical inferences (Devetak *et al.*, 2010). It is essential to note that qualitative research uses a small sample, which might be more convenient for the researcher who may want to focus on each of the participants individually in order to retrieve specific information on the topic under investigation in the study. However, this aspect concerning a small sample might apply to quantitative research as well, depending on the researcher's personal choice. Qualitative research engages in a dialectic process occurring between the questions initially introduced and the data observed (Nissen, 2005).

Whilst the qualitative research approach has been identified as the most appropriate for collecting data from the Saudi Arabia community, the quantitative research approach was considered as effective for collecting data from international delegates, and this is needed to address one of the research objectives, which is to analyse the quality of service and its effects on business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. The reason for using the quantitative research approach for this group of respondents is that it facilitates the collection of data from as many of them as possible (Sarantakos, 2012). Because quantitative data is mainly collected using structured data collection instruments like close-ended questionnaires, the process of data collection and analysis is usually simpler than that used in the collection of qualitative data. Therefore, the time required to collect data from one respondent in a quantitative research approach is much less (Bryman, 2012). Even though the information collected might not be as specific and in-depth as that

collected using qualitative data collection instruments, the generalisability associated with quantitative research will enable stakeholders to apply the results to the larger international body of conference tourists and investors in Saudi Arabia, and thus implement the necessary strategies to attract them.

Based on the arguments presented above, the choice of the researcher to use a mixed methods research design is justified considering the specificity of the tourism sector, which requires both an in-depth exploration of some elements, as well as the collection of a lot of data in order to facilitate generalisability. A mixed research approach, as argued by Marshall *et al.* (2013), also increases the credibility and accuracy of the research results. This is because whereas some research objectives can be effectively addressed using the qualitative approach, others require the quantitative approach in order to be fully addressed. Table 4.3 shows the different research objectives and how the mixed approach was used in addressing them.

The ways in which both the qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed in order to address the different research objectives are summarised in the Table 4.3 according to the research objectives:

Table 4.3: Research Objectives and Data Collection Methods

| Research objectives | Data collection | Data analysis |
|--|---|--|
| 1- To examine the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international business and conference tourism destination | Six semi-structured face-to-face interviews | Qualitative data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach |
| 2-To understand the positive and negative factors affecting business tourism and the business tourism policy of Saudi Arabia | 10 semi-structured face-to-face interviews | Qualitative data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach |
| 3-- To analyse the quality of service and its effects on business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia | 124 questionnaires | A quantitative approach was used. Descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis were used with SPSS as the preferred data analysis tool. |
| 4- To explore the social and political feasibility of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia developing as an international business and conference tourism destination | 10 semi-structured face-to-face interviews | Qualitative data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach |

(Source: Author)

4.5 Sampling

Sampling is the selection of a section of the research population in order to ease the process of data collection and also to ensure that the data collected is manageable (Black, 2011). There are different approaches that can be used in sampling, the main ones being random sampling and non-random sampling (Zikmund *et al.*, 2012), in random sampling, the researcher randomly picks any member of the research population without following any predetermined criterion. Any of the members of the population are eligible for selection as a research respondent. The main advantage associated with random sampling is that it has quite a low level of bias, which increases the accuracy of the research results (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, the associated drawback is that it may be time consuming because the researcher has to have access to the whole population or their details in order to come up with an appropriate random sample. In addition to this, since there is no specific criterion for selecting respondents, therefore those with the relevant expertise or knowledge regarding the research subject might be left out (Yin, 2009).

Non-random or purposive sampling, on the other hand, involves the selection of research respondents based on specific characteristics that have already been decided upon by the researcher (Black, 2011). This sampling approach is appropriate in situations where the researcher is seeking convenience, or may not have much time to select the sample randomly or may not know the population. There are several advantages to this sampling approach, one of these being that it enables the researcher to select the most suitable subjects for the research and it saves time as a result (Zikmund *et al.*, 2012). The downside, however, is that it is quite prone to bias because researchers may naturally prefer a section of the research sample and ignore other sections. Selection of the ideal sampling approach therefore depends on a variety of issues.

For this specific study, purposive sampling was used for selecting respondents from whom data could be collected using interviews. It was selected as an appropriate method for recruiting participants, as it is an approach which is designed to make it possible to collect cases that are rich in information in a manner that is both determined and tactical (Devetak *et al.*, 2010). The precise type and number of cases chosen depends on the research objectives and other aspects previously discussed. The reason for selecting this approach is that the study requires respondents who are well-versed in the subject of tourism. Identification of respondents according to their knowledge about the sector was imperative for the success of this project and thus, a convenience sampling approach was seen to be the most ideal for this research. This approach involves the selection of respondents based on their relevance to the research subject, and their availability and willingness to take part in the study (Borrego *et al.*, 2009; Sarantakos, 2012). In

order to gain an in-depth understanding of the research issue, a relatively small research sample is sufficient for providing data on the research subject. Nonetheless, there has been growing interest amongst researchers in Saudi Arabia's economy, many of whom have established the overreliance of the country on oil and gas, and have recommended that it should focus on other viable sources of revenue to shield it from adversity brought about by fluctuations in oil prices. Whilst many of them have suggested tourism as an alternative, there has been minimal focus on conference tourism, which limits the available information on its current status and future prospects. By focusing on business tourism, this study will contribute to filling this current research gap. It is particularly timely that the subject of the research corresponds to the vision of the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau. (SECB, 2018), which is the government organisation responsible for conferences in Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that the researcher was provided with letters of support from them (see Appendices 11 and 12). This was very helpful and confirmed the relevance of the research. However, such an undertaking is never without its difficulties, too. Obtaining samples for the study was a challenge, because of the lack of freedom of expression in many areas in Saudi Arabia, especially in the government sector.

Ultimately, six respondents were selected from the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau to take part in addressing the first objective of the research, which is to examine the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international business and conference tourism destination. In addition, to address the second objective, which is to understand the positive and negative factors affecting business tourism and the business tourism policy of Saudi Arabia, ten respondents were selected. The respondents were staff and managers of tourism companies drawn from the private sector, and this was done to ensure that the sample was sufficiently representative of the different stakeholders in business and conference tourism.

For the third objective, which was to analyse the quality of service and its effect on business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia, 124 questionnaires were administered, using non-random sampling, to participants selected from three different types of conferences in Saudi Arabia, attended by external conference delegates from across the globe. These participants use these services and can give a first-hand account of their experiences, and so were considered the ideal target population to meet this objective. Ten internal conference delegates were also selected as respondents, as these were relevant for addressing the fourth objective of the research, which is to explore the social and political feasibility of Saudi Arabia developing as an international business conference tourism destination. The selection of the respondents was not based on the sectors they were from, but based on the interest that they had in the conferences that were being

attended, as well as their willingness to take part in this study. These respondents were sampled from three different types of conferences in order to ensure that the possibility of bias was reduced.

There are several conferences on tourism held in Saudi Arabia each year, which were ideal avenues to access and select suitable interview respondents. The attendees of this event had specific knowledge about the subject of tourism and how it can be improved, and they have provided valuable insights for this research. A non-random sampling technique was applied. The fact that this approach also requires less time and resources to select an ideal sample size also contributed to its selection, as it also ensured that the respondents selected had relevant knowledge and experience about the dynamics of business and conference tourism. Sampling was done independently for the interview respondents and questionnaire respondents.

There have also been conferences that may be seen as being very suitable for sampling questionnaire respondents. Similarly to the interviews, the selection of different events from which to select the research sample was based on the fact that this provides different perspectives on the research subject, given that the attendees have different experiences as well as different national and cultural backgrounds of the external conference delegates that attended these events, 150 were provided with questionnaires to complete. Settling for 100 delegates as an appropriate sample size reflects the practicalities of accessing this number of delegates in the targeted conferences. It is also a sufficient sample size for collecting data that gives an in-depth examination of the research subject. In addition, given that the questionnaire instrument only addresses one research objective, this sample is considered sufficient. Table 4.4 summarises the different events that were attended, and the data collection instruments that were used in collecting the data from attendees.

| Population of interest | Methods used | Place | Date | Sampling criteria | Events at which participants were recruited |
|--|---------------------|--|---|--------------------------|---|
| <p>Staff and managers from The Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB) from one Government Organisation.</p> <p>Staff and managers of private companies and service providers (management and organisation) at conferences in Saudi Arabia</p> | Interviews | Dammam, Saudi Arabia Sheraton Dammam Hotel & Towers | 8--10 Nov, 2015 | Purposive sampling | <p>The Third Saudi Conventions & Exhibitions Forum Nov, 2015)</p> <p>Six respondents were interviewed from the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau, which is the government organisation responsible for conferences in Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>Ten respondents were interviewed, one each from a range of private companies and service providers.</p> <p>(Additionally , the researcher arranged to visit them in their offices)</p> |
| Internal conference delegates | Interviews | Dhahran International Exhibitions Center, Dammam, Saudi Arabia Intercontinental Hotel, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia | 15 -- 17 Nov 2015 17 -- 19 Nov, 2015 1- 3 Dec, 2015 | Purposive sampling | <p>Three respondents were interviewed from the Arab International Aluminium Conference and Exhibition (ARABAL).</p> <p>Three respondents were interviewed from the 3rd International Conference on Endocrinology and Diabetes.</p> <p>Four respondents were interviewed from the 2nd International Conference for Assessment and Evaluation.</p> |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|--|--|------------------------|---|
| External Conference Delegates | Questionnaires | InterContinental Hotel -Riyadh Saudi Dhahran International Exhibitions Center, Dammam, Saudi Arabia Intercontinental Hotel, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) Riyadh, Saudi Arabia | 15 -- 17 Nov 2015 17 -- 19 Nov, 2015 22 - 23 Nov, 2015 | Non-Random sampling | 43 respondents from the Arab International Aluminium Conference and Exhibition (ARABAL) 41 respondents from the 3rd International Conference on Endocrinology and Diabetes 40 respondents from the 4th Electronic Warfare Symposium 2015 |
|----------------------------------|----------------|--|--|------------------------|---|

Table 4. 4: Events from which research samples were selected and data collection methods used

(Source: Author)

4.6 Design of the Survey Instruments and Data Collection

As previously discussed, both face-to-face interviews and questionnaires have been used to collect the data. This section presents a discussion of how these data collection instruments were designed and how they were used in the research. A justification of how these data collection instruments were selected and used is also provided in this section.

4.6.1 The interviews

The data collection instrument that was deemed ideal for the qualitative design element is the interview, specifically semi-structured interviews. Such interviews are preferred because in addition to giving the respondents the freedom to express their opinions, they also provide the researcher with the convenience of preparing questions before carrying out the interview; this way, time wastage is greatly minimised (Polit & Beck, 2008). The respondents selected for interviews in this research were mainly those who were knowledgeable and had reasonably long experience in their different areas of expertise. Through the interviews they had the opportunity to exhaustively address the different interview questions and as such, provide extensive insights about the different areas of interest in the research. For this research, the questions had to be designed in a manner that would elicit responses that effectively address the research questions. Even with the benefits associated with semi-structured interviews, there are also several shortcomings. The benefits and shortcomings are shown in Table 4.5:

Table 4.5: Strengths and Weaknesses of Semi-structured Interviews

| Benefits and shortcomings of semi-structured interviews | |
|---|---|
| Benefits | Shortcomings |
| 1. They collect data that is reliable and comparable because of the uniformity of questions to all interviewees | 1. They require the interviewer to have good communication skills in order to collect as much information as possible from respondents. |
| 2. They allow the researcher to prepare beforehand and thus save time during the interview itself | 2. Interviews may be time consuming, especially if the interviewees are required to provide a lot of details regarding the research subject |
| 3. They give respondents the freedom to express their free and honest opinions regarding the question asked | |
| 4. There is an opportunity for the interviewee to explain or clarify complex questions to the respondent. | |

(Adapted from Polit & Beck, 2008)

In the design of the interview schedule, the researcher considered the importance of attending the Third Saudi Convention and Exhibition Forum in order to gain in-depth insights into the explored issue of business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia (Mazanderani & Papparini, 2015). The planned schedule for attending the Forum was the 8th to the 10th of November 2015. Initially, the focus was on the use of pilot interviews in preparation for a visit to Saudi Arabia in July and August 2015 in order to attend the respective conferences. In this way, officials could be visited in their offices to conduct more in-depth interviews. Such a preliminary step preceding the actual interview process is important in enriching the researcher's perspectives on the potential of developing and enhancing business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia (Bradley & Griffin, 2015).

Following a common interview structure is relevant in this study, as three major parts can be identified: the opening, the body of the interview and the closing procedure. The opening of the interview serves important purposes, such as establishing a rapport with participants, providing them with information on the significance of the research itself, emphasising motivation, and providing a time line. In this context, the researcher presented himself and established a welcoming atmosphere that instilled trust and confidence in the participants (Galvin, 2015). The basic purpose of the interview is to ask specific questions related to the participant's background as well as specialised questions related to the main target of the research.

The duration of each interview was roughly 45-60 minutes, and they were carried out during breaks during these conferences. During the interview sessions, the conversations were audio recorded, and at the same time, notes were taken for reference during the data analysis stage. The benefit of the audio recording is to ensure that all information is captured (Basit, 2003), and the shortcomings of note-taking were compensated for by the audio recording so as to avoid human error. There is however an argument by some researchers that when respondents are aware that they are being audio recorded they tend to reduce the degree of openness as they respond to interview questions. The interview questions which were designed for the three different target groups are in Appendices 2,3 and 4.

4.6.2 Developing the questionnaire

The questionnaires for this research were designed using close-ended questions in consideration of the research questions, as well as the knowledge and experiences of the respondents regarding the subject of tourism in Saudi Arabia. One of the conveniences of questionnaires, especially the close-ended ones, is that the same set of questions and suggested responses are provided to all research respondents, and thus the collation and analysis of data after its collection is greatly eased for the researcher. This is necessary

especially if the research sample is quite large (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Other benefits and weaknesses associated with this data collection instrument are presented in the Table 4.6 :

Table 4.6: Strengths and Weaknesses of Questionnaires with Close-ended Questions

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|---|
| They make answering quick and easy for the respondents | The choices provided for the questions may not have the exact response the respondent wished to give |
| The multiple choice options beneath the questions can clarify the question for the respondents | The many options included in the questionnaire may confuse the respondents, especially in the Likert scale sections |
| The uniformity of questions and the responses beneath them increases the consistency of responses and thus eases comparison | There is no interaction with the researcher and so the questions may be misinterpreted |
| They are easier to analyse compared to interviews or open-ended questions | A large sample size is needed in order to obtain reliable results |

(Adapted from Bryman and Bell, 2015)

In order to address the objective of analysing the quality of service and its effects on business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia, it was necessary to collect data from individuals with the relevant knowledge and experience. A wide variety of close-ended questions was included in the questionnaire in order to collect quantitative data. Likert scales were incorporated in some sections of the questionnaire in order to assess the degree of agreement or disagreement with some of the suggestions or arguments set out in the questionnaire. In its design, it was divided into three sections. The first section requested the respondents to provide information about themselves regarding aspects such as gender, age, occupation, and country of origin, among others. This section was designed to show that the respondents were suitable for the study. The second section sought to establish the level of satisfaction among the respondents regarding several aspects of Saudi Arabia, including the conference they were attending, the conference itself, the quality and range of accommodation and the standards of transport and infrastructure. With these being vital contributors to the quality of service in the tourism sector, the responses from the clients were instrumental in establishing the strengths or weaknesses that may exist, and thus provide an ideal basis for recommending the changes that need to be made. The questionnaire that was used is in Appendix 5. After the necessary tests were carried out to establish the reliability and validity of the questionnaires through a pilot study, they were distributed to 150 external delegates, as hard printed copies . This is necessary to ensure that the delegates are given ample time to

satisfactorily fill in the questionnaires that they are provided with. Given that the questionnaire was designed with 23 questions which need quite some time to answer, the respondents were given a period of three days to complete them.

4.7 Pilot Study

4.7.1 Pilot study for interviews

A small pilot study was undertaken with two organisations – a government office and a private company – Internal conferences delegate to assess tourism policy and service quality management in business conference tourism. The pilot study consisted of recorded face-to-face interviews (between 45 and 60 minutes). The pilot study was undertaken with staff from Saudi Arabia organisations: the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB), and a private company (the conference organiser), which was selected and asked to engage in an interview, as well Internal delegate. The aim of the interviews was to meet the following objectives in order to ensure a confident start to the main study:

1. To check the validity of the interview questions;
2. To examine the reliability of the research methodology;
3. To identify the timeframe of the main study.

According to the objectives of the study for each group of participants from the organisations, the questions were used to achieve specific goals.

It was observed that the participants were comfortable in responding to the questions due to their simplicity, and all questions were completely clear to the respondents. Additionally, the respondents perceived the same meaning from the questions as that intended for the purpose of asking. the respondents were well chosen because they were familiar with the questions and the issues involved. There was also a tendency among respondents to answer the questions automatically before hearing the entire question, especially these who from the two organisations. This shows that the respondents were well-chosen, since they demonstrated familiarity with the issues involved. Moreover, the time taken for the interview was about 30 to 40 minutes, which shows that the interview does not take up much time from the respondents, while still providing precious information for the analysis section of the present research study. In short, the instrument for the current study is quite a reliable and valid tool which has helped in gathering reliable facts.

4.7.2 Pilot study for the questionnaires

As with the interviews, a pilot study was also carried out in order check the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. This was necessary to establish whether the questionnaire had

been appropriately designed to examine the relationship between service quality and the attractiveness of Saudi Arabia for international business and conference tourists. In the pilot study, ten international delegates who were in Saudi Arabia for either business or for conferences were selected as samples and were given the questionnaires to complete. Carrying out this pilot research helped to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Validity concerns the effectiveness with which a research instrument can collect data that addresses the objectives of the research. Feedback from the respondents, as well as consultation with experts at carrying out research, allowed some adjustments to be made to the questionnaire that ensured that it provided relevant data for the research.

The pilot also ensured that the respondents would clearly understand the questions posed to them. For instance, the question about their country of residence was found to be quite confusing for some respondents during the pilot study. As such, it was changed from "What is your country of residence?" to "What is your nationality?" This made the question less confusing. Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the ability of the research instrument to produce the same data when used on two samples from the same research population. To test for reliability, a reliability test was carried out using the data collected from the pilot study; a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 was obtained. This is satisfactory because a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.8 or above indicates that there is a good level of internal consistency in the research instruments (Taber, 2018). As such, the questionnaire was considered suitable for use in the research.

4.8 Data Analysis

4.8.1 Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data used in this research was collected using interviews as the data collection instrument, and transcripts of the responses provided by the respondents were created. A thematic analysis approach was used in the analysis of this data. This approach involves the identification of themes or patterns within the data in order to address the research objectives or questions (Silverman, 2001). This is done through rigorous processes of data coding, familiarisation, revision and theme development. Since there were different sets of interview questions developed to attain different objectives, the thematic analysis approach developed themes that effectively addressed the different respective research objectives (Welsh, 2002). One of the reasons that this analysis approach was selected is because it is theoretically flexible, since the researcher has the freedom to critically evaluate the data and develop themes that they independently see as present in the data (Bernard, 2011).

For the public/government sector, the initial number of respondents sampled was ten. However, when they were informed that the interviews were to be recorded and they had to

sign the interview consent form before participating, some of them opted to pull out, leaving only six respondents. For internal delegates, similarly, the initial number of respondents sampled was 15, but some of them opted to pull out, leaving only ten respondents. Nonetheless, their answers were informative and met the research objectives with in-depth and rich information. As for the private sector, all the 15 respondents who were sampled were interviewed. However, one of them later requested for his interview not to be used in the research. It was also established that two of them had not signed the interview consent form, and in two cases the interview recordings were not clear; this meant that even though their interviews had been recorded already, they could not be used. These were excluded, leaving a sample of ten respondents. Despite this, the sample size and information collected were established as sufficient for meeting the research objective. Respondents from the public sector also requested for their positions in the tourism sector not to be mentioned. This request was respected in adherence to research ethics. The lack of freedom of expression in many areas in Saudi Arabia, especially in the government sector, may have contributed to these reservations.

4.8.2 Quantitative data

Quantitative data collected via questionnaires had to be statistically analysed. To begin with, the information in the questionnaires was transferred onto a spreadsheet in order to identify how each of the respondents responded to all the 23 questions that were included in the questionnaire. It is at this stage that the spoilt questionnaires were identified and exempted from the final tally. These included those with many questions unanswered, not filled in at all, or those that were never collected from or returned by the respondents, the study distributed a total of 150 questionnaires. Non-Random sampling was used to ensure that the response rate met the intended 100 participants. The response was in the end more than expected, with 124 participants the participants to whom the questionnaires were distributed were attending three different types of conferences in Saudi Arabia, as explained previously in Table 4.4. It was found that 109 of the participants were male, representing (87.9%) of the sample, while 15 of the sample were female, representing (12.1%). The high representation of men and low representation of women that is shown here could be attributed to Saudi Arabia cultural and its religious environment and may have been an impediment in data collection. With the researcher being a man, it was difficult to enter the women's sections at the conferences, which reflect the restrictions of Saudi culture. As such, there was a challenge in meeting and convincing women to take part in the survey. Although attempts were made to remedy this issue, ultimately it was not feasible to address it fully. Additionally, one conference, the fourth Electronic Warfare Symposium, had very low attendance by women, which may be linked to the theme and the industry of the conference.

The language barrier was also a challenge for this research, especially when collecting data from questionnaires. The questionnaires were drafted in English and whilst a section of the respondents understood and could effectively answer the questionnaire, there were some who did not understand English and therefore, translation was required for them to understand the research questions. This applied especially to the external delegates of different nationalities and different languages.

After this tally, an appropriate data analysis approach was selected in order to ease the statistical analysis operations to be performed on the research variables.

The preferred tool for the analysis was the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). One of the capabilities of this software required in analysing the data collected in this study is descriptive and bivariate statistics (Bryman, 2012). This is because from the design of the questionnaire, as presented above, the main operations that are applicable to the data collected are the establishment of frequencies, ratios, means and correlations. Descriptive statistics were applied to the data collected in Section A of the questionnaire, in order to establish the frequencies or percentages of respondents in each category. In section B however, there was a need to test other correlations among the variables such as linearity. These operations are instrumental in establishing the relationship that exists between service quality and attraction of business and conference tourists. The analysed data was presented in Tables for easier understanding, comparison and even prediction of trends. One of the limitations of using SPSS, however, is that operating the application might be quite complex and thus a lot of skill is required by the researcher (Pallant, 2013).

4.9 Ethical Issues

In terms of motivation, it is important to emphasise that the information that is obtained from participants is to be used in a socially responsible manner in the context of Saudi Arabia. The process of undertaking research is associated with the researcher's thorough consideration of specific ethical issues. A major principle related to the ethical conduct of research is linked to the automatic elimination of any harm to participants. Reasonable expectations should be demonstrated by the participants themselves, especially concerning the exact degree of research validity, reliability and ethical conduct. The privacy and anonymity of those participating in the study should be guaranteed prior to initiating the research process (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop & Miller, 2002). Both institutional and individual privacy levels should be properly maintained by the researcher. A significant rule in this direction is to remove any identifying information from the records completed during the interview.

As a researcher, it is essential to preserve the confidentiality of the information provided. It is unethical to share the results with a third party unless one has been given the go-ahead by the respective official (Seidman, 2013). This implies that the researcher must have the social

responsibility to deal with the details provided in a confidential manner. The information should not be provided to third parties, as part of the enacted confidentiality principle in research. Another significant ethical issue is informed consent, indicating the importance of informing participants about the nature and goals of the study (Farrimond, 2012). Thus, they have the freedom to decide whether or not to participate in the research process. They should not be coerced into participation by any means.

In addition, aspects of rapport, in the sense of informing participants about all stages of the research process, and friendship demonstrated by the researcher, may reinforce the quality of the results reported in the study. Consent and information forms were presented to the respondents prior to the commencement of the interviews. This was necessary because it enabled them to provide informed consent regarding their participation in the research. When participants provide their agreement to take part in the study, the researcher is responsible for the development of a detailed, efficient rapport which enables them to disclose specific details related to the nature of the study. Maintaining a friendly attitude towards participants serves as a proper indicator of complying with the expected norms of ethical conduct in research (Kimmel, 2007). When the interviewer is able to put themselves in the position of those interviewed, there are significant possibilities for generating insightful results with relevant implications for practice in the sector of business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. It is also expected that the researcher should not demonstrate any aspects of intrusive behaviour, as this might reduce the quality of results, as well as the expectations of the participants concerning maintenance of a high level of ethical conduct (Banks, 2010). Inappropriate behaviour should be completely discouraged during the interview. In general, the process of data interpretation is quite sensitive in qualitative research, therefore an important expectation is that the researcher should analyse the data in an objective manner, avoiding misinterpretations.

4.10 Summary

This chapter has established that a mixed methods research design is the most suitable approach for carrying out this research in the business and conference tourism sector in Saudi Arabia, as evidenced by previous research. One of the benefits of using the mixed methods research approach is that the qualitative and quantitative research design components complement each other, which should result in the collection of accurate and satisfactory data. Specifically, the methods described for obtaining the qualitative data are: conducting interviews, which were semi-structured interviews with three major parts identified: the opening, the body of the interview and the closing procedure. The interviews enabled more information to be gained about the emerging and pertinent issues for the study's population.

The interview sessions targeted internal conference delegates, and the staff and managers of private companies as service providers (management and organisation) of conference tourism, and one government organisation, which is the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau.

In addition, quantitative data, which is required to address the connection between service quality and the attraction of international and business conference tourists to Saudi Arabia, was collected with the aid of a questionnaire that was designed using close-ended questions. Since there was direct contact between the researcher and the respondents, there was a need to observe research ethics, which has been clearly described in this chapter. Convenience sampling was used to select the interview respondents, while non random probability sampling was used for selection of the questionnaire respondents. The aspect of time was also considered as important throughout the research because it was to be carried out within a stipulated time frame. The interviewees were given ample time to effectively address the questions that were posed to them, and it took approximately 30 to 45 minutes for every interview session. The questionnaires that were distributed to respondents were also collected three days after distribution, which was considered an ample period for the respondents to satisfactorily fill them in, and at the same time, it was ideal for the researcher because it did not take up too much research time. Qualitative data was analysed using the thematic analysis approach, whilst SPSS was used to analyse the quantitative data. After carrying out this research, several limitations and opportunities for Saudi Arabia's business conference tourism were identified, and they are instrumental in the formulation of recommendations that can improve the performance of the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia. The next sections of the dissertation present the findings that were obtained from both the qualitative and quantitative data collected in the research.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Analysis Results from the Public and Private Sectors

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present the results of two of the objectives that were set for this study. The first objective was to examine the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international business conference tourism destination. The second objective was to understand the positive and negative factors affecting business, tourism, and the business tourism policy of Saudi Arabia.

The objectives were addressed using a qualitative research design. The qualitative data were collected using face to face interviews with different sets of respondents who were from the public and private sectors of Saudi Arabia's tourism industry. Establishing the developments that have taken place in the field of conference tourism in Saudi Arabia will help facilitate strategy formulation on areas that need more development or how the developments can be taken advantage of.

5.1.1 Results from the public sector

The first section of this chapter provides the results from the public sector. It provides a description of the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB), which is the government organisation responsible for conferences in Saudi Arabia, including the supervisory committee, advisory group members and its organisational structure. This is followed by a report and discussion of the results obtained from the interviews carried out with stakeholders from the public sector to address the first research objective mentioned above. The results are structured according to the different themes that emerged from the interview responses.

5.2 SECB Supervisory Committee

The SECB supervisory committee is the overall governing body of the SECB. This committee was created based on a decision by the council of ministers – which was headed by the President of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage – in May of 2013. It is in charge of the approval and overseeing of all the activities that take place in the bureau. It primarily includes representatives from different government agencies but has two additional representatives drawn from the private sector (SECB, 2016a). The private sector representatives are selected by the Council of Saudi Chambers. Among the aspects that this committee approves or oversees are its budget, rules and regulations and structure. Each of

the representatives on the committee is additionally responsible for providing advice on the sector's aspects that are synonymous with their organisations. The committee members are from different sectors which make up the Saudi commission of tourism and antiquities, the ministries of interior, finance, municipal and rural affairs, commerce, and members of the private and public sectors. Drawing members from different sectors of the economy ensures that SECB's activities and operations are run in a sustainable manner. The committee is summarised in Figure 5.1, below.

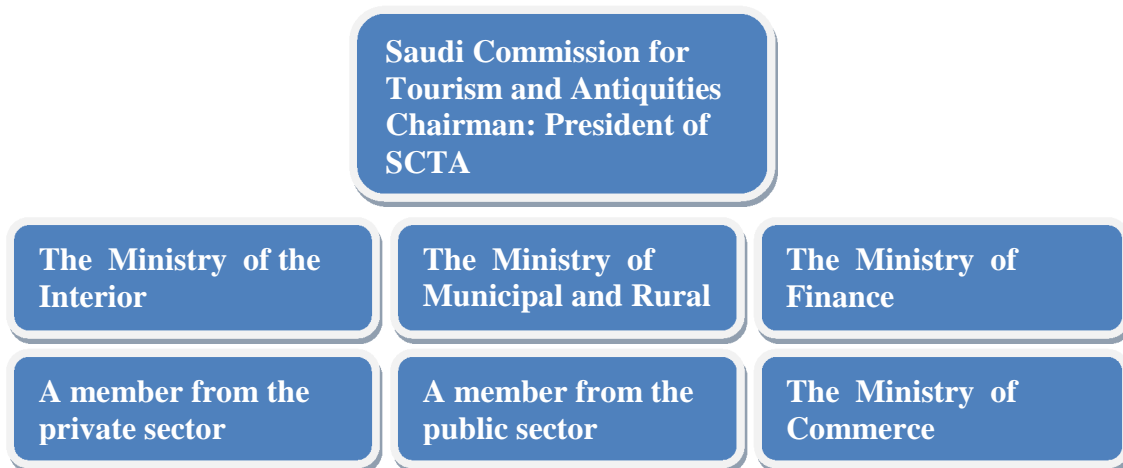


Figure 5.1: SECB Supervisory Committee Members (Source: author)

5.2.1 Advisory group members

The advisory group was created in November 2013 by the supervisory committee of the bureau and it consists of members from the conference and exhibition sector. This group is however temporary and subject to annual restructuring (SECB, 2016a). There are several roles that the advisory group members play, and these include designing plans for developing Saudi's exhibition and conference sector, the development of licensing and classification standards, updating fees for SECB services, and coming up with policies and plans for attracting investors, amongst others. The group consists of 27 members, as shown below:

- 22 qualified executives from the exhibition and convention sector
- The 2 supervisory committee representatives from the private sector
- 1 representative from the Council of Saudi Chambers
- The SECB chief executive officer
- The group coordinator from SECB.

5.2.2 The organizational structure of the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB)

According to the nature of the SECBs work and activities, and in order to effectively achieve its objectives of supporting the sustainable development of the conferences sector in Saudi Arabia, its organizational structure has been built as shown in Figure 5.2. It is evident that the structure is bureaucratic, with clearly defined levels of authority or ranks. At the highest level are the internal auditor and the supervisory committee. This is then followed by the finance and administration departments, the executive board and the board of directors. Below this level are three departments, which are marketing communications, business development and operations (SECB, 2016a). The significance of understanding this organizational structure was that it enabled the researcher to select respondents that were representative from all the sections of the SECB organizational structure.

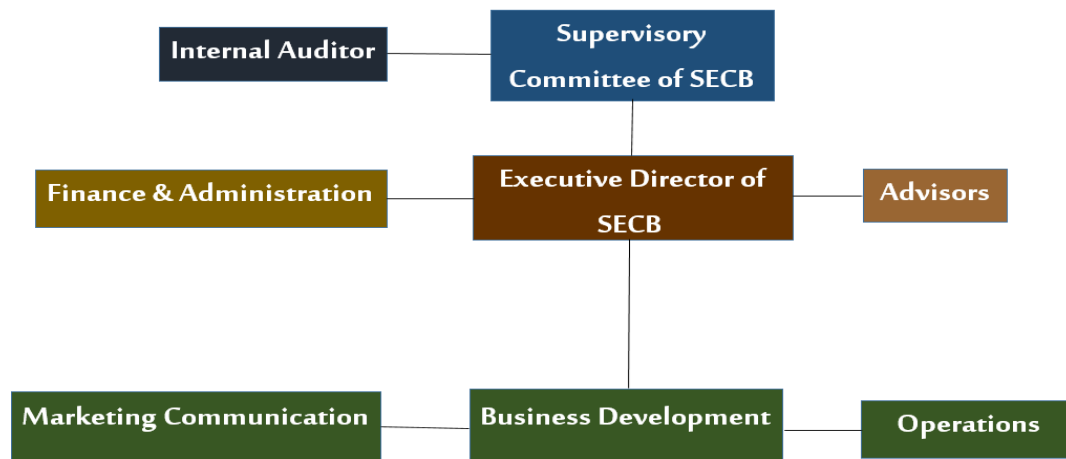


Figure 5.2: The Organizational Structure (Source: Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau, 2016)

5.3 The Research Sample

The respondents used meet the first objective, which was to examine the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international business conference tourism destination, consisted of six officials from the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau. The demographic characteristics of these participants, including their age, education level, department, and current work experience are presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents from the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau. (Source: author)

| Respondent ID | Age | Education | Department | Experience working in the tourism sector (in years) | Current work |
|----------------------|------------|--|--------------------------|--|---|
| R1 | 55 | Bachelor's degree in Media | Supervisory Committee | 20 | At the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau |
| R2 | 60 | Bachelor's degree in Finance and Marketing | Advisors | 9 | At the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau |
| R3 | 35 | Master's degree in Management Information Systems | Business Development | 2 | At the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau |
| R4 | 41 | Master of International Tourism and Hospitality Management | Marketing Communication | 11 | At the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau |
| R5 | Not Given | Master's degree in Media studies | Finance & Administration | 15 | At the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau |
| R6 | 26 | Bachelor's degree in event management | Operations | 1 | At the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau |

Comparing the respondents in Table 5.1 and the departments in the organisational structure of SECB above, it shows that there was a respondent drawn from each of the constituent departments of the SECB.

5.4 Results from the Public Sector

In considering Saudi Arabia's capacity to become an internationally recognised destination for business and conference tourism, the respondents were presented with several questions that cumulatively helped research this objective. The section below presents the themes that were developed from the interview schedule and established from the responses provided by the interviewees. The reports of the results in this section are made with reference to the identification numbers of the respondents as shown in Table 5.1.

5.4.1 The future of the conference tourism industry

In establishing the future of the conference tourism industry in Saudi Arabia, several themes emerged from the responses that were made by the respondents. Table 5.2 outlines the themes that were identified.

Table 5.2: Themes on the Future of Conference Tourism in Saudi Arabia

| Question | Responses | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Could you tell me what you think about conference tourism and how you imagine the future of the conference tourism in Saudi Arabia? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...Saudi Arabia sees this sector as a promising economic sector...[R1] • ...Conferences on the way to grow large and noticeable...[R2] • ...Conferences industry a promising sector and will represent an important part of the economy of Saudi Arabia...[R3] • ...But now the conferences have evolved to become one of the pillars of the economies of countries...[R5] | Optimism for growth of the sector |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A resolution from the Saudi Council of Ministers (No. 246 Dated 17/7/1434 Hegira) has been declared to establish the Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau (SECB)...[R2] • ...Saudi Arabia's began interest from three years ago, trying so hard to develop this sector...[R3] • The Saudi government is supporting this sector as well as working to enhance the sector's effectiveness within the country's economy...[R4] • SCTA in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Interior, Amaras, Municipalities and the | Support by government policy for growth |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| | <p>Council of Saudi Chambers have directed their efforts to develop the sector's influential elements to become more competitive...[R2]</p> | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no awareness in government organizations of the physical and moral effects of the delay in the proceedings • In Saudi Arabia, the sector faces a lack of regulations and rules[R3] | <p>There are challenges that may limit the growth of the sector</p> |
| <p>Is the potential of Saudi Arabia ready to become an international business and conference tourism destination?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, because the possibilities and the ingredients are high[R1] | <p>Optimism for growth of the sector</p> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • but there is a lack of facilities and the need to invest in facilities fit more[R3] | <p>There are challenges that may limit the growth of the sector</p> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not yet[R5] • ...there are some challenges that are being working on, such as government bureaucracy[R4] | <p>Support by government policy for growth</p> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kingdom is now working to develop the systems for easing entry for exhibitors and speakers and participants to get the visa quickly through sophisticated systems[R1] • The possibilities and the constituents and high support from government [R2]. | |

As presented in Table 5.2, three main themes emerged. The first was that there was optimism for a good performance of this sector in future. This is because almost all respondents stated that the sector had a promising future based on the efforts by the government and tourism stakeholders. The second was that the government had measures in place to support the sector. The final theme was that there were some concerns about the future of the industry because of the underlying challenges. All of the six respondents from the public sector (officials from the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau) declared a high level of optimism about growth in the sector. They also lauded the efforts being made by the government to increase the capacity of this sector and make it internationally recognised. Three of the

respondents, for instance, cited the recent resolutions of the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB) to carry out a complete development and organisation of the conference and exhibition sector in the country. They also mentioned its commitment to work towards enhancing the effectiveness of the sector as a contributor towards the country's economy. These were the respondent from the advisor department and another from the marketing and communications department. In addition, the respondent from the advisor department [R2] added,

“Saudi Arabia sees this sector as promising economic sector and this sector has existed in Saudi Arabia for 45 years as conference tourism; there are many conferences that have reached their annual capacity for 32 years and it continues at this pace. Saudi Arabia is not new to this sector”.

One of the respondents from the Finance & Administration department [R5] also stated that the importance of conference tourism is growing in different countries across the globe as one of the pillars of their economies. He stated

“Antiquity knew conferences as important meetings to resolve the issues and solutions to problems and debates... etc. But now the conferences have evolved to become one of the pillars of the economies of countries, and also become conferences to discuss all issues, not just political issues”

This is among the reasons why the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the country and the SCTA have paid close attention to improving the sector's competitiveness regionally and globally. This means that the country can build on the experience it has had in this sector to develop an even better and more effective industry. There is however a need for the development efforts to be increased if the country intends to increase its competitiveness to match that of other developed countries that have greatly progressed in this sector. This is based on the comments from a respondent from the supervisory committee [R1] who was highly enthusiastic about the development of this sector in The Kingdom but was concerned about the positioning of the country's sector on the global scene. He stated,

“Unfortunately, Saudi Arabia occupies 120th place from 140 countries working in the MICE less powerful than Saudi economy but establish the Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau (SECB). The resolution has stated that the SECB aims to develop and organize the meeting industry in Saudi Arabia”.

He however shows his optimism for the sector by arguing that SECB will through its mandate be able to overcome the challenges to this sector posed by the policies and decisions of previous regimes, specifically in the exhibitions and conference sector. This can be through expanding venues in which conferences are held, investing in other supporting sectors such as hotels and resorts, and strengthening technological capabilities to better facilitate service delivery. The research by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (2014) established that there are several promising patterns in Saudi's overall tourism sector, which can also be reflected in its conference tourism. Among the sectors that were noted to have been greatly promising are culture and heritage tourism, training and education tourism, and agricultural and farm tourism. All these are closely related to conference tourism. In another report by Colliers (2012), tourism product development and investment factors also increase hopes for the industry's growth. Efforts by the government towards ensuring this include investment in marketing and events, developing attractions and encouraging investment and partnerships, even with members of the private sector. These aspects of potential growth are however hampered by some challenges such as strict visa regulations for potential tourists (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010) and a lag in technological capabilities for conference tourism as compared to other Western nations (Ramady, 2010).

Another question that sought to establish the future of the tourism industry was posed to seek the opinions of respondents regarding the potential of Saudi Arabia to become an international business and conference tourism destination. Out of the six respondents that were interviewed, three of them showed optimism that indeed, there is a potential for Saudi Arabia's conference sector to become an international tourism destination, citing various reasons. For instance, the respondent from the advisor department stated that the sector can take advantage of the location of Saudi Arabia to target clients from other regions in the Middle East as well as across the globe. For those who were pessimistic about the potential of this sector to grow in future, the reason for their pessimism was that the country still lags behind in terms of bureaucracy, technology and government investment into the sector. For example, the respondent from the finance and administration department at SECB [R5], stated "*Yes..., but there are some challenges that are being worked such as government bureaucracy; we need to arrange co-operation between governmental organizations and work with some of the integration and the achievement of goals*".

The issue of bureaucracy was also mentioned by a respondent from the supervisory committee [R1] who stated, "*the government bureaucracy's old systems do not update in some government organizations and they have no awareness of the physical and moral effects*

of the delay in the proceedings R1 also added that there is high potential for the Saudi tourism conference tourism sector to expand internationally. He stated,

“Yes, because the possibilities and the ingredients are high but there are some challenges that are being worked on; Saudi Arabia’s strategic location mediates the continents of the world from the east and west, north and south, as well as having a competitive advantage in the Muslim world because of the presence of the holy places in the city of Mecca; also Saudi Arabia is a member of the twenty countries and economic powers in the oil sector (G-20 major economies) and petrochemical and chemical manufacturing as well as having superiority in certain sectors and it has a pioneering example of a desalinated water sector; the most important challenges that must be worked on are facilitating entry into The Kingdom and it is now working to develop systems for easing entry for exhibitors and speakers and participants to get the visa quickly through sophisticated systems.”

These responses can all be interpreted to mean that the industry will certainly grow in future. For instance, the location of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, coupled with its recognition as a politically stable kingdom place it in a better position as a destination in which business conferences can be carried out (Preble *et al.*, 2000). Much effort also has to be made by the government to ensure that the existing challenges are overcome and thus, the potential of the industry is fully attained. With regards to the bureaucracy that was identified by some of the respondents as being a major challenge, these results were also obtained in related studies by Park (2016) and Alssbaiheen and Love (2016) who cited bureaucracy as being one of the major setbacks in the country’s development in sectors. The major challenge brought about by bureaucracy is a delay in decision making, which slows down the implementation of strategies that are meant to improve this sector. Bureaucracy however is well entrenched into Saudi Arabia’s culture and resolving it requires a more radical approach (Park, 2016).

5.4.2 Saudi Arabia’s potential for opening up as a conference tourism destination

The interview also sought to gather opinions as to whether Saudi Arabia has the desire to open itself up to this kind of tourism or if there are there still some reservations. To this, there were different responses from the subjects, some stating there are no reservations, and others acknowledging the existence of some reservations. The themes that emerged from the interviews regarding the likelihood for the country opening up are summarized in the Table 5.3:

Table 5.3: Themes on the Potential of Saudi Arabia Opening up as an International Conference Tourism Destination

| Question | Responses | Themes |
|--|--|---|
| Do you think Saudi Arabia has the desire to open itself up to this kind of tourism or are there still some reservations? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no reservations, because The Kingdom sees this sector as a promising economic sector and works hard to develop it[R2] • The next few years will see The Kingdom become on the first list of the countries working in this area of business[R4] | The Kingdom is likely to open up to the international market |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saudi society is a unique mix between religion and culture, which poses difficulties to opening itself up [R2]. • The cultural setting of Saudi Arabia is Arab and Islam, and society itself is in general deeply religious, conservative, traditional, and women wearing niqab [R6]. • Under Saudi law, hijab is compulsory for women, but niqāb is optional...[R5] | Societal and religious beliefs limit the possibility of opening up. |

Table 5.3 exhibits two main themes regarding the likelihood of the Saudi Arabia conference tourism opening up to the international market. One of the themes emerging from the responses above is that The Kingdom is willing to open itself up. The other theme is that there is no possibility for opening up because of social and religious factors. R2 from the advisor department was of the opinion that it will open up. He stated,

“There are no reservations, because The Kingdom sees this sector as a promising economic sector and works hard to develop it”.

A respondent from the supervisory committee [R1] also echoed these sentiments by arguing that The Kingdom is quite willing to open itself up to the global conference and exhibition tourism industry in order to improve its market position. In his response, he stated,

“There are no reservations, because The Kingdom sees this sector as a promising economic sector and work hard to develop it. The next few years will see The Kingdom become on the first list of the countries working in this area of business”.

The establishment of the SECB, he argues, is evidence enough for the commitment of the country towards improving this sector. This answer was countered by that of another

respondent from the marketing and communications department [R4] who stated that the country has not taken full advantage of its position in the MICE market to grow its conference tourism sector and as such, its potential is highly untapped. He stated,

“Saudi Arabia [intends] to be on the 2020 main interface for exhibitions and conferences around the world and this requires hard and serious work; and there is work continuously, workshops will show results during the next two years”

Four out of the six respondents however were of the opinion that whilst the desire of Saudi Arabia to open itself as a conference tourism destination exists, the cultural and religious practices and beliefs limit the degree to which it can open up. As an example, it was mentioned by the respondent from the operations department [R6] that,

“The cultural setting of Saudi Arabia is Arab and Islam, and society itself is in general deeply religious, conservative, traditional, and women wearing niqāb. Under Saudi law, hijab is compulsory for women, but niqāb is optional...”

Overall, it can thus be argued that whilst Saudi Arabia might be committed towards opening itself to conference tourism; its religious and cultural beliefs may be the factors that could limit the level to which it could open up. Regardless of this, the sector can be successful without compromising its cultural and religious beliefs. This can be attained by mainly targeting clientele from countries that share cultural and religious beliefs with Saudi Arabia because there will be no difficulties in adhering to the norms and codes of conduct expected in the country. Even though this could be seen as an impediment for visitors from other countries that may not have restrictions; for instance, with regards to their code of dressing, creating certain exceptions for such visitors will be beneficial. This phenomenon has been studied by several researchers who have sought to establish the effects of cultural differences on the tourism sector. For instance, Sadi and Handerson (2005) argued that there is an incompatibility between the Western and Middle Eastern styles of tourism because of Saudi's Islamic religion that is quite restrictive of indulgences that are enjoyed by Western tourists. The commitment to Islam for Saudi Arabia means that the possibility of relaxing the religious restrictions for the sake of improving any sector of tourism is quite difficult (Khaksari *et al.*, 2014)., the country devotes minimal attention to conventional tourism leisure because of social, political and religious reasons. For instance, being a destination of over 2 million pilgrims for the Hajj in Mecca annually, KSA has to uphold its strong Muslim practices and regulations in order to maintain its position and regard in the global Muslim community (Brdesee *et al.*, 2013). Based on these arguments, the possibility of the country's conference

tourism opening up to accommodate and allow other forms of indulgence by tourists from other parts of the globe is minimal.

5.4.3 The impact of Saudi Arabia’s conference tourism on the economy

There was also an interest to establish the impact of tourism on Saudi’s economy. The themes that were established from this question are as shown in Table 5.4

Table 5.4: Themes on the Impact of Conference Tourism in Saudi Arabia’s Economy

| Question | Responses | Theme |
|--|---|--|
| What is the overall impact of tourism business on the Saudi economy? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conferences and industry of conferences have a significant impact on gross domestic product[R3] | Increases the country’s GDP |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In fact, unfortunately, it did not ensure the MICE sector in the gross domestic product yet[R4] | The impact is insignificant |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... the sector is important and promising, and there are very significant opportunities, especially in Saudi Arabia targeted by all the neighbouring countries to attract Saudi investors[R2] | It is vital and promises to impact the economy greatly |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examined and compared with a number of leading countries in this sector, look at the contribution of this sector in the gross domestic product; we detect in these rural regions that are working to emulate the United States, Germany and Australia constitute approximately 2%[R2] | The impact on the economy could be better |

The themes in Table 5.4 that emerged from the responses of this question were: it increases the country’s GDP, the impact is insignificant, it is vital and promises to impact on the economy greatly, and the impact on the economy could be better. For instance, a respondent from the advisor department [R2] stated that even though the current contribution to the economy is minimal, Saudi Arabia, just like other developing and emerging economies, are working to emulate developed countries such as Germany, United States and Australia. He stated,

“Examined and compared with a number of leading countries in this sector, look at the contribution of this sector in the gross domestic product; we detect in these rural [developing] regions that are working to emulate [developed nations such] as the United States, Germany and Australia constitute approximately 2 % of the gross domestic product.” In another response, the respondent from the business development sector [R3] stated that he

acknowledges the contribution that the sector can have to the economy, but that Saudi Arabia has not maximised this benefit. However, he reiterated that plans are underway to ensure that the impact of this sector on Saudi's economy is felt. He said:

“Conferences and the industry of conferences have a significant impact on gross domestic product, there is a great benefit from them to diversification of income sources, but although The Kingdom has not yet benefited from them dramatically, we plan to do so, and we want to achieve that, and we are in the early stages.”

Therefore, from the responses provided for this question, it can be argued that there might be a potential for this sector to impact on the country's economy but as of now, the impact is limited. The fraction of the GDP from conference tourism is greatly dwarfed by contributions from other sectors, key among these being oil and gas which account for approximately 93% of the country's budget revenue, 97% of earnings from export and slightly more than half of the country's GDP (Saudi Arabia Monetary Agency, 2016). This can bring about a debate as to whether it is a feasible step in to invest in this relatively new sector or to revamp the other sectors to earn the country more foreign income. The fact that other economies have immensely benefited from conference tourism should however inspire The Kingdom to work towards improving its capacity. However, as it stands, the contribution of tourism to Saudi Arabia's GDP is still quite low. For instance, in 2014, the direct contribution of tourism towards the country's GDP was only at 2.4%, which is very low relative to that brought in by the petroleum sector. There are however hopes that by 2025 the contribution will have risen from 2.4% to 2.8%, which is still quite a small fraction. This also takes into account the decline in sales of oil alongside oil's dwindling prices. With the conference tourism sector being just a section of the larger tourism and travel sector, it can be deduced that its contribution to the overall GDP of the country is close to negligible. Therefore, tremendous measures have to be taken if this sector's contribution to the GDP is to be felt (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015).

5.4.4 Applicable models for success

It is acknowledged that in order to succeed as a sector, there are models that can be implemented to make it easier to achieve objectives that might have been set. Based on this, the respondents were asked about whether there is an example of a model of conference tourism that can be applied in Saudi Arabia in order to optimize the sector. The results obtained from the interview responses are shown in Table 5.5:

Table 5.5: Themes on the Models that can be used in Conference Tourism in Saudi Arabia

| Question | Responses | Themes |
|--|--|--|
| - What is your proposed model of business and conference tourism that may optimally work in The Kingdom? Can you give me an example? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no specific model[R1] • There is no specific model, but there are several elements must be completed on time such as the conference programme, the right place depending on the type of conference[R6] | The sector should be flexible |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One that is in line with the customs and traditions of the country and achieves global competitiveness and development[R3] • Which is within the rules and regulations[R4] | There should be adherence to rules and customs |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • but simulate global practices in the establishment of specialized conferences, there are many styles of exhibitions and conferences according to who is the target Is the B2B or B2C ...etc.[R2] | It should fit with international standards |

The themes in Table 5.5 that emerge from the responses of the above questions, as shown in the Table above, are that the business model should be flexible, adhere to rules and customs, and that it should fit with international standards. It is however worth noting that some of the responses failed to provide a response to this question. Two of the respondents suggested that there is no specific model that should be adhered to by the conference tourism sector to increase its performance. However, they argued that they should emulate practices utilised by other developed countries that have achieved success in this sector. Response from the advisor department **R2** stated,

“There is no specific model, but simulate global practices in the establishment of specialized conferences, there are many styles of exhibitions and conferences according to who is the target Is the B2B or B2C ...etc., but Saudi Arabia is seeking to achieve a global competition for better implementation and aimed at development and become a major tourism destination in the Middle East.”

In another response from the marketing and communications department [**R4**] stated

“Saudi still working hard to be the main interface for exhibitions, conferences, and this creates several challenges such as infrastructure development; contributing effectively to the development of accommodation sector and the aviation and transportation in order to be an

attractive area for conference attendees. It will be a short period of work underway on the development, BUT now we cannot say The Kingdom is ready, it needs time to be ready to compete internationally”.

In another response from by **R3**, it was stated by the respondent from the business development department that:

“[a model] which is in line with the customs and traditions of the country and achieves global competitiveness and development.”

This can be interpreted to mean that any model can be taken up by the business, as long as they abide by the rules and regulations. The respondent from the operations department **R6** also echoed this response and added that there are several elements which have to be completed in a timely manner in order to achieve the desired market position in the industry. In addition to this, the involved stakeholders should ensure that there are appropriate venues for such events and in addition, there ought to be sufficient supporting services such as hospitality and accommodation that are of high quality. This therefore shows that there are different approaches with which success in the conference tourism sector can be achieved. Given that there are differences in business environments across different countries, the Saudi conference tourism sector needs to carry out an evaluation of the type of clients that they are targeting and ensuring that they provide facilities that cater to their needs. On application of these suggested strategies, the respondents are confident that the potential of conference tourism can be achieved. There are currently several business models that are recommended for tourism across different countries that have effectively worked to improve their positions in the market. One of the most relevant models that are applied in this period of technological advancement is the e-commerce business model, which has taken advantage of the increased accessibility to the internet across the globe. In addition to increasing the global reach of clients, this model also makes the booking process for tourists easier. Other totally parallel business models were mentioned by (Park, *et al.* 2018). and they consist of the financial-based business model, the customer-based model and the service-based model. These models are all designed to meet certain key objectives. Financial-based business models are designed to maximize revenues by focusing more on high-value clients, service-based models are designed to provide the maximum number of services possible and the customer-based models are meant to accommodate and serve as many clients as possible (Casadesus-Masanell & Zhu, 2013). Considering the current status of the Saudi conference tourism, all of these models can be relevant and therefore, stakeholders need to ensure that they adopt the most appropriate one. The suggestion that there have to be supporting services in order to

increase the chances of improvement in the sector is highly relevant for this sector because it cannot succeed on its own. These are also referred to as ancillary services, and include foreign currency exchange services, travel insurance, car hire and entertainment, among others (Byrd *et al.*, 2016). Ensuring that these services and facilities are available increases the country's relevance as a conference tourism destination.

5.4.5 Strengths and weaknesses of the organisations in Saudi-Arabia's conference tourism

To evaluate the status of the Saudi tourism sector, it was also necessary to examine the weaknesses and strengths that exist in the sector. This is vital in suggesting the strategies that can be used to ensure that the sector prospers. In Table 5.6, the respondents and emerging themes are presented.

Table 5.6: Themes on the Strengths and Weaknesses of Conference Tourism in Saudi Arabia

| Question | Responses | Themes |
|---|--|--|
| What are the strengths and limitations of Saudi Arabia Conference Tourism Organisations that you have observed? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticeable lack of rehabilitation, one of the things that have been identified in many studies, meetings are the rehabilitation of the organizers, there are Saudi institutions[R6] • For the conferences organizers companies, institutions in Saudi Arabia most of them are not specialized for conferences and it does not differentiate between the organization of a conference or event or.... etc.[R1] • It is still a new industry conferences for them and there is no qualified and specialists in the field and most of the local organizers wanted to achieve profit only [R2]. • The Conference tourism organisations in the past it has not been able to operate in a professional manner because of complex procedures[R4] • So far, there is no integrated company provides full conference services in a professional manner [R4] | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor rehabilitation • Lack of specialisation and professionalism • Inexperience • Improper integration of systems • Many bureaucracies |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • population density, economic growth and is one of the strongest regions economically and geographically the largest areas in the Middle East[R3] • Financial strength[R5] | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic strength • Strategic geographical location • High population density. |
|--|--|--|

From the themes in Table 5.6, it is evident that there are more weaknesses than strengths in this sector. The weaknesses include poor rehabilitation, lack of specialisation, inexperience, improper integration of systems and bureaucratic management. The strengths on the other hand included economic strength, strategic geographic location and high population density. These aspects of the sector provide information which can be effectively used to formulate success strategies. The respondent from the operations department **R6** stated “*weakness in management, lack of systems knowledge and lack of an efficient, qualified and professional workforce for conference tourism*”.

The respondent from the advisor department **R2** stated “*It is still a new industry conferences for them and there is no qualified and specialists in the field and most of the local organizers wanted to achieve profit only but our plans in the future it will be no opportunities for non-specialist, or nonprofessional to work in the field anymore in order to help the sector to achieve its objectives*”. The lack of professionalism is also mentioned as a challenge facing the conference tourism sector by the respondent from marketing and communications department **R4**. He attributes this to complex procedures that are synonymous with most of the country’s public sector. As he stated,

“The Conference tourism organisations in the past it has not been able to operate in a professional manner because of complex procedures.” He added, *“So far, there is no integrated company provides full conference services in a professional manner”*

This should also provide an opportunity for creation of institutions, both in the private and public sectors that execute different roles required in this sector with the highest level of professionalism. It was also mentioned that the weaknesses of this sector include lack of rehabilitation, lack of specialty among companies for conference tourism, lack of adequate classification of companies into different event specialties, and the fact that it is still a new industry. The fact that there are more weaknesses than strengths are established from this

research shows that there is much that needs to be done if the sector intends to increase its competitiveness in the sector. Apart from the weaknesses or challenges mentioned by respondents in this study, there are several other challenges that have been identified by researchers who have examined the country's tourism sector. In a critical report by Layla (2011), she noted that the main weaknesses of Saudi Arabia that also adversely affect its tourism sector are discrimination, surveillance and restrictions, especially on international tourists and visitors. The number of companies that are currently allowed to sponsor visas to The Kingdom are limited, and the visa acquisition process itself is long and complicated. Some of the restrictions include the fact that women visiting the country should be over 30 years of age or otherwise, be in company of a male relative, to be allowed visa, tourists must in a group of four at minimum, and their movement in the country should be monitored by the travel company (Steiner & Al-Hamarnah, 2005). Whilst these measures can be lauded as being vital for security and safety of both the citizens of the country and tourists themselves, they are so extreme that they hamper the comfort of tourists.

In addressing these weaknesses, there are several suggestions that were provided by the respondents regarding what has to be done. For instance, a respondent from the marketing and communications department stated that there were issues with the sizes of halls that can host such conferences in Saudi Arabia as well as a shortage of suitable facilities for conferences. These include hotels where they can rest when the conferences being held last longer than a day. To solve this issue and the associated challenges, more of these facilities therefore have to be developed. The respondent from the finance and administration department [R5] stated that government bureaucracies ought to be reduced. He said

“there must be flexibility in the regulations, there is legislation issued unexplained, this means breaking into more than a governmental entity or activity that inconsistency and contradiction may occur, especially that some government organization has nothing to do with systems of conferences they are not qualified to decide, all of this complexity because government bureaucracy”.

He stated that the SECB's decisions should not be in any way influenced by those of other government organizations. With increasing globalisation, Saudi Arabia's restrictions on tourist influxes and movements in the country will adversely affect the growth of the conference tourism industry. This is because of the presence of a plethora of other destinations that are friendlier to international visitors yet provide even better tourism services and facilities (Jafari & Scott, 2014). There is therefore a high degree of urgency with which the stakeholders in Saudi

Arabia's tourism sector should act in order to improve its position as a conference tourism destination.

5.4.6 Other issues in Saudi Arabia's conference tourism sector

From the interviews that were carried out with the respondents, there are several other issues that were mentioned to exist in this sector, and ways in which the issues were being addressed were also mentioned. For instance, the respondent from the advisor department **R2** felt that the sector is not quite developed and mentioned some of the plans underway to develop the sector. He said,

"...activating the role of the health professional scientific societies and the meetings and conferences represent the demand side and those with a large global interest in the Saudi Arabia there are approximately 170 professional association healthy scientific societies".

These health science professional societies provide an ideal market opportunity of utilising the conference tourism facilities offered by Saudi Arabia. In showing what has been done to tap in this market, **R2** added,

"There is a tendency to increase the effectiveness of these associations and to increase their capacity to bring events and conferences internal or regional and benefit from the increased demand for tourism facilities and contribute to the development".

This is one of the evident ways in which the country and the government is trying to ensure that this sector grows to a better position and more so, a more competitive global position. This has also been reported by the World Travel and Tourism Council (2015) in reference to Saudi Arabia's tourism sector. This in essence shows the role that is played by conference tourism in transfer of skills and knowledge that is in abundance in some countries yet deficient in others. Another sector that other regions across the globe can learn from Saudi Arabia is the management of oil and gas resources that the country is rich and experienced in. Inviting stakeholders from other countries to learn skills in such sectors from Saudi Arabia, conference tourism can experience the desired growth.

The market awareness issue was also identified as one of those affecting the country's conference tourism sector. This was mainly identified by the respondent from the finance and administration department **[R5]**. As a solution, he proposed that the media should be more active in supporting and promoting the conference sector. He argued,

“The media is very important to support the conferences sector, for example media makes winning some of the wars”

He added, *“Focus on the role of the media sector to display the conferences sector professionally”*.

The media being referred to in this case comprises of a vast range of media avenues from broadcast to internet (Web 2.0) media outlets. **R5** also suggested that Saudi citizens also have a role to play in promoting conference tourism. He mentioned,

“Focus on the work of Saudi qualified citizens to develop the conferences sector”.

A respondent from the supervisory committee **R1** also outlined the need for Saudi Arabia to focus on religious conferences, which in Saudi Arabia's case will predominantly be Islamic. He said,

“There are future plans to focus on religious conferences, especially at a time and before the time of Hajj.”

This will increase the revenues from this sector, more so because Saudi Arabia is highly revered by Muslims as the Hajj destination. These arguments provided by these respondents on suggesting how some of the impending challenges can be addressed are highly applicable not only to the conference tourism sector, but also in the wider tourism industry. For instance, creating awareness by using different media avenues has been mentioned as an effective approach by a wide range of marketing researchers, such as Zeng & Gerritsen (2014) and Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013). With the increase in internet accessibility and development of social media, these avenues are accessible to a wide range of target clients globally.

From these results concerning the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international destination for business conference tourism as collected from semi-structured interviews with respondents from the public sector, it is clear that whilst there is a potential for growth in this sector, much has to be done in order to overcome the challenges and limitations of the sector. The potential for growth is especially challenged by the fact that there are more weaknesses than strengths in this sector. Co-operation between the government and the conference tourism sector is needed if a comprehensive solution is to be developed.

5.5 Results from the Private Sector

This section presents the perspectives of private sector stakeholders regarding the state of this sector, positive and negative factors that affect business, tourism and the business tourism

policy of Saudi Arabia. These results will be analysed based on the different themes generated from the responses provided during the interviews.

5.5.1 The research sample

A total of ten respondents, consisting of staff and managers of private company service providers in conference tourism, took part in the study. Members of the private sector form a valuable component of the SECB, just as their counterparts from the public sector. Therefore, interviewing this group of respondents was also necessary in order to compare their views or opinions with those of members from the public sector. Table 5.7 shows their demographic characteristics, including their age, education, positions at work, the number of years they have been working in the tourism sector, the type of company and the services provided by the company. As shown in Table 5.7, three of the respondents were members of the SECB advisory group as well as being involved in their own private businesses related to conference tourism. The respondents are also identified with unique codes with which they will be referred to in the rest of this section.

Table 5.7: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents from Private Company Service Providers in Conference Tourism

| Respondent ID | Age | Education | Positions | Experience working in the tourism sector in years | Type of company | company's services |
|---------------|-----|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| R-A | 43 | BA Engineering in Systems Information | Chief Executive of the projects, also Member of Advisory Group of the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB) | 17 | exhibitions, conferences, and events organizer | Local |
| R-B | 49 | BA in Public Relations | Chief Executive Officer | 25 | Integrated company serving the field of exhibitions and conferences | a global company: members of UFI the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry and members of IAEE international association energy Economics |

| | | | | | | |
|------------|-----------|---|--|-----------|--|---------------------|
| R-C | 57 | Bachelor of Business Administration | Executive Director, also Member of Advisory Group of the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB) | 33 | Organiser of exhibitions and conferences | Middle East Company |
| R-D | 51 | BA in Management | Executive Director, also Member of Advisory Group of the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB) | 15 | Conferences and exhibitions organizer | Local |
| R-E | 30 | Master of Management | Director and company owner | 5 | Providing logistical services | Local |
| R-F | 55 | PhD in Operations and Management | Executive director. Member of supervisory committee at SECB | 30 | Conference and Exhibitions Organization | Global |
| R-G | 29 | Master's in information system management | Project Manager and company owner | 3 | Exhibition and conference organizer | Local |
| R-H | 54 | Bachelor's in business administration | Executive director and owner | 28 | Providing logistical services, and exhibition and conference organizer | Local |
| R-I | 47 | Bachelor's in media | Member of supervisory committee at SECB | 16 | exhibition and conference organizer | Global |
| R-J | 42 | Bachelor's in management | Event Manager | 15 | Conference planning | Local |

5.6 Results Obtained from the Respondents

The respondents used meet the second objective, which was to understand the positive and negative factors affecting the business tourism and business tourism policy of Saudi Arabia, are discussed here. The ten respondents (managers and staff) were invited for interviews and asked questions relating to this objective. Just as with the public-sector participants, a thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the responses from the private sector stakeholders. Several themes were developed based on the responses that the participants gave during the interviews. They are discussed in more detail below.

5.6.1 Cultural differences

A major theme that arose from the interview responses was the issue of culture between different countries. Yukl (2012) explains that culture has a strong impact on the formation of certain expectations and the quality-perception of a tourism experience. According to the OECD (2012), there is a connection between culture and different types of tourism, including conference tourism. The destinations that are considered to be successful in this sector are those that ensure that there is a positive synergy created between culture and tourism, and efforts have to be put in place to manage and develop these capabilities. Whilst many destinations have capitalised on the management of synergy between culture and tourism to increase their position in the sector, there are those that have faced difficulties in achieving this (Wilson & Ypeij, 2012). The definite phenomenon that is expected to arise in conferences or business meetings that involve people from different countries is that there will be different cultures represented, and as such, the element of cultural differences will be present. Although it is expected that delegates from different cultures will mingle and appreciate each other's cultures in a positive way, situations can arise where these cultural differences pose challenges (Cohen, 2010). This includes both between delegates and between delegates and the host country. These challenges or opportunities vary from country to country, and tourism, to an extent, is a reflection of the interaction among people who originate from different cultural backgrounds (Dellner, 2014). The two-sided relationship between these variables could have either positive or negative effects on the overall experience of tourists.

In this study, when the respondents were asked about whether they thought organising a conference in Saudi Arabia was different from organising one outside the country, the issue of different cultures arose. According to R-A, different countries have different cultures, which influence how they establish conferences. For instance, tourists from Western countries are said to demonstrate a better awareness and knowledge of the specificity of their tourist needs and expectations when compared to those from Eastern countries. **R-A** said, *“yes, there are differences based on culture, and there is a difference between one country and another. Not*

all the countries are similar. It depends on the culture of the state as well as the direction and aim of the establishment of conferences”.

This was further supported by **R-B** who even after stating that there is no difference between organising a conference in Saudi Arabia and outside, went ahead to claim that both religion and culture provide a special place for women separately from men in the country. Similarly, **R-E** suggested that there is no difference in various sectors but that time management is a major issue associated with the Saudi Arabia culture. **R-E** stated, *“I think there is no difference in places such as registry, regulations; however, organizing a conference in Saudi Arabia is different than outside; sometimes on the first day of the conference, most of the time between 4-5 hours are spent waiting for an important person who is sponsoring the conference, which results in a delay in the time-Table during the day of the conference, and the delay extends to the last day”.* These cultural issues also have an impact on the acquisition of knowledge among the different stakeholders in the sector, especially those who are interested in increasing their knowledge and skills through reading. One of the respondents, **R-I**, stated, *“There is something very important, a lack of references, research and books need to be translated into Arabic in general, and business tourism in particular conferences, to increase awareness and education among workers in the sector”.*

The responses above are in tandem with arguments from several researchers in the field of culture and tourism. For instance, Sehlikoglu & Karakas (2016) regarded Saudi Arabia and the larger Middle East to be incompatible with Western countries and societies in terms of tourism and leisure. Most of the Western societies associate any form of tourism – even conference tourism – with leisure. Therefore, the fact that Saudi Arabia regards leisure travel as being economically unnecessary and undesirable, as mentioned by Gholipour, Tajaddini and Al-Mulali (2011), may repel potential tourists from the West. Such restrictions can be argued to be unfriendly to countries like Saudi Arabia because the liberality of Western countries accommodates tourists from all parts of the globe, including Saudi Arabia, yet Saudi Arabia restricts its target audience to those that adhere to their Muslim doctrines. The fact that there may be logistical delays, as mentioned by R-E, also highlights the fact that Saudi Arabia needs to develop its tourism sector more in order to reduce unnecessary delays.

Cultural differences, although difficult to observe and measure, are very important in conference tourism, because failure to consider them can affect the success of the conference. According to Hofstede's (1984). Cultural dimensions differ from one country to another (Moran *et al.*, 2014). For instance, Saudi Arabia is considered a collectivist society where relationships among workers are highly valued . Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has a high preference for uncertainty avoidance, which means that the people maintain rigid beliefs and

behaviours, and do not tolerate unorthodox ideas and behaviour (Gołowska *et al.*, 2015). This greatly differs from most Western countries like the UK, which is considered an individualistic country and has low uncertainty avoidance. Therefore, culture has a major influence on the success of a conference in Saudi Arabia since it sets the expectations and determines the quality of the event (Avraham & Benhin, 2015). Organising a conference in Saudi Arabia may require the organiser to be exposed to the several countries' cultures in his or her daily operations so as to tailor the approaches and practices to match Saudi's cultural context. The degree of control that governments have over certain elements of culture and cultural practices also plays a role in determining whether there will be a positive or negative synergy between tourism and culture. These include strict restrictions on interactions between men and women in the country (Al Dabal, 2001); the dress code, and many other activities that are regarded as normal in other parts of the world. Referring to the responses provided in the interviews, there are several elements of Saudi culture that are closely monitored by government authorities, and as such, even tourists have no choice but to adhere to these practices, even though they are not necessarily accustomed to them, compared, for example, to the high degree of indulgence in the West, exemplified by activities such as alcohol consumption and partying in skimpy clothing (Georgescu *et al.*, 2017); Saudi Arabia does not allow any of these. It therefore could be argued that denying tourists the freedom to indulge in the activities that are allowed in their home countries and forcing them to adhere to Saudi cultural practices may be adverse to the growth of the conference tourism industry. This is because other countries may offer more freedom for people from all cultures, after official conference duties and meetings, business tourists are able to indulge in more 'fun' activities (Dellner, 2014). Such countries provide stiff competition for Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries with similar degrees of strictness about adherence to cultural norms and practices. However, with the recent easing of strict rules by the Saudi government, which is evidenced by factors such as allowing women to drive, there are indications that the culture may become more accommodating in the future.

5.6.2 Government support

Another theme generated from the interviews is the support from the government in Saudi Arabia. Business tourism is rapidly growing in Saudi Arabia due to increase in oil, gas and construction industries, thereby attracting the attention of the government. Over recent years, Graetz and Smith (2010) explain, the Saudi government has invested quite a substantial amount of money in promoting business tourism, whether in the hospitality, education or health sectors. This is acknowledged by some of the participants in the study who claimed that the government has been providing the much needed support in the expansion of business and conference tourism.

According to **R-A**, the Saudi Arabia government has increased its attention on conference tourism. This has been attributed to the high rate of growth which has made the country a leading destination for conference tourism. For instance, **R-A** states that in 2005 there were 4462 conferences held by the end of that year, with most being medical conferences. The participant went on to say, “...*this number was in 2005, let alone the current time, I'm sure that the number has increased but unfortunately, there is no accurate statistics on the number of conferences that were held in Saudi Arabia.*”

Moreover, most of the customers for conference activities come from government sectors, as stated by all the participants. However, some government ministries sponsor conferences in order to seek fame. **R-E** explained that

“Government ministries have abundant money that they use to seek fame through conferences provide their activities”.

Furthermore, the Saudi government is striving to attract more visitors to the country by providing tourists with easy procedures for entry in to the country, as stated by **R-B**. Moreover, the government has started to revive local tourist spots that are restricted to pilgrims and domestic tourists only, which is a major obstacle in regard to travel and tourism (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Whilst it is impossible for the government to scrap such policies because they form part of the country's identity, relaxing them, especially for visiting parties, will enable the attraction of more visitors.

The future of the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia looks very positive. The government is striving hard to diversify the economy through major infrastructure projects, among other initiatives such as creating opportunities to develop its religious, cultural and business tourism (Rogers, 2013). Regulation, licensing and government support can play a key role in transforming Saudi Arabia into a more attractive country for business tourism. .The Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) has announced new licensing and classification requirements in the hospitality industry in order to streamline the facilities and services associated with tourism in general and thereby guide their activities, as well as protecting the interests of tourists (Allan, 2016) . Furthermore SCTA together with the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Interior have been working towards developing the influential factors in business tourism in order to become more competitive. The government has also invested heavily in enhancing infrastructure in both rural and urban areas so as to attract business tourists as well as increase the flow of tourists across the county.

5.6.3 The strong economy in Saudi Arabia makes it a favourable destination for conferences

A third theme that can be derived from the interviews is the strong economy of Saudi Arabia, which makes the country a favourable destination for conferences. Despite being a semi-developed country, Saudi is well positioned to take total advantage of the tourism industry. **R-C** stated *“the position of Saudi Arabia in the Gulf region gives it an advantage over other countries . Especially as it is considered the largest in terms of area and population”*.

As the income from oil and gas declines, the country is beginning to engage in others income generation avenues to diversify its economy, come 2030 (Simons, 2016). Tourism is one the activities that can be developed in order for its overall contribution to the GDP to increase. The growth of tourism however depends on other supporting sectors such as transportation, infrastructure and communication technologies (Tefler & Sharpley, 2015). Even though the state of conference tourism is currently lower than in most countries in the emerging and developing world, the commitment shown by the government to address the issues in the industry gives it a promising future.

There are several factors that make it a favourable destination for business tourism. According to **R-C**, Saudi Arabia leads in the field of petrochemical industries, oil and the production of desalinated water. Furthermore, both **R-D** and **R-D** argued that Saudi Arabia has an active and fast-growing market. According to **R-E**, *“I think it has a strong economy, a promising sector supported by the government. Active and fast-growing market also... the existing value of the investments I think do not exist anywhere else in the world thereby giving Saudi the opportunity for businesses and clients to link together”*. Saudi Arabia also allows businesses to publicize themselves as well as their products around the world (Herstein, Berger & Jaffe, 2014). Since Saudi Arabia is a leader in different economic sectors in the Middle East, it can host delegates from different economies who can borrow a leaf from its prowess in the mentioned sectors.

Saudi Arabia's economy is based on its oil production and a strong government that is able to control the key economic activities in the country. The country has 18% of all the petroleum reserves in the world as well as being the leading exporter of petroleum. The private sector contributes about 40% of its GDP, with approximately 7.5 million foreign workers who are in the country legally (Al Mallakh & el Mallakh, 2015). For this reason, Saudi has a very strong economy, which has contributed to the increase in the number of business tourists in the county. As a result, conference tourism is also growing due to the strong economic growth, combined with the focus of the government on creating other facets to the economy.

5.6.4 Insufficient facilities for conferences

Another theme that arose and can be considered as a weakness or a negative thing in regards to promoting conference tourism in Saudi Arabia is the lack of sufficient facilities for holding conferences. For Saudi Arabia to remain competitive in the business tourism industry, it must aim at enhancing its facilities and raising them to international standards so as to catch the attention of many customers. **R-C** stated, "*Facilities it's the most important for conference to consider; then organize the conference in professional way*".

The insufficiency of leisure facilities is one of the main reasons that make the country lag behind in conference tourism. There are several opportunities that can contribute to the building of such facilities, such as the country's natural heritage and the lifestyle of people in urban cities. However, Colliers (2012) argues that the natural heritage in Saudi Arabia is not promoted effectively or supported in order to attract both domestic and international tourists. Similarly, urbanisation has increased and is still increasing in Saudi Arabia, which means that there is a need to create more leisure activities and entertainment in cities. Only a few leisure facilities are available to the growing population in urban areas, hence people do not have many options when it comes to leisure activities. **R-C** confirms by stating that "*the country lacks places of entertainment which can attract conferences*". According to **R-C**, Saudi Arabia lacks infrastructure for hosting international conferences. The slow development of tourism facilities in the Middle East, as argued by Prayag and Hosany (2014), has had counterproductive impacts on its tourism sectors because many young tourists native to those countries prefer tourism destinations that are in Western countries.

The situation of inadequate facilities for conferences is even worse in small towns in the country and also contributes to high cost of organising conferences. This is further supported by **R-E** who claims that:

In fact, despite the advantages there are some negatives things; there are no services in small towns, which increases the cost of conferences, especially for those who organize a conference; also, not enough conferences halls."

R-A also complains that in major cities, the few hotels are usually fully booked throughout the year, thus making it difficult to find a hall for a conference. **R-A** stated:

"As Conferences organizer I cannot get easily halls if you want to get halls in hotels or anywhere, since they are fully booked in 2016".

R-A suggested that there is a need for investors to come into the country and create new facilities, even in small towns, so as meet the increasing demand for conference facilities in

Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Colliers (2012) believes that the business environment in Saudi is open for partnership with tourism investors, operators and developers from all over the world. The government is placing a lot of emphasis on business tourism as an important source of investment and profits. This has attracted the support of British Expertise who support business in international markets and also encouraged several delegates to explore business opportunities available in Saudi.

5.6.5 Quality of services

Another theme that arose concerns the quality of services and its impact on the success of the conference. According to Salazar *et al.* (2010), quality management in every business is important in presenting quality actions that are well planned so as to gain a competitive advantage in the industry. Frahm and Brown (2007) confirm that quality is a priority in a production system. In a country such as Saudi Arabia, service companies are required to show that they are ensuring the quality assurance of their services before they can introduce them to customers. This means that they must meet the required standards of service quality (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). In the tourism sector, and more so for business and conference tourism, there are variables that are considered in the estimation of service quality, and the degree of satisfaction of tourists is estimated according to how well or poorly their expectations are met from their perspective (Frahm & Brown, 2007). The aspects of conference tourism that visitors use to gauge the service quality or build their expectations include technological advancements, infrastructure, accommodation, and how accommodative the local population is to visitors, amongst others (Kapiki, 2012). In the examination of the quality of services being offered by the conference sector in Saudi Arabia, several questions were posed to respondents. With regards to conference services, the quality of services is important in determining its success, as indicated by all the respondents during the interviews. According to **R-C**:

“If there is any weakness in a conference, sustainability may not be achieved and hence the conference may not succeed as well”.

R-C further claims that *“there is need for professional companies that operate based on strategies and provide quality services to ensure sustainability”.*

In Saudi Arabia, service organisations use a wide range of tools to enhance certain aspects of quality. For instance, quality assurance tools are often used to ensure customers have the best quality and are also satisfied in regards to affordability of services, and safety. In addition, the main objective of service quality management requires a proper management system and a corporate culture that observes the principles of customer satisfaction and service

innovation. According to El-Garaihy (2013), employees must be able to work in a team, communicate effectively, and have good time management skills at all organisational levels in order to ensure quality of services offered. This is supported by **R-B**, who explains that *“Time management and whether the speaker’s level is equal in the same session determines the quality of services offered during the conference in Saudi Arabia”*.

Time management in Saudi is a big challenge when it comes to conferences. Presenters and sponsors tend to take their time preparing, which affects the entire time-Table for the conference. **R-E** pointed out that *“sometimes on the first day of the conference, people have to wait between 4 to 5 hours for the important person sponsoring the conference to come, which results in a delay on the time-Table and this extends even to the last day”*.

Conference delegates attend paid-for meetings with the objective of learning how to improve their professional skills or the performance of their businesses. The content of what they learn therefore plays a vital role in the overall view that delegates will have about their experiences during the conference. The fact that this aspect of conference tourism was not mentioned by the respondents could lead to the deduction that the content that speakers at these conferences shared with them is relevant to the improvement of their skills and business brands. Whilst time management and the content of speeches contributes towards the experience that determines service quality and customer satisfaction, quality of services also depends on the facilities, which must be organised in a professional way. Similarly, **R-E** argues that in order to provide quality services, facilities must correspond to the type of conference. This means that a lack of good facilities for holding conferences leads to poor services, and consequently affects the success of the conference. There are a wide range of facilities that are considered when examining the service quality of tourist destinations, and in this case, conference tourism. One of these is the infrastructure of the destination, which determines the ease of movement of delegates to and from conference venues. There is also the general state or condition of the facilities that are used for conferences, and this is evaluated by a wide range of factors, including the interior design, and the technology used to ensure that the entire experience at the conference is friendly. For the duration of stay that the delegates are in a country, there is a need for suitable accommodation and catering services for the delegates and, as such, the level of service quality is reliant on the services they get from these facilities. Whilst Saudi Arabia has undergone several developments as a result of the revenue from its vast gas and oil resources, there are still limitations in the development of its conference tourism facilities because funds are directed towards other projects that are considered more vital. Given that the level of development of conference tourism services is lower than that of many other destinations around the globe, there need to be measures put in place to assure

that capacity is built well enough to assure delegates or tourists of a positive experience during and after conferences.

5.6.6 Ideal business models for conference tourism

Another theme is the use of Western business models in conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. The results from all the ten participants indicate that there is no specific business model in conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. **R-B** explains that this is due to lack of a scientific articles or courses on the best business model to develop the sector. **R-E** argues that *“There is no specific model. This side lacks a scientific article or courses to adopt a model suited to development of the sector. Hence, the lack of this research about Saudi Arabia's conference tourism has made it inadequate”*.

This is also supported by **R-C** who claimed that *“there is no specific model in Saudi Arabia. Also there is no organization that evaluates conferences we do as clients or sponsors want”*, while **R-A** echoes this: *“There are no user models in Saudi it is depends on customers' requests or the wishes and this open market”*. According to **R-C**, that lack of a clear strategy in the conferences sector has been shown to cause misunderstanding between the private and government or public organisations. However, **R-E** explained that *“There must be a checklist provided by the Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau (SECB) for conference standards to be comprehensive in order for an organization to be allowed to hold conferences”*.

SECB was established with the aim of developing the exhibition and convention sector in order to have a positive effect on the Saudi economy. Their mission is to apply sector best practices in overseeing the Saudi exhibition and convention sector (SECB, 2016a). Despite having no specific model for conference tourism, the checklist provided by SECB prevents conference organisers from committing various violations when executing trading and consumption exhibition in cities and municipalities around Saudi. Trade exhibition violations may include cases of direct sales to the public along with involvement of exhibitors who are not specialised in exhibitions (Otgaar, van den Berg & Feng, 2016). Consumer exhibition violations may include selling short-life foods and the participation of officers who do not have sites in the same municipality in which the exhibition is being held, besides selling imitation goods. With no robust model that can be adhered to by the conference tourism stakeholders in Saudi Arabia, it is also important for the sector to be flexible based on the target audience they would like to attract for each conference that is organised. E-commerce is however one of the models that can assure the sector of attracting more clients and easing logistical challenges (Hays, Page and Buhalis, 2013).

5.6.7 The implications of conference tourism to Saudi Arabia

Another theme that arose from the responses provided by the participants is about the benefits of conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. **R-A** explains that *“Conferences in Saudi Arabia involve scientific developments, researches that we present from the inside to the outside and invite people from abroad to post research and experiments with them and the formation of discussion panels between inside and outside that benefit a particular sector. We are compatible with international regulations in the conference area. The next market is the conference market (knowledge exchange) in which many Saudis have experiments and scientific research in all fields that should be presented at home and abroad”*.

The Saudi government gets involved with various initiatives that widen its tools for recovering the knowledge base and skills of managers, employees and supervisors. This transfer of knowledge is one of the implications of conference tourism. **R-B** and **R-C** echoed that

As added by **R-B** *“Some of the countries are aiming at transferring knowledge and others at transferring technology. Also, some countries are interested in tourism and attracting tourists to visit and so provide them with easy procedures for entry and offer competitive. in this area ”*. These comments bring out the need for stakeholders in the Saudi Arabia conference tourism sector to organise for exchange programmes with similar sectors in countries that are in a better position than Saudi Arabia. This strategy has been successfully used in Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of foreign affairs, where delegates have been sent to different countries such as China and the UK to bridge the cultural gap that exists with the other countries (UNDP, 2016). Such programmes however are limited, as there are cultural and religious boundaries that cannot be crossed, even as Saudi Arabia intends to appeal to a wider global audience.

The concept of knowledge transfer within businesses and in a global context is considered as being a quality philosophy, and has also been acknowledged by the respondents. Knowledge transfer involves the exchange of certain values like on-going teamwork, exchange of ideas and flexible communication (Ageli, 2013). Moreover, other philosophical values include demonstrations of various products, team meetings, innovative activities that related to quality management, and programs that increase customer awareness of the company’s products and services. This in turn increases the knowledge base of employees such that they are able to recognize consumer preferences and behaviours, which may enable a business to raise the sustainable competitiveness in the market, including the dimensions of service quality management (Song, 2014). As established from the evidence in these interviews, Saudi Arabia’s conference tourism is still in its beginning stages; therefore the stakeholders have to identify the market segments that are most viable to target. This way, the company will design

its service to suit the needs of these target groups and thereby maximize customer satisfaction.

According to one of the respondents, **R-B**, the benefits of organising a conference depend on several factors; hence there is no specific concept of the establishment of conferences in Saudi Arabia. He stated, *“If we want to talk about it, it will takes too much time, but in general, there is no specific concept of the establishment of conferences in Saudi Arabia for most of the government departments and companies as well. So there is no real importance or support to the establishment of the conference. What is the objective of establishment of the conference? What is the role of conferences in the country's development? This is because there is not enough awareness and education about the importance of the conference in Saudi society”*. This means that the different stakeholders involved in the sector ought to carry out research and increase global awareness about its capability to host conference tourism. This response also shows that this sector is in its infancy in Saudi Arabia, and efforts have to be made to clearly set objectives that have to be met by the sector, as well as clear timelines in which they are to be met. Achieving this may require different teams within this sector to be assigned different roles in which they will have to specialise (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). Such efforts will be beneficial in developing this sector to the desired level.

5.6.8 Importance of good organization of the conferences

R-F argued that part of the success of conference tourism is the interest of the audience or delegates that have come for the conferences. **R-F** stated, *“In Saudi Arabia, the environment and culture is different; not all the audience come for the interest and get the results to achieve conference's goals, some of them probably come out of courtesy to his/ her boss or to compliment the important person who's the sponsor of the conference. (Not convinced to learn from conference) In the sense that not all attendees have a specialization in the field of the conference (social prestige)”* This draws attention to the fact that even with basic infrastructure and facilities, conference tourists who mostly tour for educative purposes will have their goals met only if they focus their interest on the content offered at the conference (Rogers & Davidson, 2015). The fact that some of those who are sent to attend the conferences may be interested more in the facilities rather than the lessons or discussions being held can also be seen as a challenge. As added by **R-H**, *“the conference has conditions, requirements and suitable environment, if it is available you, can achieve success, such as official sponsors , important subject, good speakers on the subject, right place at the right time, interested attendees and provides logistics services professionally.”* These, according to **R-H**, are the main factors that contribute to the success of a conference tourism event.

The reality, however, is that people are more likely to choose conference tourism destinations that have a uniqueness over other regions in terms of better facilities, more comfortable accommodation and a higher degree of professionalism in the hosting and management of the conferences (Mahoney & Lankford, 2015). This therefore gives the venues that are outside Saudi Arabia, especially in the developed countries, an advantage. As added by R-F, "*in Saudi Arabia quality of the product in conferences is sometimes based on non-qualified people, scientific committees, and the scientific committees are weak. It must be strong so as to be an attractive environment for conferences focused on interest and achieve conference's goals not on the preparation of the conference held in a year That means focusing on quantity rather than quality of conferences.*" This observation highlights the need for increasing investment in training and development of skills among staff members or other individuals in the conference tourism sector Saudi Arabia. Based on the argument that Saudi Arabia's competence in conference tourism is still developing as compared to that of other countries in the developed world, it will be better for selected individuals to seek training in countries whose conference and tourism sectors are exemplary.

Many researchers have argued that the competence of personnel and the qualities of employees have a great impact on how the tourism industry performs (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015). The qualities are associated with thoughts, skills and knowledge, which lead to the survival and development of firms in the tourism industry. The training of personnel is important in many ways. It increases the productivity of employees as they are armed with valid thoughts, professional knowledge and experienced skills through training (Christian *et al.*, 2011). The training of staff also inspires and motivates employees by providing them with all the information required for working and also helping them to recognize the importance of their jobs. The training of personnel is also important in helping them to effectively work as members of multidisciplinary teams, which is necessary in the achievement of sustainable growth in this sector.

5.6.9 The role of technology in conference tourism

Each and every business venture, organisation, or industry is becoming increasingly reliant on technology in its day-to day operations. Technology is also highly relied upon in the quest for maintaining relevance or competitiveness. From the interviews that have been carried out with different players from the private sector, several responses highlighted the need to have advanced technological capabilities in place. The need for digital technologies, specifically the internet, has been supported by several respondents. They argue that the slow internet speeds in Saudi Arabia are an impediment to its competitiveness as a conference tourism destination. For instance, R-H states, "*There is a lack of services, for example slow speed internet services taking time to conduct transactions.*" In an almost similar argument, R-F

stated “Internet services are very slow to download and register during the first day, thus delaying the registration process or how we can provide attendees with online service, unlike countries that organize conferences outside The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia”. In a comparison between Saudi Arabia’s conference tourism and that of other countries, R-J stated “outside they are using technology more than Saudi Arabia. An example is using the technology to vote or to post questions, participation and interventions through a particular model during the conference . In Saudi Arabia, we still use paper with each of the above.” These responses highlight the fact that there is currently a very high reliance on internet services on a global scale that helps not only in communication, but also in a wide range of areas such as e-commerce. Supporting information systems or digital systems are also required to facilitate an easier and faster execution of activities, such as scheduling for conferences and record keeping. Whilst it cannot be stated that these information systems are totally lacking in Saudi Arabia, the respondents point out the need for the stakeholders in this sector to upgrade or improve their technological capabilities. In a survey by OpenSignal (2016) where a comparison among countries was made in terms of the accessibility of 4G internet, it was established that Saudi Arabia’s 4G speeds were just slightly more than 5MBPS. This is among the slowest speeds, given that the speeds in Singapore and South Korea are as high as 45MBPS.

It has been long time since the World Wide Web and the Internet first opened their virtual doors to the world. The tourism industry had however lagged behind in the adoption of new technology (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2014). But in the current world of tech-savvy meeting planners, gadget-friendly presenters and Blackberry-addicted executives, conference centres are forced to provide updated and state-of-the-art technology equipment as a standard practice lest they want to risk being beaten by competitors. Rogerson *et al.*(2005).Technology standards within the conference tourism industry are advancing quickly following the emergence of new innovations. Hotels and conference centres in Saudi Arabia are offering packages that are specifically designed for group meetings. These package incorporate high-end technology equipment. Hence if any additional technology is requires, it is readily available and also the meeting rooms are designed for a meeting setting instead of a banquet space (McCabe, Sharples & Foster, 2012). Innovations are constantly bringing technology to the next level, hence hotels and conference centres in Saudi Arabia are required to constantly renovate so as to maintain high-tech capabilities.

5.7 Available Opportunities for Expanding Conference Tourism in Saudi Arabia

The current state of conference tourism in Saudi Arabia provides a wide range of opportunities for growth or improvement in the future. The responses provided by almost all the respondents in the private sector showed optimism in the future of conference tourism. One of the

respondents, for instance, provided a detailed description of the regions in Saudi Arabia, some of whose unique features can be taken advantage of to set up destinations for conference tourism in future. Referring to the Quassim Province of Saudi Arabia, **R-G** says: *“This area combines the sands of the Nafud desert and the surrounding greenery of the countryside with an abundance of water and towering palm trees. In addition, the finest dates in the world are produced here. Qassim is versatile in its heritage, nature, and traditional handicrafts. Its historical and cultural richness and unique festivals makes it rich in tourism”*. This shows that if well exploited, the landscapes in the region can be tourist attractions which tourists can enjoy after their conferences. Saudi Arabia’s strategic location also counts as an opportunity for conference tourism because it is regarded as a point of convergence for many countries across the globe and in the Middle East. **R-J**, for instance, stated: *“Saudi Arabia’s strategic location mediates continents of the world from the east and west, north and south, as well as having a competitive advantage in the Muslim world because of the presence of the holy places in the city, Mecca, as well as Saudi Arabia being a member of the twenty countries and economic powers in the oil sector (G-20 major economies).”* Optimism was also expressed by **R-I** who stated, *“There is no specific model but possibilities are very high and there is interest in development. I think it will compete in the conference market during the next five years because the market is growing up very fast. especially vocational associations conferences”*. Whilst it cannot be ascertained that these objectives will be met in the next five years, this response supports the fact that there is a bright future in the conference tourism sector.

Compared to the past five years, the demand for conference tourism has increased markedly (Avraham, 2015). There is a growing demand for conference tourism across all sectors in Saudi Arabia, including energy, healthcare, insurance, education and telecommunication sectors. The meeting size in Saudi Arabia is growing. The growing demand for meetings in Saudi Arabia has resulted in hotels giving preference to larger meetings that are capable of paying more (Tian, 2010). When it comes to last-minute bookings and walk-in bookings hotels are not as flexible as before hence such bookings are not possible anymore. This creates an opportunity for developing more facilities that can facilitate conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. The meeting place in Saudi Arabia is also changing, where the traditional board style is being replaced by a more innovative approach that features huge outdoor meeting spaces as well smaller nooks that are cosy for limited gatherings, and a variety of seating arrangements are increasingly requested (Avraham, 2015). The focus in conference tourism is now on creating conducive settings. This creates an opportunity that can be exploited by firms in the tourism industry. New technology has created an opportunity for expanding conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. Events and meetings are getting more and more tech-savvy (Tian, 2010). Events have been transformed in conference tourism by

technology. The return of the meeting package in Saudi Arabia also creates an opportunity for expanding conference tourism in the nation. Planners are now able to embrace the meeting package product for the value it offers the meeting budget.

5.8 Contribution of the Sector to the Saudi Economy

These results from the private sector interviews have presented several themes that can be used to understand the current situation of conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. From the demographic characteristics of respondents outlined in Table 5.7, one of the themes that emerge is that the sector contributes to the country's economy albeit in a small way, as argued by many researchers. From the evidence provided by the research respondents, one of the sure ways in which it contributes is through the creation of employment. Responses to interview questions also indicate the plans that the government has for making this sector a key contributor in its economy. For instance, **R-F** states "*The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is open for business and confirmed its commitment to develop the exhibitions and conventions sector after it realized its importance in supporting the economic diversification process, away from the returns oil production and export*". The realization by the government that this sector is a viable source of revenue also shows how effectively this sector can supplement the existing major sectors of the economy.

Some of the challenges or negative aspects that have been identified include the underdevelopment of tourism facilities in the region and the cultural incompatibility with other countries (Avraham, 2015). However, the fact that the government is committed to increasing investments in this sector increases the prospects of its growth in future. Business tourism refers to a wide range of events like conferences, exhibitions and meetings, which are considered to be of great importance commercially, socially, culturally and politically. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries which have concentrated on developing these activities by strengthening its related elements such as establishing conferences, exhibitions, airports and hotels, and reforming other government regulations and procedures to support the industry (Alodadi & Benhin, 2015). In the recent past, Saudi Arabia has been experiencing an increase in the exhibition and conference sector. This has been attributed mainly to its economic development, availability of conference facilities and improved infrastructure. According to the results from the private sector, several themes arise regarding conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. They include cultural differences, government support, strong economy, insufficient facilities for conferences and the quality of services offered.

5.9 Summary

The results obtained from both the public and private sector regarding the state of Saudi Arabia's conference tourism have provided a deep insight into the current situation of the

sector, which has been supported by results from different researchers on the subject. Whilst there is wide agreement that the sector has its weaknesses/shortcomings, there are several aspects about the sector and the country at large that provide optimism about the improvement or future growth of the sector. The shortcomings mainly revolve around the strict cultural and religious customs that have to be abided by, underdevelopment in the technological sectors and shortage of professionals with the level of competence required to successfully run the sector. Positive aspects, on the other hand, include the government's commitment to support the sector through the creation of the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB) and the increase in venturing into conference tourism by players in the private sector. These aspects of the conference sector provide a lot of optimism that in the next decade, the contribution of conference tourism to the country's economy will have increased, and will complement that of major contributors such as the oil and gas industry.

It is worth noting that stakeholders in both private and public sectors were quite cooperative in aiding the research by volunteering to be study respondents. For the public/government sector, the initial number of respondents sampled was ten . However, when they were informed that the interviews were to be recorded and they had to sign the interview consent form before participating, some of them opted to pull out, leaving only six respondents. Nonetheless, their answers were informative and met the research objective with in-depth and rich information.

As for the private sector, all the 15 respondents who were sampled were interviewed. However, one of them later requested for his interview not to be used in the research. It was also established that two of them had not signed the interview consent form, and in two cases the interview recordings were not clear; these were excluded, leaving a sample of ten respondents. Despite this, the sample size and information collected were established as sufficient for meeting the research objectives.

This meant that even though their interviews had been recorded already, they could not be used. Respondents from the public sector also requested for their positions in the tourism sector not to be mentioned. This request was respected in adherence to research ethics. The lack of freedom of expression in many areas in Saudi Arabia, especially in the government sector, also contributed to these reservations.

Chapter 6: Quantitative analysis of external conference delegates' responses

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the, third research objective is addressed, the intention of which was to analyse the quality of service and its effects on business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. How the quality of services affects business and conference tourism highlights the most important determinants of the correlations between quality of service and business and conference tourism. As defined by Sparks *et al.* (2001), service quality management is the process which involves the management of a service in order to improve its quality, based on customer expectations. Serra (2006) stresses that the quality of a service is a matter of perception, and therefore it is the duty of the management to take into account all aspects of the visitor's experience, beginning with the initial planning (all elements that make a place attractive for tourists) to the travelling, accommodation, and overall tourism experience. Hence, it was necessary to determine which elements are important to foreign tourists who visit Saudi Arabia, and how they influence their perceived quality of services rendered and offered in the context of business tourism in this country. The objective was addressed using a quantitative research design, and the data was collected using questionnaires that were completed by external conferences delegates. These were attending three different types of conferences in two important cities in Saudi Arabia, namely Riyadh, the capital city, and Dammam, the largest city in the Eastern Province. This chapter contains many aspects necessary to attaining the objective. Chief among these is a deeper illustration and analysis of the quantitative data collected in the research. This section begins with a description of the demographic attributes of the research sample, outlining the gender, nationality, work sector and occupation of the respondents in this research, and presents the descriptive statistics of the results that were obtained from the respondents regarding their accommodation, such as the arrangements that they made for the accommodation and the duration of their stay. The chapter later presents results on customer satisfaction with various aspects of different facilities. Several correlation tests were applied in order to determine whether the quality of the services offered influences business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. Due to the nature of the variables tested, Spearman's rank order correlation was used. These results are presented in Tables and statistical analysis is carried out to establish the main factors that influence satisfaction among conference tourists. The p value at which correlations are significant was 0.05. Some of the correlation coefficients obtained exhibit lower value due to a lack of significant correlation between variables, reflected by a large p value (higher than 0.05). The chapter ends with a

summary of the main points in respect to the results and how they address the aim being focused upon in this chapter.

6.2 Sample Composition

To establish the quality of service, as defined in the introductory section and in the literature review and its effects on business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia, the researcher designed a questionnaire for external delegates, who were considered as the ideal target population for this research. To this end, the study distributed a total of 150 questionnaires using non-random sampling to ensure that the response rate met the minimum intended, of 100 participants. The final sample consisted of 124 participants (24 participants more than the minimum); the participants to whom the questionnaires were distributed were among those attending three different type of conferences in Saudi Arabia, as explained in the methods chapter, and Table 4.4. These conferences were the Arab International Aluminium Conference and Exhibition (ARABAL), held in Dammam, the third International Conference on Endocrinology and Diabetes held in Riyadh, as well as the fourth Electronic Warfare Symposium, held in Riyadh. The questionnaire was built, as explained in the methodology chapter, based on the quality attributes relating to the business tourism sector, as identified in the review of the literature in section 2.3.5.3. The sample is based on the fact that it provides different perspectives on the research objective, given that the attendees have different experiences as well as having different national and cultural backgrounds, as the sample comprises delegates from different countries across the world. The cultural background of the participants is relevant in relation to the theoretical framework of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, as applied to the current research and discussed in Chapter Two.

6.2.1 Demographic composition

The main demographic variables examined included gender, nationality, occupation, and work sector. The following results provide an understanding of the demographic composition of the participants, who were external conference delegates attending different conference events in Saudi Arabia. In order to examine gender composition, participants were asked to state their genders. It was found that 87.9% of the participants were males, whereas the females were the remaining 12.1%. The high representation of males and low representation of females that is shown here could reflect that attributes of the Saudi Arabia cultural and religious environment may have been an impediment to the research. With the researcher being a man, it was difficult to enter the women's sections at the conferences, one of the restrictions of the Saudi culture. As such, there was a challenge in meeting and convincing women to take part in the survey. The lower representation of females in the survey does not necessarily suggest that women tend to visit Saudi Arabia less in terms of business tourism, but it does

demonstrate a high masculinity to femininity index, as per Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. This is in line with the findings from the literature (Dellner, 2014, 2017).

Nationality is another demographic factor of interest in this study. Given that there were many countries represented, they were classified according to their regions to simplify analysis. The results are summarised as follows in Table 6.1:

Table 6.1: Distribution of Nationality by Region

| Region | Respondents | Percentage |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Europe | 35 | 28.2% |
| Middle East | 32 | 25.8% |
| North America | 14 | 11.3% |
| Asia | 32 | 25.8% |
| Africa | 8 | 6.5% |
| Australia | 3 | 2.4% |
| Total | 124 | 100% |

Source: Author’s survey

From Table 6.1, it is evident that the biggest percentages of respondents were from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. 28.2% of the respondents were from Europe, 25.8% were from the Middle East and 25.8% were from Asia. Having more than two thirds of respondents from countries outside the Middle East is a positive indicator because there are many aspects about Saudi Arabia and the Middle East that people from other countries and regions are interested in learning about. There is also a large representation from other regions and this shows the extent to which conference tourism is common across the globe. This is because the approaches that are used by different professions when handling certain issues differ from country to country and as such, learning best practices from colleagues from different nationalities is one of the ways in which skills and professional competences can be improved. A detailed analysis of nationality is provided in Table 6.2:

Table 6.2: Nationality by Country

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Sudanese | 6 | 4.8 | 4.9 | 4.9 |
| | Oman | 9 | 7.3 | 7.3 | 12.2 |
| | Bahrain | 1 | .8 | .8 | 13.0 |
| | UAE | 15 | 12.1 | 12.2 | 25.2 |
| | Holland | 1 | .8 | .8 | 32.5 |
| | China | 1 | .8 | .8 | 33.3 |
| | USA | 11 | 8.9 | 8.9 | 42.3 |
| | Netherlands | 1 | .8 | .8 | 43.1 |
| | Australia | 3 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 45.5 |
| | UK | 16 | 12.9 | 13.0 | 58.5 |
| | Switzerland | 3 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 61.0 |
| | Japan | 1 | .8 | .8 | 61.8 |
| | Singapore | 1 | .8 | .8 | 62.6 |
| | Republic of Korea | 1 | .8 | .8 | 63.4 |
| | Germany | 4 | 3.2 | 3.3 | 66.7 |
| | Italy | 1 | .8 | .8 | 67.5 |
| | Egypt | 10 | 8.1 | 8.1 | 73.7 |
| | Kuwait | 2 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 74.0 |
| | Irish | 1 | .8 | .8 | 74.8 |
| | India | 3 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 77.2 |
| Greenland | 1 | .8 | .8 | 78.0 | |
| Malaysian | 1 | .8 | .8 | 78.9 | |
| Filipino | 10 | 8.1 | 8.1 | 87.0 | |
| South Africa | 2 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 88.6 | |

| | | | | |
|-----------|---|-----|-----|-------|
| Jordanian | 4 | 3.2 | 3.3 | 88.6 |
| Pakistan | 4 | 3.2 | 3.3 | 91.9 |
| France | 2 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 93.5 |
| Canada | 3 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 95.9 |
| Turkey | 3 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 98.4 |
| Ukraine | 1 | .8 | .8 | 99.2 |
| N/A | 1 | .8 | .8 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's survey

As Table 6.2 shows, the highest percentage of participants was from the UK (12.9%), followed closely by the UAE (12.1%) and the USA (8.9%). This large percentage of foreigners, especially from Western countries such as the UK and the US, as exhibited in Tables 6.1 and 6.2, is in line with the results of Abdullah (2011) and Ageli (2013) who indicate that important growth can be observed in business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. However, the sector remains limited by its lack of experience.

The study also examined the composition of participants based on occupation. Participants were attending three different types of the conferences in Saudi Arabia, as explained in the methods chapter, and Table 4.4. They were clustered into different sectors, which included business, health, engineering and 'other sectors'. The results of responses obtained from the participants are summarised in Table 6.3:

Table 6.3: Occupation Distribution of Participants

| Sector | Respondents | Percentage |
|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Healthcare | 34 | 27.4% |
| Engineering | 29 | 23.4% |
| Business | 32 | 25.8% |
| Others | 29 | 23.4% |

Source: Author's survey

Table 6.3, shows 27.4% of participants were working in healthcare, with another 23.4% in the engineering sector; 25.8% were from business and 23.4% were classified as 'others'. This shows how diverse the delegates in these conferences were. It also shows how vital conferences are for people from different sectors and occupations. These results reflect the literature, as Graetz and Smith (2010) indicate that the business tourism industry is more developed with respect to healthcare conferences held in this country.

Moreover, other authors found that Saudi Arabia is currently investing in the development of other business sectors to attract conferences in multiple business domains. It is important to note, however, that Ageli (2013) indicates there is a limited number of professionally qualified event managers in Saudi Arabia, so they rely more on personal experience in their approach to conferences. The increased percentage of participants from the business sector found in this study can be interpreted as an indicator of increased quality in such conferences compared to the period in which Graetz and Smith (2010) or Ageli (2013) conducted their studies.

To have a good picture of occupational distribution, it was decided to group occupations based on sectors. This helped in the identification of which sectors are more represented and as such, which are more acknowledging or accepting of the importance of conferences. The following Table 6.4 summarises the sectors represented by participants:

Table 6.4: Distribution of Work Sector

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Private sector | 82 | 66.1% |
| Public sector | 36 | 29% |
| Other | 6 | 4.9% |
| Total | 124 | 100% |

Source: Author's survey

The results in Table 6.4 indicated that 66.1% of the participants are in the private sector whereas 29.0% of the participants were in the public sector and the remaining 4.8% were in other sectors, which includes specialised non-profit health associations. This may mean that more employers and employees in the private sector are interested in the conferences offered by Saudi Arabian firms. This, together with the relatively high percentage of participants from the business sector, as shown in Table 6.3, could indicate an improvement in the quality of services in the business conference tourism sector in comparison to the situation revealed in the literature.

6.2.2 Results relating to the conferences

Knowledge about the Conference

Apart from establishing the demographic composition of the participants, the study aimed at establishing how the participants obtained information concerning the conference. This makes it possible to establish the communication channels that are used to pass information on aspects such as events, and as such shape future strategies on communication. This information is relevant because it can reveal which aspects of conferences are attractive to foreign tourists. As previously mentioned, the attractiveness of

the services offered is among the determinants of perceived quality of service (Serra, 2006). A number of sources were identified, and participants asked to pick the one through which they had found out about the conference. Table 6.5 summarises the responses from participants concerning how they heard about the conference.

Table 6.5: Source of Information about the Conference

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Other | 29 | 23.4% |
| Conference website | 27 | 21.8% |
| Word of mouth | 19 | 15.3% |
| Email | 18 | 14.5% |
| Sales Rep | 10 | 8.1% |
| Press | 8 | 6.5% |
| Social media | 7 | 5.6% |
| Online media | 6 | 4.8% |
| Total | 124 | 100% |

Source: Author's survey

From the data presented in Table 6.5, most participants, 23.4%, learned about the conference using other means. The 'other means', in this case, comprised of internal memos in their places of work, as well being invited to attend by the Saudi government and organizations responsible for these conferences to share their experiences, especially where the sector is in the early stages. It can be relevant to identify these sources, because they show how much the government has invested in business and conference tourism, as previously indicated by El-Garaihy (2013) or Stankati (2016). Stankati (2016) discusses the focus the Saudi government has on business tourism as a source of improving the market share of tourism in the country. The fact that businesses learn about conferences from other sources, amongst which the Saudi government, reflects this effort, as Stankati (2016) and the Oxford Business Group (2016) have discussed.

This was followed by 21.8% of participants learning about the conference through conference websites. Online media sources were the least used means to obtain information since only 4.8% of the participants learned about the conference through the said channel. The should not suggest that the internet has a limited role in the present-day business environment, since it is the key medium of communication to people across the globe because it facilitates the electronic communication that takes place including social media, company websites, emails, online media outlets, and the conference website. This may show that while conference websites are actively promoting conference tourism in Saudi Arabia, their social media presence is scarce. Al-dweeri *et al.* (2017) highlight the potential benefits of the Internet in

promoting conferences, but it appears that Saudi firms are not making very much use of social media, possibly for cultural reasons.

Moreover, the fact that 21.8% of the participants learned about the conference on the website while 4.8% learned about it from online media may indicate that the online media did not promote the conference sufficiently.

Word of mouth (not including eWOM) was also among the leading sources through which the respondents got information on the conference, accounting for 15.3% of the respondents. Some of the main avenues through which word of mouth information is passed include workmates and peers at social places. The advantage of this approach of passing information is that people are more likely to trust a recommendation from their peers than to trust promotional messages by the event organisers (You, Vadakkepatt, & Joshi, 2015). Promotion or creating awareness of an event is one of the aspects that need to be taken seriously by event organisers because without the knowledge of its existence among people of the target audience, its attendance will be minimal (Altareri, 2016). Economic factors, activity programmes, media and information, and the local situation are also cited as factors that affect tourism awareness (Alhaj, 2017). Even though the sample of this research comprised of delegates from three conferences, these results can be used to inform organizers about avenues through which conference sector organisers can pass their messages regarding any conference meetings that may be coming up. The results also suggest that business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia is not benefiting from sufficient online promotion, as many of the participants (53.3% in total) found out about the conference from the traditional means (internal memos, word of mouth, sales reps or the press) in comparison with the remaining 46.7% in total who used electronic means, such as the conference website, their email, social media or online media.

Accommodation Arrangements

The study also aimed at establishing clients' preferred accommodation arrangements. Accommodation, as identified in several studies (Ramseook–Munhurrin *et al.*, 2016; Al-Ababneh, 2016; Al-dweeri *et al.*, 2017) has a significant influence on people's decision to visit a certain location. Thus, it can also be considered an integral part of service quality management (Serra, 2006). Different accommodation arrangements were identified, and participants asked to select their preferred arrangement. Results of responses from participants are shown in Table 6.6:

Table 6.6: Accommodation Arrangement

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Motel/hotel | 94 | 75% |
| Staying home | 19 | 15.3% |
| Others | 7 | 5.7% |
| Friends or relatives home | 3 | 2.4% |
| Apartment | 2 | 1.6% |
| Total | 124 | 100% |

Source: Author's survey

Results in Table 6.6 show that 75% of the participants stayed in a hotel/motel and another 15% stayed at home, suggesting they are external employees working in Saudi Arabia. Only a few stayed with friends and relatives or in apartments (2.4% and 1.6% respectively). Therefore, the majority of participants prefer staying at hotels or motels whenever they attend conferences. Given that living with relatives provides tourists with an accommodation arrangement that is of low cost, it could have been expected that more than 2.4% of the respondents could choose to stay with relatives or friends in the course of their conference attendance (Hill, 2013). This was however not the case for these respondents. Even though it may be expensive, depending on the level or standard of hotel, they provide several conveniences such as privacy, access to facilities such as internet and 24-hour catering services, and security. These may not be guaranteed at the other accommodation spots and in addition, living at a friend's or relative's home may force one (or one's host) to fit into a schedule that is inconvenient. There might also have been arrangements by sponsors to pay the accommodation for some of the delegates and as such, they had to use the hotels that had already been paid for. In addition to this, many conferences offer accommodation as part of the package for delegates. Even with these arguments, it can also be interpreted to mean that most of the delegates had no close relatives or friends in the towns where the conferences were taking place and as such, could not request for accommodation arrangements elsewhere apart from hotels.

The researcher also sought to find out the type of hotels or motels preferred by the participants. This was for the purpose of establishing how much delegates may be willing to spend on their accommodation. The following Table illustrates results of responses obtained from participants concerning types of hotels or motels in Table 6.7:

Table 6.7: Rating of Hotel/Motel

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Luxury (5 star) | 44 | 46.8% |
| Deluxe (4 star) | 39 | 41.5% |
| Standard (3 star) | 9 | 9.6% |
| Budget | 2 | 2.1% |
| Total | 94 | 100% |

Source: Author's survey

Based on the results in Table 6.7, 46.8% of the participants that prefer hotels or motels selected luxury or five stars, with 41.5% preferring deluxe or 4-star, 9.6% preferring standard or 3-star, and the remaining 2.1% preferring budget or 2-star hotels. This result indicate that most participants prefer five and four-star hotels or motels as accommodation arrangements whenever they are attending a conference. Al-Ababneh (2016) indicates that 5-star hotels often offer higher quality in comparison to 4-star hotels, and a similar difference can appear between 4-star hotels and 3-star hotels, so the preference for certain types of hotels reflects the desired quality of services that business tourists in Saudi Arabia are searching for. This may not exactly represent their economic capability but shows that many of the conference attendees prefer to get the ultimate experience and comfort in the different countries in which they are invited to attend conferences. On the other hand, it is argued by Rhee and Young (2015) that selection of hotels by tourists may not entirely be reliant on their star ratings. Rather, there are several other factors that are looked at by tourists in their selection of these facilities. For instance, the proximity of the hotel facility determines the time that is saved or wasted when commuting to and from the conference and therefore is a key determinant of hotel selection. Other factors include the amenities available in the hotels, the value that the hotels offer for the clients' money, and the reviews or testimonials that they might have heard of from other avenues (Zhou, Ye, Pearce, & Wu, 2014). Thus, it can be said that hotel stars are not the only factor that influences the perceived quality of services that tourists look for in the context of conference and business tourism in Saudi Arabia.

The tourism and hospitality industry, in this regard, can capitalise on some of these factors to provide the best experience to delegates, which will make them return and recommend them to friends. With regard to this, Ageli (2013) mentioned that Saudi Arabia can potentially create an environment that would facilitate business tourism despite the cultural differences with the Western world. Taking into account Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, culture is, as

previously discussed, an important aspect to be considered here. Therefore, a cross-tabulation between nationality and the type of accommodation chosen was also conducted, as shown in Table 6.8:

Table 6.8: Nationality * Hotel/Motel Cross-tabulation

| Count | | Motel/Hotel | | | | | Total |
|-------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------|------|-------|
| | | Luxury (5 star) | Deluxe (4 star) | Standard (3 star) | Budget | 5.00 | |
| Nationality | Sudanese | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| | Oman | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 9 |
| | UAE | 8 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| | Holland | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | China | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | USA | 5 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| | Netherlands | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Australia | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| | UK | 6 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 14 |
| | Switzerland | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| | Japan | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Singapore | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Germany | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| | Italy | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Egypt | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| | Kuwait | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| | Irish | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | India | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| | Greenland | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Filipino | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|----|----|----|---|---|----|
| | South Africa | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Jordanian | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| | Pakistan | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| | France | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | Canada | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | Turkey | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Ukraine | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | N/A | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | | 45 | 39 | 10 | 4 | 1 | 99 |

Source: Author's survey

A summary of type of hotel by region is shown in Table 6.9:

Table 6.9: Type of Hotel chosen by Region

| Region | Luxury (5 star) | Deluxe (4 star) | Standard (3 star) | Budget | Total |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------|-------|
| Asia | 9 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Australia | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Canada | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Europe | 9 | 16 | 3 | 2 | 30 |
| Middle East | 16 | 11 | 4 | 1 | 32 |
| N/A | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| USA | 5 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 11 |
| Africa | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Grand Total | 45 | 39 | 10 | 4 | 98 |

Source: Author's survey

Table 6.9 indicates that the majority of Western visitors (Europe, Canada, USA) have chosen to stay in 5- and 4-star hotels, with only three Europeans and one American choosing to reside

in a 3-star hotel during the conference. The majority of the Middle Eastern visitors have also stayed in luxury hotels. The fact that not all respondents indicated the type of accommodation they chose may alter the results, as a higher percentage of respondents from the Middle East provided answers to this question, compared to other regions. Comparing the number of respondents from the Table above with the data from Table 6.1, it can be seen that out of the 32 Asian participants, only 12 provided an answer to this question, whereas all 30 European participants provided an answer. Moreover, Table 6.8 shows that only two UK participants, one Sudanese and one Omani participant, chose to stay in budget hotels. This is compared to 15 UAE participants who preferred to stay in luxury and deluxe hotels (5 and 4 stars, respectively), which can be an indicator of differences in quality of services between these types of hotels and budget hotels, as argued by Ageli (2013) and Ramseook–Munhurrin *et al.* (2016).

Booking Accommodation

It was also imperative to examine how participants to a conference book their accommodation, because ease of booking may be another factor that influences perceived quality of service (Sierra, 2006). Many ways of booking accommodation were identified, and participants asked to state the ones they preferred. Results are as shown in Table 6.10:

Table 6.10: Accommodation Booking Method

| Method | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| A travel agent | 36 | 29.0% |
| Through a conference organizer | 29 | 23.4% |
| Direct with a hotel | 24 | 19.4% |
| Using internet | 20 | 16.1% |
| Others | 15 | 12.1% |
| Total | 124 | 100% |

Source: Author's survey

Table 6.10 shows that 29.0% of participants, preferred booking their accommodation through a travel agent to other methods, whereas 23.4% preferred booking accommodation through a conference organiser, 19.4% preferring dealing directly with the hotel, 16.1% booking their accommodation using the internet, and only 12.1% of the participants booking their accommodation using other means. The effectiveness through which a hotel's services can be booked is also a determinant of the overall quality of service of clients because it is the

starting point of contact between the client and hotel. Failure to provide a convincing image of the hotel to the client at the booking stage might make them consider booking other alternative hotels available to them (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). The fact that travel agents and conference organisers are the most-used methods for booking accommodation can be attributed to many reasons. One of these is that they make accommodation reservations for many clients at once and thus, the discount that they are offered trickles down to the conference attendees, allowing them to pay less than if they had booked the hotels on their own. Communication barriers or currency conversion challenges are also properly bridged by intermediaries such as travel agents (Koopman, Mitchell, & Thierer, 2014).

Number of Nights Spent in Saudi Arabia

The study was also concerned with number of nights spent in Saudi Arabia during the time that was planned for attending the conference. This was to establish the average duration of conferences, which can be instrumental in planning or projecting the required accommodation for conference tourism. The results are as follows in Table 6.11:

Table 6.11: Number of Nights spent in Saudi Arabia during the Conference Time

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | 25 | 20.2% |
| 2 | 21 | 16.9% |
| 3 | 38 | 30.6% |
| 4 | 28 | 22.6% |
| 5 | 6 | 4.9% |
| 6 | 2 | 1.6% |
| 7 | 1 | 0.8% |
| 10 or more | 3 | 2.4% |
| Total | 124 | 100% |

Source: Author’s survey

Table 6.11 shows 30.6% spent three nights, followed by 22.6% of the participants who spent four days, 20.2% of the participants spending one day, and 16.9% of the participants spending two days. The results also showed that only 0.8% of the participants spent seven days, with 2.4% spending 10 or more days during conferences in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The fact that many of the respondents reported spending three or four days in Saudi Arabia during the conferences can be interpreted to mean that that is the typical expected duration for conference tourism. Therefore, as conference tourism facilities are booked for such events, they should consider this in order to avoid incidents of collisions whereby two or more teams are booked for a venue. In order to establish the attractiveness of the country for foreign

tourists, it is necessary to also look at the number of additional nights these tourists spend to extend their stay in the country for leisure purposes.

Additional Nights in Saudi Arabia

The study also aimed at establishing whether participants spend additional nights after the conferences in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This was to establish the likelihood of attendees staying and enjoying other tourism facilities even after the conferences have already ended. The results are as follows in Table 6.12:

Table 6.12: Additional Nights spent in Saudi Arabia

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| None | 79 | 63.7% |
| 1 | 16 | 12.9% |
| 2 | 11 | 8.9% |
| 3 | 3 | 2.4% |
| 4 | 2 | 1.6% |
| 5 | 3 | 2.4% |
| 7 | 2 | 1.6% |
| 8 | 1 | .8% |
| 10 or more | 7 | 5.6% |
| Total | 124 | 100% |

Source: Author’s survey

Responses from participants in Table 6.12 indicate that 63.7% do not spend additional days in Saudi Arabia after the end of their conferences, 12.9% would only spend one day, and 8.9% would spend two days. The results also indicate that only 0.8% spend eight days, with only 5.6% spending 10 or more additional days after the end of their conferences. The results imply that participants at a conference within The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are unlikely to engage in tourism activities especially after their conference. Even though there may be other aspects about Saudi Arabia that they might experience after the event, it is understandable that few of the respondent prefer staying for an extra day after the conference in Saudi Arabia. As previously discussed, the literature suggests the same thing: few tourists chose to remain in

Saudi Arabia outside the conference days, which is why it is argued that the development of Saudi tourism is still in its early stages.

There are also other factors that can trigger an intention among conference or business tourists to extend their stay at a hotel facility, commonly referred to as 'bleisure'. These include the prices of the hotels and the length of time that visas allow the tourists to stay (GBTA, 2017). It can therefore be also argued that in addition to the delegates having other responsibilities to address in their home countries, most of them did not consider adding extra days on their visas and did not want to spend more time and money.

Visit to Saudi Arabia without a Conference

In establishing whether participants would visit Saudi Arabia without a conference it was considered necessary to classify the respondents by nationalities, in order to establish whether there was a correlation between the nationalities of the respondents and their likelihood of visiting Saudi Arabia for other leisure activities. The nationalities represented in the results were quite various and as such, there was also a need to classify them according to regions. On so doing, the results were as presented in the Table 6.13:

Table 6.13: Would Visit Saudi Arabia without a Conference

| Region | Yes | | No | |
|---------------|------|------------|------|------------|
| | Freq | Percentage | Freq | Percentage |
| Europe | 11 | 8.9 | 16 | 13.0% |
| Middle East | 21 | 17.0 | 13 | 10.5% |
| Asia | 8 | 6.5 | 12 | 9.7% |
| North America | 3 | 2.4 | 11 | 8.9% |
| Africa | 10 | 8.1 | 6 | 4.8% |
| Total | 53 | 42.7 | 57 | 46.0% |

Source: Author's survey

Among participants, as shown in Table 6.13, 42.7% said they would visit Saudi Arabia without a conference, while 46.0% of them said they would not visit Saudi Arabia without a conference, with 10.5% of the participants choosing not to provide feedback. What can be interpreted from this is that participants are on the whole unlikely to engage in other forms of visits apart from attending conferences. However, on classifying the responses based on nationality, there are countries whose representatives overwhelmingly stated that they would like to revisit. Key among these are those from Sudan, UAE, Kuwait, Jordan and South Africa. There are however Western countries whose representatives stated that they would not stay, and these included the United States, Egypt, Pakistan, Switzerland and Germany. These results show

that countries whose citizens are more likely to visit Saudi Arabia for tourism tend to be culturally closer to the people in Saudi Arabia, and those whose citizens may not choose to visit, namely the Western countries, are different from a cultural point of view. The literature emphasises the impact of state religion on tourism development in Saudi Arabia (Burns, 2007; Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010), which can be used to analyse why tourists from countries that are culturally similar to Saudi Arabia tend to flock there, rather than those whose culture is different. Similarly, Burns (2007) demonstrated how Saudi Arabia uses Islam to highlight Saudi legitimacy, and presented a knowledgeable analysis of tourism development in the Kingdom. Altareri (2016) revealed the important differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in their perceptions of The Kingdom as a destination for meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) tourism. For the Muslims, Saudi Arabia is an ideal MICE tourism destination. For non-Muslims, it is a very good MICE tourism destination because of safety, cleanliness, and a friendly environment. Both groups in Altareri's (2016) study preferred visiting Saudi Arabia mostly for MICE tourism purposes; in particular, for professional development. These results are also in line with the theory of cultural dimensions set out by Hofstede: people tend to feel more at home in foreign countries with similar cultural dimensions. However, multiple reasons invite people to visit a certain country for leisure activities or not. These include availability and awareness of leisure destinations, costs of visiting for leisure, the accommodative nature of people in those countries, and similarities or differences between cultures. Some of the tourist attractions that could make people visit Saudi Arabia include nature parks, religious and sacred landmarks, and museums, among others (Tripadvisor, 2018). Thus, efforts need to be put in place to ensure that more is known about the tourist attractions in the country through different marketing avenues. By region, the willingness to visit without a conference is reflected in the following Table 6.14:

Table 6.14: Willingness to Visit without a Conference

| Region | Yes | Yes | No | No | Invalid | Invalid | Total |
|-------------|-----|------|----|-----|---------|---------|-------|
| Africa | 8 | 100% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 8 |
| Asia | 15 | 50% | 15 | 50% | 0 | 0% | 30 |
| Australia | 1 | 33% | 2 | 67% | 0 | 0% | 3 |
| Canada | 1 | 33% | 2 | 67% | 0 | 0% | 3 |
| Europe | 11 | 35% | 17 | 55% | 3 | 10% | 31 |
| Middle East | 15 | 58% | 11 | 42% | 0 | 0% | 26 |
| USA | 2 | 18% | 9 | 82% | 0 | 0% | 11 |
| Total | 53 | 47% | 56 | 50% | 3 | 3% | 112 |

Source: Author's survey

As can be seen in Table 6.14 , the majority of people who have expressed their unwillingness to visit Saudi Arabia without a conference come from Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia, Asia and the Middle East. In order to learn the reason why these results were obtained, a correlation analysis between willingness to stay and various motivational factors will be conducted in the following sections.

A summary by region is presented in Table 6.15:

Table 6.15: Willingness to Extend Stay by Region

| Region | Yes | Yes | No | No | Invalid | Invalid | Total |
|-------------|-----|------|----|-----|---------|---------|-------|
| Africa | 4 | 57% | 3 | 43% | 0 | 0% | 7 |
| Asia | 10 | 31% | 22 | 69% | 0 | 0% | 32 |
| Australia | 1 | 33% | 2 | 67% | 0 | 0% | 3 |
| Canada | 3 | 100% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 3 |
| Europe | 8 | 26% | 22 | 71% | 1 | 3% | 31 |
| Middle East | 10 | 33% | 20 | 67% | 0 | 0% | 30 |
| USA | 4 | 36% | 6 | 55% | 1 | 9% | 11 |
| Total | 40 | 34% | 75 | 64% | 2 | 2% | 117 |

Source: Author's survey

Table 6.15 also reveals that people from Europe and Asia have expressed their unwillingness to extend their stay beyond the period of the conference. In order to better understand their reasons, a series of analyses of motivational factors will be conducted in the following section.

Motivational factors

Because previous data showed that despite people's satisfaction with accommodation, and curiosity or attraction towards the conference topic, tourists are mostly unlikely to extend their stay after the conference or visit the country in the absence of a conference, it is necessary to analyse other motivational factors that influence tourism behaviour that can be linked to service quality management. Thus, the other aspect of this study relates to the motivating factors that made the respondents attend the conferences in Saudi Arabia. By knowing the motivating factors behind the attendance of the conferences, the reason people are less willing to visit Saudi Arabia independently of a conference could be determined. Several factors were considered as being motivators for conference attendees. One of these was the fact that it provided opportunities for the delegates for business networking. When asked about this, the responses they gave are as summarised in Table 6.16.

Table 6.16: Business Networking Opportunities as a Motivator

| Statement | | Influence | | | | | Total |
|---|------|--------------------|---------------|---------|----------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | Very low influence | Low influence | Neutral | High Influence | Very High influence | |
| Business networking or opportunities | Freq | 8 | 8 | 24 | 26 | 58 | 124 |
| | % | 6.5 | 6.5 | 19.4 | 21 | 46.8 | 100 |

Source: Author's survey

As presented in Table 6.16, 46.8% of the respondents stated that the opportunity to network had a very high influence on their decision to attend the conference. This is followed by 21% who stated that it had a high influence. 19.4% of the respondents were neutral about it, 6.5% stated that it had a low influence and 6.5% stated that it had a very low influence. Based on the fact that a majority of the respondents said it is very influential, it shows how much business people and professionals value the concept of networking with other people who have expertise in the same profession as them. Similarly, Bellini (2007), emphasised the relevant characteristics of culture that are properly translated into local communities, as the basic idea is to exchange important information among different participants in cultural interactions. The role played by networking at business conferences is quite vital in the social and professional lives of those involved and is one of the main reasons that could attract people to attend events, including business conferences (Gardiner & Scott, 2014). Some of the benefits that can be drawn from networking include getting referrals and just being up-to-date with the trends in the profession. As the results establish, there are people from different occupations and sectors that took part in the survey. This not only provides the delegates with an opportunity to network with people from different sectors, but also from people of different professions within their sectors of expertise. For instance, referring to the healthcare sector, there were surgeons, intern doctors and physicians, who could benefit from networking and sharing the advances that might have taken place in their different areas of work. Similarly, Abdullah (2011) noted that except for the restrictions that are currently in place in Saudi Arabia, its current state of business conference tourism is rather promising. The potential to develop various forms of employment in the Kingdom can potentially enhance its business conference tourism sector.

The respondents were also asked to state how influential the content of the conference was as a motivator for their attendance of the conference. This was mainly directed at establishing whether they considered the content of the conference as being relevant for the growth of their businesses or careers in Table 6.17:

Table 6.17: The Content of the Conference as a Motivating Factor

| Statement | | Influence | | | | | Total |
|---|------|--------------------|---------------|---------|----------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | Very low influence | Low influence | Neutral | High Influence | Very High influence | |
| The content of the conference programme | Freq | 2 | 11 | 29 | 41 | 41 | 124 |
| | % | 1.6 | 8.9 | 23.4 | 33.1 | 33.1 | 100 |

Source: Author's survey

Table 6.17 shows that 33.1% stated that it was of a very high influence, 33.1% stated that it was of a high influence, 23.4% were neutral about it, 8.9% stated that it had a low influence, and 1.6% stated that it had a very low influence. The theme that emerges from these results is that training and development is also an important aspect just as networking is, for any business or professional growth. Development of content for conference delegates is a key element that will not only determine the intention of the delegates to attend the conferences, but also the overall degree of satisfaction that they will obtain from attending them (Whitfield, Dioko, Webber, & Zhang, 2014). In essence, it is vital of organisers to ensure that the concepts that are shared through the conferences are not common knowledge, and that professionals who are experienced and successful in the different professional fields are the ones that deliver the content to the delegates. Some of the concepts that could draw interest include technological advances that have taken place in different fields or other cutting-edge approaches that they can apply to better their service delivery (Pradhan, 2014). Given that the delegates are paying to attend and are also spending money on accommodation, the content provided to them ought to be worthwhile and also provide value for money. Given that conferences provide an ideal avenue for these training and development activities, it is expected that the delegates – who value training and development – will be motivated by the content and teachings provided in the conference. With regard to this, the literature pointed out that The Kingdom's international conference tourism may be considered as a strategy for meeting the needs of current domestic and global tourism, and that irrespective of the challenges faced by the tourism sector, Saudi Arabia organisations are on right track in

developing competitive products and services for tourists to respond to their evolving needs (Abduallah, 2011; Ageli, 2013).

Previous attendance was also identified as a possible motivator for attending conferences. This is because previous good past experiences would make an individual attend the conference with the hope that they will have the same or even a better experience. The respondents were asked how this influenced their decisions to attend the conference and the results are tabulated below in Table 6.18:

Table 6.18: Annual Attendance of the Conference as a Motivator

| Statement | | Influence | | | | | Total |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------------|---------------|---------|----------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | Very low influence | Low influence | Neutral | High Influence | Very High influence | |
| I attend this conference each year | F | 24 | 8 | 23 | 27 | 30 | 112 |
| | % | 9.4 | 6.5 | 18.5 | 21.8 | 24.2 | 80.4 |

Source: Author's survey

The largest group of respondents, shown in Table 6.18, stated that the fact that they had attended the conference the previous year was a very highly influential motivator for them to attend the conference. They made up 24.2% of the respondents. 21.8% of the respondents stated that it was highly influential, 18.5% were neutral about it, 6.5% mentioned that it was of a low influence, and 9.4% stated that previous attendance had very low influence. Similarly, Cohen (2010) stated that the tourists' cultural viewpoints in their tourism experience can offer them a better understanding of the breadth of quality and uniqueness of business and conference tourism. This is also reflected in Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, as previously argued. From the data in the current study, and the information gathered from previous studies and theories, it becomes more and more evident that culture plays an important role in influencing the perceived quality of services, as it also influences the decision to visit a country. Another factor that was considered as being important in the examination of motivators for delegates to attend the conference was the fees that they were to pay to attend the conference. This aspect has been evaluated because of the high influence that costs have always had in decision making. The results obtained from the questionnaire are summarised below in Table 6.19:

Table 6.19: Fees Charged at the Conference as a Motivator

| Statement | | Influence on decisions to attend conference | | | | | Total |
|----------------|------|---|---------------|---------|----------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | Very low influence | Low influence | Neutral | High Influence | Very High influence | |
| Conference fee | Freq | 22 | 21 | 59 | 12 | 10 | 124 |
| | % | 17.7 | 16.9 | 47.6 | 9.7 | 8.1 | 100 |

Source: Author's survey

Referring to Table 6.19, 47.6% of the respondents mentioned that they were neutral about the costs as a motivator. Another element that is evident is that more of the respondents mentioned costs as being either of a very low or low influence (34.6%), as compared to those who mentioned that it was of a very high or high influence (17.8%). The cost or price of services is quite a vital factor that affects the intention and satisfaction of clients who are in need of a product or service. However, if a product or service offered provides the client with value for their money and is unique to their needs, people will be willing to pay even high prices in order to use it (Friedman, 2017). Given that there was a relatively small percentage who mentioned that the cost highly influenced their decisions or motivation to attend, this is proof that they are aware of the value that the conferences have in the growth and improvement of their professions. The results can be interpreted to mean that for those who attend conferences, cost is not regarded as an issue. The results can be interpreted to mean that for those who attend conferences, cost is not regarded as an issue. This may be because the costs are covered by the company for which they work, who covers all fees incurred during the participation in the conference. This is reflected in Table 6.20:

Table 6.20: Fees * Conference Fee Cross-tabulation

| | | Count | | | | |
|-------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------|----------------|---------------------|
| | | Conference fee | | | | |
| | | 1 Very Low influence | 2 Low influence | Neutral | High influence | Very high influence |
| Fees | Sponsor paid | 6 | 9 | 16 | 4 | 3 |
| | Organizers paid | 4 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| | Self-paid | 7 | 9 | 12 | 6 | 3 |
| | Other | 4 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 1 |
| | N/A | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | | 21 | 20 | 40 | 12 | 9 |

Source: Author's survey

As Table 6.20 shows, the level of influence of the fees increases when they are self-paid, as six respondents who paid for the conference themselves argued that conference fees had a high influence on their decision to attend. However, even in this situation, 12 of the respondents who paid for the conference themselves rated conference fees as a neutral factor. This may indicate either that the fees are not considered to be high, or that the participants are financially stable and have sufficient resources to cover for the costs. In the absence of more primary data concerning the fee level, an accurate assessment of this factor cannot be attained. However, connecting the information here with the fact that the majority of respondents chose luxury hotels (5 or 4 star hotels in Saudi Arabia) may suggest that accommodation and other fees are not highly relative to their income.

The security and safety of the destination in which the conference is held were also considered as a motivating factor, which could influence the quality of hospitality services rendered. Respondents were asked how much they consider security as a motivator for attendance. The results are as presented below in Table 6.21:

Table 6.21: Security and Safety as a Motivator

| Statement | | Influence | | | | | Total |
|--|------|--------------------|---------------|---------|----------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | Very low influence | Low influence | Neutral | High Influence | Very High influence | |
| Security and safety of the destination | Freq | 21 | 8 | 36 | 31 | 22 | 118 |
| | % | 16.9 | 6.5 | 29 | 25 | 17.7 | 95.1 |

Source: Author's survey

Table 6.21 shows 29% of the respondents were neutral about the security factor as a motivator. 25% stated that it was of a high influence, 17.7% stated that it was of a very high influence, 6.5% stated that it was of a low influence and 16.9% stated that it was of a very low influence. It is understandable that even though a large part of the respondents were neutral, a good number of them mentioned that security was either highly influential or very highly influential. The role of security and safety in present day events is one of the key factors that individuals consider when travelling or attending events. With the increase in terrorist attacks that occurred with the turn of the twenty-first century, coupled with the rise in extremist religions, organisers have learnt the need to take security seriously (Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain, 2015). It is based on this that people are more likely to avoid attending events if there is no assurance that their lives and properties will be well protected, as Hussain, Al Nasser, & Hussain (2015) indicate. For conferences that take place abroad, the concept of security applies not only on the venue of the event, but throughout the entire journey. The fact that 16.9% of the respondents stated that security was of a very low influence can be interpreted to mean that they consider Saudi Arabia to pose among the least security threats in the Middle East, as also argued by Avraham (2015). It can also be that they expect security measures to be already in place for conference delegates and thus, they are not really worried about their safety. Correspondingly, Ali (2010) stated that the Saudi government provides important services such as security and other infrastructure that supports business, such as maintaining roads and providing a clean environment.

The researcher also sought to establish the level of satisfaction with the different elements of the entire conference experience. Determining how satisfied the respondents were in relation to these elements can contribute to more accurate conclusions regarding the areas of strength and weakness affecting the quality of hospitality services provided in the business and conference tourism sector in Saudi Arabia. In this regard, the question that was posed to them was "How satisfied were you with the following aspects while attending the conference destination?" Some of the results from the main aspects included in the questionnaire are

presented below. One of these elements was the quality of accommodation that they were offered. This was aimed at establishing the general level of service quality provided by the different facilities from which they received accommodation services. The results of this survey are summarised in Table 6.22:

Table 6.22: Level of Satisfaction with the Quality of Accommodation

| Statement | | Agreement | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------|--------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| | | Very dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | Very satisfied |
| The quality of accommodation | F | 3 | 5 | 25 | 40 | 38 |
| | % | 2.4 | 4 | 20.2 | 32.3 | 30.6 |

Source: Author's survey

From Table 6.22 shows, it is evident that there is a high degree of satisfaction among the respondents with the services that they were offered, with 32.3% stating that they were satisfied, and 30.6% stating that they were very satisfied. 20.2% stated that their experience was neutral, 4% stated that they were dissatisfied and 2.4% stated they were very dissatisfied. Even with this high degree of satisfaction, factors that led to the dissatisfaction of the eight respondents ought to be addressed in order to cumulatively increase the index of satisfaction with the country's accommodation facilities. Perhaps one way in which this can be approached is the consideration of the fact that many of the tourists in Saudi Arabia are not Muslim and therefore feel somewhat restricted if they are forced to adhere to the rules and regulations that many Saudis are accustomed to (Altareri, 2016).

Ageli (2013) also mentioned that the Saudi tourism industry is still facing a number of difficulties in carrying out service quality management within their organisational culture. Further, the literature reveals that tourism mirrors elements of interaction amongst people from different cultural backgrounds (Altareri, 2016; Cohen, 2010; Kandampully, 2001).

The degree of satisfaction with the safety and security that the respondents were provided with was also asked. This is because of the role that security plays in determining the overall degree of satisfaction of the respondents. These results are as presented in Table 6.23:

Table 6.23: Level of Satisfaction with Safety and Security

| Statement | F | Agreement | | | | |
|---|---|-------------------|--------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| | % | Very dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | Very satisfied |
| Destinations safety and security | F | 5 | 3 | 32 | 39 | 38 |
| | % | 4 | 2.4 | 25.8 | 31.5 | 30.6 |

Source: Author's survey

From the results in Table 6.23, it is evident that there was a high degree of satisfaction among the respondents about the level of security and safety they experienced, adding to the overall degree of satisfaction of the services offered. Of the 124 respondents, 31% of them stated that they were satisfied with the level of safety and security, 30.6% stated that they were very satisfied with the level of safety and security at the conference, as well as in their different areas of accommodation. 25.8% had a neutral opinion about it, 2.4% were dissatisfied, and 4% stated that they were very dissatisfied. These results show that there is confidence among the conference attendees about the security offered in the areas of accommodation. Gould (2017) suggests that security is among the motivators in the hotel industry, while clean hotels, good food and friendly staff can be attributed to hygiene factors. Security, as found by Gould (2017), can take many forms, one of which is translated into the willingness locals have to welcome people of a different culture. Quintal, Lee and Soutar (2010) also point out that an important part of tourism is the interaction between individuals of different cultures. Moreover, as Altaeri (2016) points out Muslim and non-Muslim tourists have different motivations to visit Saudi Arabia. While Muslim visitors appreciate the cultural closeness, non-Muslims appreciate the high performance of the country in terms of cleanliness, safety and hospitable attitudes – a matter which is also reflected in the current study by the high percentage of people indicating satisfaction with safety.

The range of accommodation options available was also an element surveyed by the questionnaire. This was to establish whether there is sufficient variety to accommodate the tastes and preferences of the respondents and their different purchasing capabilities. The results obtained are as presented in Table 6.24:

Table 6.24: Level of Satisfaction with the Available Range of Accommodation

| Statement | F | Agreement | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------|--------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| | % | Very dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | Very satisfied |
| The range of accommodation available | F | 3 | 3 | 33 | 47 | 26 |
| | % | 2.4 | 2.4 | 26.6 | 37.9 | 21 |

Source: Author's survey

Most of the respondents in Table 6.24 were satisfied with the available range of accommodation (37.9%). 21% indicated that they were very satisfied with this range. The cumulative percentage of those who stated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied therefore is approximately two thirds of the total research sample, an indication that the accommodation facilities available in Saudi Arabia are of a wide enough range to accommodate different customer segments. Almuhrzi, *et al.* (2017) stated that service quality management focuses on training employees to provide adequate services that satisfy customers' expectations. It is vital for stakeholders in the field of hospitality to acknowledge that there are conference delegates or tourists who prefer to spend less on accommodation as much as there are those who prefer to spend more in order to get the optimal comfort, with others whose spending preferences and capabilities lie between these two levels (Masiero, Nicolau, & Law, 2015). Therefore, in order to ensure that all these clients get services that are satisfactory for their different budgets, it is vital to ensure that there are decent accommodation arrangements that fall within a wide price range. The fact that most of the respondents were satisfied with the range of accommodation facilities that were available to them shows the effectiveness of the Saudi hospitality sector in this regard. This may be attributed to the fact that the country hosts other events, such as the Hajj and Umrah, which is religious pilgrimage to Mecca and nearby holy sites in Saudi Arabia that all Muslims who are physically and financially able must perform at least once in their lives. According to the General Authority for Statistics of Saudi Arabia (2017) the total number of the Hajj pilgrims is about (2,352,122) annually. Such events have contributed to its preparedness in terms of accommodation options.

The cleanliness of the destination, quality of the conference facilities, range and quality of restaurants, accessibility to the country, culture tolerance, quality of the shopping malls, transportation costs, entertainment and availability of information to tourists were also evaluated as aspects for gauging customer satisfaction. The results from these are as summarised in the combined Table 6.25:

Table 6.25: Level of Satisfaction with other Elements of the Accommodation

| Statement | Level of satisfaction | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| | Very dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | Very satisfied |
| Destination cleanliness | 4 | 10 | 27 | 50 | 26 |
| The quality of conference facilities | 9 | 10 | 25 | 42 | 36 |
| Restaurant quality and range | 4 | 10 | 27 | 50 | 26 |
| The accessibility of the country | 9 | 9 | 35 | 38 | 26 |
| Culture tolerance | 6 | 10 | 41 | 39 | 21 |
| Shopping malls quality | 6 | 17 | 26 | 16 | 16 |
| Transportation cost | 8 | 14 | 35 | 31 | 10 |
| Tourist information and availability | 20 | 22 | 29 | 21 | 12 |
| Entertainment | 20 | 29 | 24 | 9 | 7 |

Source: Author's survey

A high contrast with regard to the level of satisfaction can be seen between the last two items in Table 6.25 (tourism information and availability, and entertainment) and the other motivators for tourism listed in the same table. These results are consistent with the literature, as Colliers (2012) also observed that despite the fast growth of the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia, the country still offers little information of help to tourists (e.g. leaflets, tourist guides etc.), and there are not enough leisure facilities to capitalise on its domestic tourism industry. In addition, Colliers (2012) also noticed there are few opportunities for leisure and entertainment, and the development of the provision of facilities remains very slow. This appears to remain the case, as the current data shows, While this may appear to be a weakness in this sector, the reason is that there is no independent governmental organisation interested in its development. To address that, on the 7th of May 2016, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia announced a royal decree which, in line with one of the pillars of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 being the creation of a vibrant society, the General Entertainment Authority has been established to organise, develop, and lead the entertainment sector to provide exciting entertainment options, and tailored experiences to meet the needs of people from all walks of life around Saudi Arabia (Saudi Vision 2030).

Likelihood of Recommendation

The study also focused on establishing how likely the participants would recommend other persons to also attend the conferences such as the one they attended in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The results are as follows in Table 6.26:

Table 6.26: How likely to Recommend the Conference to Others

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Very unlikely | 6 | 5.0% |
| Unlikely | 7 | 5.8% |
| Don't known/Undecided | 16 | 13.3% |
| Likely | 71 | 59.2% |
| Very Likely | 20 | 16.7% |
| Total | 120 | 100% |

Source: Author's survey

The results in Table 6.26 in terms of how likely the participants were to recommend others to also attend conferences in Saudi Arabia show that a total of 75.9% (59.2% being likely and 16.7% being very likely) of the participants stated that they are likely to do so. A major role is played by recommendations through word of mouth. This is because clients are more likely to believe the reviews of another client who has used the services than promotional advertisements sponsored by an organisation. Therefore, organisations stand to greatly benefit from referrals that are made by other clients who have used their services (Fileri, Algezau, & McLeay, 2015). Therefore, the fact that most of the respondents are likely to refer their peers to the hotels they used during the conference is a sign of the degree of satisfaction that they had in these hotels. An important point to consider is that of Altareri (2016), who stressed that people with different cultural backgrounds tend to utilise different criteria in choosing destinations for tourism purposes. As earlier mentioned however, efforts have to be made in order to understand the point of dissatisfaction for the 10% of respondents who claimed that they could not recommend the hotels they used to others. As such, strategies should be put in place to ensure that they are addressed in order to increase the overall level of satisfaction of the tourists. This is because destinations that give people a good tourism experience are likely to attract more conference tourists than those which do not.

6.3 Relationships Between Satisfaction Factors

In addition to the descriptive analysis presented in the earlier sections based on the measures of central tendencies and dispersion, several correlation tests were applied in order to answer the research question, determining whether the quality of the services offered influences business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. Due to the nature of the variables tested,

Spearman's rank order correlation was used. While statistical significance was not obtained on all tests, as described in the sections below, the information gathered from running Spearman's rank order on the variables obtained via the questionnaires indicates a number of possible relationships between elements of conference tourism and tourists' decisions. This is shown in detail in the Appendix (Appendix 1).

6.3.1 Correlations between visiting without a conference and satisfaction

As shown in the descriptive statistics section, participants were required to express their level of satisfaction with a number of elements they came in contact with during their stay. In addition, they were also asked to indicate if they would have visited the country in the absence of the conference. 46% of the participants indicated a negative answer. The purpose of this correlation is to determine how the participants' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with various factors during their stay may have determined this percentage. The results are presented in Table 6.27:

Table 6.27: Correlations between Visiting without a Conference and Satisfaction

| Correlations | | Visiting without a conference |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| The accessibility of the country | Correlation Coefficient | .283** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .003 |
| | N | 108 |
| Destination safety and security | Correlation Coefficient | .111 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .249 |
| | N | 109 |
| Cultural tolerance | Correlation Coefficient | .106 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .271 |
| | N | 110 |
| Shopping malls quality | Correlation Coefficient | .143 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .222 |
| | N | 75 |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

As Table 6.27 shows, there is a positive correlation between the accessibility of the country and the possibility of visiting the country without attending a conference. In other words, people who were dissatisfied with the level of accessibility of Saudi Arabia, were more likely to respond no to visiting the country without a conference. The literature also suggests Saudi Arabia has had and continues to have challenges in the area of accessibility (Al Essa, 2014), especially as far as the accessibility of visas is concerned. There are certain formalities foreigners who travel to Saudi Arabia need to accomplish, especially when it comes to business travel, and some can become quite difficult, increasing the cultural gap. As Altareri (2016) also observes, the cultural gap can mean people focus on different criteria when choosing a tourist destination. And, from a cultural point of view, Saudi Arabia imposes some restrictions which can make the country seem inaccessible. With a significance factor (p value) of 0.003, (which is lower than 0.05, the maximum p-value for results to be considered statistically significant), it can be said that the correlation between the unwillingness to visit the country in the absence of the conference and the satisfaction with the level of accessibility of tourism in Saudi Arabia, is statistically significant. Similarly, El-Garaihy (2013) provided a model of hospitality service quality that allows for sufficient credibility and responsiveness in Saudi tourism industry. The aspect of repeat purchasing behaviours has been explored in the Saudi tourism industry as a way to create a basis for developing a competitive tourism sector in The Kingdom (Ageli, 2013).

Other important factors that influence the decision to refrain from visiting Saudi Arabia, as per the responses of the participants, are safety and security, cultural tolerance and shopping malls' quality. While the p value surpasses the 0.05 level at which it can be said the correlations are statistically significant, the literature (Ageli, 2013; Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010) shows that the feeling of significant cultural differences and the issues of security and safety can have a certain influence on tourists' decision to visit a certain country for leisure.

6.3.2 Correlation between extending the stay and motivational factors

A Spearman correlation test was also conducted between the motivators to choose visiting Saudi Arabia for a conference and the probability to extend the stay after the conference. It was found that there are statistically significant positive correlations (p value below the 0.05 level) between the opportunity to visit Saudi Arabia, the touristic offers, the safety of the destination, the accessibility of the country, the availability of tourist information, the quality of shopping malls and the availability of the entertainment. The correlation coefficients and p values are presented in Table 6.28:

Table 6.28: Correlations between the Decision to Extend the Stay and the Motivation for Participating in the Conference

| Correlations | | | Would you extend stay |
|----------------|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Spearman's rho | The opportunity to visit the country | Correlation Coefficient | .214* |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .028 |
| | | N | 106 |
| | Packages & Offers | Correlation Coefficient | .213* |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .030 |
| | | N | 103 |
| | Security and safety of the destination | Correlation Coefficient | .219* |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .022 |
| | | N | 109 |
| | The accessibility of the country | Correlation Coefficient | .192 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .042 |
| | | N | 113 |
| | The range of accommodation available | Correlation Coefficient | .185 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .055 |
| | | N | 108 |
| | Tourist information and availability | Correlation Coefficient | .203 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .042 |
| | | N | 101 |
| | Shopping malls quality | Correlation Coefficient | .238 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .033 |
| | | N | 80 |
| Entertainment | Correlation Coefficient | .266 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .012 | |
| | N | 88 | |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Source: Author's survey

These results in Table 6.28 are consistent with the literature, as Altareri (2016) and Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott (2010) suggested these can be the main factors that attract tourist to visiting foreign places. The opportunity to visit a new place and the availability of the offers, as well as the accessibility of the country are strongly correlated to the people's willingness to spend leisure time in that country (suggested by a willingness to stay after the conference). As a consequence, lacking these motivators would inevitably lead to a tendency to limit the trip to the business interest only. A high level of correlation was also found between the willingness to stay and the quality of shopping malls and entertainment. Being a culturally strict country, these are not as widespread in Saudi Arabia as they are in other Western and European countries. As the descriptive statistics previously showed, the majority of the participants were business tourists from Europe, where there are fewer restrictions to entertainment and shopping malls are extremely popular. In this context, Ageli (2013) mentioned that the prospects of commencing business conference activities in The Kingdom might be limited to a certain extent. Finally, other important correlation levels were found with the range of accommodation and the security and safety of the destination. While the literature shows that effort has been made to stimulate high-quality services in the hospitality sector, especially as far as accommodation is concerned (Ali, 2010; El-Garaihy, 2013), Saudi Arabia is still faced with challenges in this aspect.

6.3.3 Correlations between satisfaction with destination and motivational factors

Looking at the first two correlations, a common theme between the statistical tests seems to emerge. While the business tourism in Saudi Arabia is quite developed and people from all over the globe choose to participate to different conferences in this country, not many of them are willing to extend their stay. The most significant factors in this are the perceived lack of accessibility of the country, the perceived cultural intolerance, the lack of safety and the lack of entertainment. In addition, the descriptive statistics also showed a tendency towards being dissatisfied with the destination (12% very dissatisfied, 22% dissatisfied, as opposed to 24% satisfied and 8% very satisfied). Thus, it is important to see how satisfaction (or its lack) is correlated to motivational factors. The Table 6.29 shows the most significant correlations:

Table 6.29: Correlations between Satisfaction with Destination and Motivational Factors

| Correlations | | | Satisfaction with destination |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Spearman's rho | The content of the conference programme | Correlation Coefficient | .289** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .002 |
| | | N | 110 |
| | Conference location | Correlation Coefficient | .365** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |
| | | N | 107 |
| | The opportunity to visit the country | Correlation Coefficient | .326** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 |
| | | N | 102 |
| | Packages & Offers | Correlation Coefficient | .340** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 |
| | | N | 101 |
| | The accessibility of the destination (city) | Correlation Coefficient | .243* |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .012 |
| | | N | 106 |
| | Security and safety of the destination | Correlation Coefficient | .314** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 |
| | | N | 106 |
| | The accessibility of the country | Correlation Coefficient | .298 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .002** |
| | | N | 108 |
| The quality of accommodation | Correlation Coefficient | .290 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .003** | |
| | N | 103 | |
| Cultural tolerance | Correlation Coefficient | .377 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000** | |
| | N | 110 | |
| Tourist information and availability | Correlation Coefficient | .235 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .019 | |
| | N | 99 | |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Source: Author's survey

The most important finding in Table 6.29 is the positive correlation between satisfaction with the destination and cultural tolerance. With a p value of 0.000 and a correlation coefficient of

0.377, it can be said that cultural tolerance is the factor that influences the respondents' satisfaction with Saudi Arabia in a statistically significant manner. As previously observed, cultural tolerance was deemed to be a factor that is positively correlated with the decision to visit in the absence of a conference. In addition, all other factors that were found to be positively correlated either with the decision to make a leisure visit to Saudi Arabia or extend one's stay after a conference stemmed from a cultural background. For example, the perceived accessibility of the country, the lack of entertainment and the quality of the shopping malls are rooted in the country's culture. Religion and law are intertwined in a manner that may appear restrictive to foreign visitors with significantly different backgrounds. This can also explain the statistically significant (p value of 0.000) positive correlation between satisfaction and the conference location. Other statistically significant positive correlations were found between destination satisfaction and security (p-value of 0.001), accessibility (p-value of 0.002), and quality of accommodation (p-value of 0.003). This result seems to lead to the same conclusion regarding Saudi Arabia's foreign tourism, as the previous correlations.

6.3.4 Correlations between visiting the country outside the conference and motivational factors

Considering the pattern observed in the previous correlations, the final one looked solely at the manner in which the option to visit Saudi Arabia is influenced by accessibility, safety and cultural tolerance irrespective of the conference. The results are detailed in Table 6.30:

Table 6.30: Correlations between Visiting the Country outside the Conference and Motivational Factors

| Correlations | | | Would have visited without the conference |
|----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Spearman's rho | The accessibility of the country | Correlation Coefficient | .291** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .002 |
| | | N | 113 |
| | Destination safety and security | Correlation Coefficient | .168 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .074 |
| | | N | 114 |
| | Cultural tolerance | Correlation Coefficient | .208* |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .025 |
| | | N | 115 |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Source: Author's survey

Correlations in Table 6.30 are positive, with high statistical significance. The highest correlation coefficient was noticed in relation to the accessibility of the country. As descriptive statistics suggests, accessibility was interpreted not only from a legal perspective (i.e. needing a visa for entering Saudi Arabia) but also from a cultural point of view. At the same time, cultural tolerance remains statistically significant (p value of 0.025) with a correlation coefficient of 0.208. Finally, while safety and security is also a recurring pattern observed among the correlations conducted, its statistical significance is slightly above the standard p-value. Its fluctuation is also explained by the descriptive statistics presented in the previous section, where a large number of participants reported they were satisfied and very satisfied with their own safety and security while in Saudi Arabia.

6.3.5 Correlations between tourism services offered and tendency to visit without the conference

Previous sections have revealed there is a significant correlation between perceived security, cultural tolerance and the country's perceived accessibility and the conference tourism trends, as per the collected primary data. (Table 6.30 shows p values lower than the 0.05 significance threshold selected for the Spearman correlations conducted). In order to understand what impact various service quality variables have on conference tourism in Saudi Arabia, a cross-tabulation analysis was conducted for the variables representing the intention to visit without a conference and various quality of service variables. The results are shown in two separate Tables, 6.31 and 6.32:

Table 6.31: Cross-tabulation between Intention to Visit without a Conference and Quality of Service Variables

| | | Would have visited without the conference | | | | Very high influence | Total |
|--|-----|---|---------------|---------|----------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | Very low influence | Low influence | Neutral | High influence | | |
| The content of the conference programme | Yes | 1 | 4 | 12 | 18 | 20 | 55 |
| | No | 1 | 7 | 10 | 18 | 21 | 57 |
| Conference location | Yes | 4 | 6 | 13 | 19 | 10 | 52 |
| | No | 12 | 8 | 17 | 9 | 10 | 56 |
| Conference fee | Yes | 9 | 12 | 17 | 3 | 6 | 47 |
| | No | 10 | 8 | 21 | 8 | 4 | 51 |
| Opportunity to visit the country | Yes | 8 | 7 | 13 | 10 | 12 | 50 |
| | No | 16 | 8 | 14 | 9 | 7 | 54 |
| Packages & Offers | Yes | 19 | 12 | 9 | 5 | 5 | 50 |
| | No | 24 | 6 | 14 | 6 | 1 | 51 |
| Directed by an employer | Yes | 13 | 4 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 46 |
| | No | 15 | 3 | 11 | 8 | 12 | 49 |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Source: Author's survey

Table 6.31 represents a cross-tabulation analysis between the responses given to the question of whether or not people would visit without a conference, and the main quality of service variables. This demonstrates that their level of satisfaction with the quality of services has a direct influence on their decision to visit the country regardless of attending a conference, as discussed in the following paragraph.

For example, 19 people who argued that the conference location has had a high influence on their decision to attend, also indicated that they would have visited Saudi Arabia, even in the absence of a conference, as tourists. It can be observed that a slightly higher number of people for which the content of the conference programme was a factor that highly influenced their decision to come to Saudi Arabia indicated that they would have not visited the country in the absence of the conference. In addition, the data shows that for 12 of the respondents indicating they would not have visited the country in the absence of the conference, the location of the conference was of very low importance, which means the content of the conference was more important to these individuals than its location. Moreover, those indicating they would not have visited without a conference indicated the low influence of the

opportunity to visit, whereas those who would have visited indicate a high influence for this variable. Their desire to visit would lead them to travel visit regardless of the conference.

As far as the respondents' satisfaction with the services is concerned, the analysis is presented in Table 6.32:

Table 6.32: Cross-tabulation between Intention to Visit without a Conference and Satisfaction with Services

| | | Would have visited without the conference | | | | Very Satisfied | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-----|---|--------------|---------|-----------|----------------|-------|
| | | very dissatisfied | dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | | |
| The range of accommodation available | Yes | 0 | 1 | 14 | 26 | 13 | 54 |
| | No | 3 | 1 | 15 | 20 | 13 | 52 |
| The quality of conference facilities | Yes | 5 | 4 | 6 | 23 | 18 | 56 |
| | No | 4 | 6 | 18 | 15 | 17 | 60 |
| The quality of accommodation | Yes | 1 | 0 | 13 | 19 | 21 | 54 |
| | No | 2 | 5 | 11 | 18 | 16 | 52 |
| Restaurant quality | Yes | 1 | 2 | 16 | 21 | 14 | 54 |
| | No | 2 | 6 | 20 | 16 | 13 | 57 |
| Destination cleanliness | Yes | 2 | 4 | 11 | 23 | 14 | 54 |
| | No | 2 | 6 | 16 | 22 | 11 | 57 |
| Tourist information and availability | Yes | 6 | 12 | 16 | 10 | 8 | 52 |
| | No | 13 | 9 | 11 | 10 | 4 | 47 |
| Shopping malls quality | Yes | 1 | 8 | 14 | 9 | 11 | 43 |
| | No | 5 | 9 | 12 | 6 | 5 | 37 |
| Transportation costs | Yes | 3 | 10 | 17 | 12 | 6 | 48 |
| | No | 5 | 4 | 17 | 16 | 4 | 46 |
| Entertainment | Yes | 7 | 16 | 12 | 5 | 4 | 45 |
| | No | 13 | 13 | 12 | 2 | 2 | 42 |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

As Table 6.32 shows, a high number of participants who indicated they were very dissatisfied with the range of accommodation available, tourist information and availability and entertainment offers also indicated they would not have visited Saudi Arabia in the absence of the conference. It is interesting to observe that despite being relatively satisfied with the transportation costs, 16 people indicated they would not have visited in the absence of a conference, as compared to 12 claiming they would have visited. In order to better understand these results, a correlation analysis was conducted between visiting without a conference and service quality variables. The correlations are detailed in Table 6.33:

Table 6.33: Correlations

| | | | Visiting without a conference |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Packages & Offers | Correlation Coefficient | -.072 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .481 |
| | | N | 97 |
| | The range of accommodation available | Correlation Coefficient | -.026 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .795 |
| | | N | 104 |
| | The quality of conference facilities | Correlation Coefficient | -.028 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .770 |
| | | N | 113 |
| | The quality of accommodation | Correlation Coefficient | -.073 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .465 |
| | | N | 104 |
| | Restaurant quality and range | Correlation Coefficient | .026 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .790 |
| | | N | 109 |
| | Destination cleanliness | Correlation Coefficient | .023 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .812 |
| | | N | 108 |
| | Tourist information and availability | Correlation Coefficient | -.040 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .699 |
| | | N | 96 |
| | Shopping malls quality | Correlation Coefficient | -.143 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .222 |
| | | N | 75 |
| | Transportation costs | Correlation Coefficient | -.018 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .863 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|----------------------------|-------|
| | | N | 91 |
| | Entertainment | Correlation Coefficient | -.065 |
| Spearman's rho | Entertainment | Sig. (2-tailed) | .558 |
| | | N | 84 |
| | The content of the conference programme | Correlation Coefficient | -.008 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .930 |
| | | N | 110 |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Source: Author's survey

As previously seen in Table 6.33, while the analysis shows that neither of the correlations obtained are statistically significant, the results can contribute to a number of conclusions. All correlation coefficients, except for destination cleanliness and restaurant quality and range, are negatively correlated to the variable visiting without a conference. The quality of conference facilities, the quality of accommodation, the content of the conference programme, packages & offers, and tourist information and availability are negatively correlated with the variable visiting without a conference. The numerical value attributed to the answer "No" for this question in the questionnaire is higher than the numerical value attributed to the answer "Yes" ($2 > 1$). As a consequence, the negative correlation indicates that the less satisfied the participants are with the quality of service, the less likely they are to visit the country in the absence of a conference. The fact that destination cleanliness and restaurant quality and range are positively correlated with visiting without a conference may indicate they are not considered to be important factors to influence the decision to visit Saudi Arabia, either for a conference or otherwise. The same can be observed from the cross tabulation analysis, as the values for "Yes" and "No" are similar for each of the satisfaction scales. The correlation between visiting without a conference and packages and offers, the content of the conference programme, entertainment or transportation, has resulted in low values, due to the lack of a significant relationship between the variables. The absence of significance is reflected in the high levels of the significance coefficient, which are over 0.05.

6.3.6 Correlations between tourism services offered and tendency to stay after the conference

To measure the influence of service quality variables on the participants' tendency to stay after the conference has ended, a cross-tabulation analysis was conducted. The results are presented in the following paragraphs in Tables 6.34, 6.35 and 6.36:

Table 6.34: Cross-tabulation between Intention to Extend Stay and Quality of Service

Variables

| | | Would extend stay | | | | Very high influence | Total |
|---|-----|--------------------|---------------|---------|----------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | Very low influence | Low influence | Neutral | High influence | | |
| The content of the conference programme | Yes | 1 | 4 | 7 | 14 | 14 | 40 |
| | No | 1 | 7 | 15 | 22 | 27 | 72 |
| Conference location | Yes | 5 | 3 | 12 | 9 | 11 | 40 |
| | No | 11 | 11 | 18 | 19 | 9 | 68 |
| Conference fee | Yes | 7 | 9 | 13 | 4 | 3 | 36 |
| | No | 12 | 11 | 25 | 7 | 7 | 62 |
| Opportunity to visit the country | Yes | 4 | 4 | 14 | 9 | 8 | 39 |
| | No | 20 | 11 | 13 | 10 | 11 | 65 |
| Packages & Offers | Yes | 12 | 7 | 10 | 6 | 4 | 39 |
| | No | 31 | 11 | 13 | 5 | 2 | 62 |

Source: Author's survey

The data in Table 6.34 shows that the same people who argued they would not extend their stay to Saudi Arabia after the conference also indicated that the conference programme had a high influence on their decision to participate to the conference. In turn, those who indicated they would extend their stay also showed that the conference location had a higher influence on their decision to participate. In addition, people who indicated location, the opportunity to visit the country or the packages and offers were a lower motivational factor for them to attend the conference also indicated an unwillingness to extend their stay. This suggests the attraction was the conference topic and not the conference tourism services offered.

Table 6.35: Cross-tabulation between Intention to Extend Stay and Satisfaction with Services Offered

| | | Would extend stay | | | | Very satisfied | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-------------------|--------------|---------|-----------|----------------|-------|
| | | Very dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | | |
| The range of accommodation available | Yes | 0 | 0 | 10 | 19 | 12 | 41 |
| | No | 3 | 2 | 19 | 27 | 14 | 65 |
| The quality of conference facilities | Yes | 2 | 4 | 5 | 16 | 14 | 41 |
| | No | 7 | 6 | 19 | 22 | 21 | 75 |
| The quality of accommodation | Yes | 1 | 0 | 10 | 16 | 14 | 41 |
| | No | 2 | 5 | 14 | 21 | 23 | 65 |
| Restaurant quality | Yes | 1 | 2 | 10 | 17 | 9 | 39 |
| | No | 2 | 6 | 26 | 20 | 18 | 72 |
| Destination cleanliness | Yes | 1 | 4 | 7 | 21 | 6 | 39 |
| | No | 3 | 6 | 20 | 24 | 19 | 72 |
| Tourist information and availability | Yes | 2 | 8 | 12 | 8 | 5 | 35 |
| | No | 17 | 13 | 15 | 12 | 7 | 64 |
| Shopping malls quality | Yes | 1 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 31 |
| | No | 5 | 12 | 18 | 6 | 8 | 49 |
| Transportation costs | Yes | 2 | 9 | 6 | 16 | 4 | 37 |
| | No | 6 | 5 | 28 | 12 | 6 | 57 |
| Entertainment | Yes | 4 | 8 | 11 | 5 | 3 | 31 |
| | No | 16 | 21 | 13 | 2 | 3 | 55 |

Source: Author's survey

Table 6.35 shows that despite their high satisfaction with the range of accommodation available, the quality of the conference facilities and the quality of accommodation, many of the respondents were unwilling to extend their stay. In addition, a dissatisfaction with tourist information availability and entertainment quality were also associated with an unwillingness to extend their stay, indicating that people, while appreciative of the accommodation services and conference facilities, had difficulties in finding entertainment in Saudi Arabia, which influenced their decision to extend their stay. There may be a cultural component to this occurrence, as some activities which in other cultures are seen as entertainment (such as alcohol consumption) are prohibited in Saudi Arabia.

Table 6.36: Correlations

| | | | Additional nights |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Additional nights | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| | | N | 108 |
| | Packages & Offers | Correlation Coefficient | .295** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .004 |
| | | N | 91 |
| | The range of accommodation available | Correlation Coefficient | .054 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .598 |
| | | N | 99 |
| | The quality of conference facilities | Correlation Coefficient | .175 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .071 |
| | | N | 107 |
| | The quality of accommodation | Correlation Coefficient | .023 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .824 |
| | | N | 100 |
| | Restaurant quality and range | Correlation Coefficient | .010 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .922 |
| | | N | 103 |
| | Destination cleanliness | Correlation Coefficient | .073 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .462 |
| | | N | 103 |
| Tourist information and availability | Correlation Coefficient | .169 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .108 | |
| | N | 91 | |
| Shopping malls quality | Correlation Coefficient | .042 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .727 | |
| | N | 71 | |
| Transportation costs | Correlation Coefficient | .008 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .938 | |
| | N | 88 | |
| Entertainment | Correlation Coefficient | .260* | |
| Spearman's rho | Entertainment | Sig. (2-tailed) | .020 |
| | | N | 80 |
| | The content of the conference programme | Correlation Coefficient | -.145 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .145** |
| | | N | 103 |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The correlations in Table 6.36 shows positive correlations between the number of additional nights stayed and all the variables that describe the quality of the services offered. The only statistically significant correlation remains between packages and offers and number of nights of extended stay. This positive correlation indicates that the more satisfied the respondents were with the packages and offers, the more willing they were to spend at least one extra night in Saudi Arabia after the conference ended. A negative correlation was found only between number of additional nights and the content of the conference programme, confirming the fact that people who were only interested in the conference were unwilling to extend their stay despite the level of satisfaction with the services offered.

6.4 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to analyse the quantitative data collected via the surveys and discuss it in relation to the literature and other research observations, with the purpose of determining the effects of the quality of services on business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. Significant correlations were found between the participants' desire to remain in Saudi Arabia after their conference or even travel to other parts of the country, and their satisfaction with the destination and multiple factors, such as the quality of the accommodation, the tourism offers, the entertainment and quality of the shopping malls or the tourist information. These correlations, together with the observations made through the descriptive statistics in the first sections of the chapter indicate that the quality of services has an impact on business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia.

The responders indicated that the entertainment was unsatisfactory, and the quality of the shopping malls was poor. For this reason, a large number of participants did not remain in the country after the conference. On the other hand, the responders indicated satisfaction with the conference location and its content. In fact, the data revealed that, in respect of the quality of services at the conferences the respondents attended in Saudi Arabia, that majority of participants indicated that they were satisfied with the different elements of services received, including the accommodation arrangements that were available, the cost, and the security, and safety of the venues in which they were residing. This level of satisfaction with the quality of services was also observed within the literature, and it has a positive impact on businesses, motivating them to participate at an increasing number of conferences in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the positive experiences that external delegates have with the hospitality services provided to them throughout their entire stay in Saudi Arabia have a positive effect on business and conference tourism in the country. The data also suggested that the majority of the participants were particularly interested in the content of the conference they took part

in and less in the leisure and touristic aspect of their visit. However the based on the views of those who rated hospitality services as highly satisfactory.

This discovery also reveals a limitation of the current study. As the questionnaire design focused on determining a series of correlations and relationships between certain variables, as indicated by the literature, while also taking into account the fact that new information may be found, further exploring the participants' willingness to take part in other conferences in Saudi Arabia was not explored. Future studies should also look at the relationship between satisfaction with hospitality services in the conference tourism sector in Saudi Arabia and the participants' willingness to take part in other conferences which can also be organised in this country. Qualitative interviews may be used for the in-depth exploration of the reasons why participants are willing or unwilling to return to the country for a conference.

Also, three main factors of influence appeared throughout all correlations: cultural tolerance, safety and security, and country accessibility. The selected data suggests that there is a strong positive correlation between cultural tolerance and satisfaction with the destination or the visitation of the country without the conference. This means that Western tourists who visit Saudi Arabia are having trouble accommodating significant cultural differences, which is why they might avoid extending their stay after the conference or coming to the country in the absence of a conference. Nevertheless, once they arrive, the data indicates they are satisfied with the hospitality services they receive. These results imply that while the services offered in the business and conference tourism industry in Saudi Arabia are appreciated by tourists, the country remains an enigma to foreigners. Since correlations showed that cultural tolerance, safety and security and country accessibility have a significant impact on delegates' tourist behaviour and decisions (e.g. deciding to leave or stay after the conference is over, coming to the country without a conference), tourism companies should focus on these factors in their promotion. Thus, another limitation of the study can be emphasised, as there is no indication about how the participants felt about coming to a conference to Saudi Arabia before their arrival. In order to gain a deeper understanding about the influence of the aforementioned factors on people's perception of the services they may receive during a conference in this country, further studies should explore the factors that influence the decision to come to a conference in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 7: Qualitative analysis of domestic conference delegates' responses

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will analyse and discuss the results of the internal conference delegates' interviews in relation to previous studies. The research objective was to explore the social and political feasibility of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) as a business and conference tourism destination. This was addressed using a qualitative research design. The qualitative data was collected using face-to-face interviews with different sets of respondents sampled from internal conference delegates attending three conferences in Saudi Arabia; they are the ideal respondents for addressing this objective. The discussion here relies on these responses to evaluate how the politics and social characteristics of Saudi Arabia may influence the future conditions of conference tourism in the country. The respondents were selected from different sectors.

A summary of the respondents' attributes are presented in Table 4.4. In the methodology chapter .The selection of internal delegates was because they were considered to be familiar with the different aspects of domestic business and conference tourism. Seven key themes emerged from the data that was collected. Theme 1 was that there is more professionalism in the registration process, which is very convenient for business and conference events. Theme 2 was that the number of conferences held within The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is relatively low. Compared to those held in other countries such as the UAE as well as other developed countries. Theme 3 was that adhering to specific industry themes and the use of expert/widely experienced speakers can increase business and conference tourism attendance. The fourth theme was that there is optimism on the social and political feasibility of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia developing as business and conference tourism destination. Theme 5 was that the Saudi cultural element is significant in the development of Saudi Arabia as a business conference tourism destination. Theme 6 was that a number of socio-political challenges surround the development of Saudi Arabia as a business conference tourism destination. Finally, theme 7 is that a number of opportunities support the development of Saudi Arabia as a business and conference tourism destination. All the themes are expounded on in detail in the following sections.

7.2 Results from the Internal Conference Delegates

The ten internal conference delegates were considered to be representative of the internal conference delegate population and they were ideal in offering adequate data for use in the study. The internal conference delegates represented were attending three different types of conferences in Saudi Arabia as explained in the methods chapter, and Table 4.4. These were

the Arab International Aluminium Conference and Exhibition (ARABAL) held in Dammam, and the third International Conference on Endocrinology and Diabetes, as well as the second International Conference for Assessment and Evaluation, held in Riyadh. These attendees' nationality was Saudi. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, a qualitative research approach was identified as the most appropriate for collecting data from the Saudi Arabia community because it facilitates the collection of in-depth information regarding the conference tourism sector.

Qualitative data collected through interviewing the internal conference delegates was necessary so as to compare their views and opinions with the views of the external conference delegates, as explained in the methodology chapter. Unique codes have been assigned to these internal conference delegates. For example, delegate 1 has been assigned D1; delegate 2 has been assigned D2 and this method was used for all the respondents. The objective of this was to ensure that the personal or workplace information of the respondents is not revealed. This prevents the possibility of tracing back the information published in the research to the original source. The respondents had diverse ages, education levels, industry backgrounds and roles at the organization. The ages of the respondents ranged from 23 to 56, while the industry backgrounds included recycling, manufacturing, mining, health and education. As shown in Table 7.1:

Table 7.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Ten Internal Conference Delegates

| ID of the respondent | Age in years | Highest Education level | Location from | Industry | Current role at the organization |
|----------------------|--------------|---|----------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| D1 | 44 | Bachelor degree in Financial Management | Dhahran, KSA | Recycling | Owns aluminium company |
| D2 | 53 | Bachelor degree in Business | Al Qassim, KSA | Manufacturing | Owns aluminum manufacturing company |
| D3 | 42 | Master in Management | Riyadh, KSA | Mining | Owns a mineral import-export company |
| D4 | 32 | BA in History | Riyadh, KSA | Education | Teacher |
| D5 | 56 | PhD in Social Sciences | Riyadh, KSA | Education | University lecturer |
| D6 | 30 | Master of Education | Riyadh, KSA | Education | Employee at the Ministry of Education |
| D7 | 42 | Degree in Medicine | Riyadh, KSA | Health | Paeditrician |
| D8 | 27 | Degree in General Medicine | Dammam, KSA | Health | Doctor |
| D9 | 23 | Medical student | Riyadh, KSA | Education | Medical student |
| D10 | 33 | BA in Business Administration | Riyadh, KSA | Education | Teacher |

Source: author

The respondents in Table 7.1 were sampled from local professional bodies in Saudi Arabia. The reason was that there was a need to collect the opinions of Saudis familiar with the local dynamics of business and conference tourism in their country. The industries that are represented here are education, recycling, health and manufacturing. This wide spread made it possible to obtain an opinion that was not biased to one or two sectors alone.

7.2.1 Important themes emerging with more critical discussion

This thematic analysis is important since it shows the emerging patterns in the data. Identifying the emerging themes from the collected data is important since it gives more flexibility to the investigator; the investigator can apply multiple theories to the process. Moreover, developing the themes is significant since the collected interview data was large and could not be easily tabulated because of its qualitative nature; thematic analysis was the best approach for analysing it. Identification of the different themes in the research made it possible establish how effectively the data addresses the research objectives. The themes that were identified in this research are discussed in more detail below.

Theme 1 is about professionalism in the registration process. This is important since it has been shown that the level of conference attendance is significantly affected by issues such as the ease of registration for the event. Many potential attendees are put off if the registration process is not smooth. Theme 2 is that Saudi Arabia has a relatively low level of conference attendance. This observation is significant since Saudi Arabia has world-class infrastructure and conference facilities. Moreover, it is an important region in the Arab world, and the reasons as to why it has a relatively lower number of conference attendances as compared to the nearby UAE should be a question worth looking at in more detail. Theme 3 is that using more professional speakers attracts more conference attendances in the country. The theme highlights the issues of whether these professional speakers are locally available in Saudi Arabia, and if not, what are the challenges for their presence in these events, such as visa issues? In the same way, the other themes are also important in the study and help in fulfilling the research objective because they highlight the different difficulties in the industry, as well as the opportunities that should be taken advantage of by the stakeholders in business and conference tourism in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Theme 1: More professionalism in the registration process is very convenient for business and conference events

The respondents were asked about their opinions on the difficulties encountered in the whole conference process. Several challenges were mentioned, including inability to network informally as a result of the location:

“...the attendees were unable to network informally and the location did not provide the perfect environment to make business networks with the others” (D1)

and the challenges in queuing in hot weather while registering for conference (D3). However, several respondents agreed that online registration for the conference proved to be very convenient for them, for example D1 and D3.

“...the registration and payment was easy via online but registration on site takes a very long time” (D3)

Another respondent reiterated the need to incorporate modern technology to ease the logistical challenges experienced in the registration process. He stated: *‘There should be the introduction of modern technology during registration of participants’*

Key (2004) observed that online registration provides higher convenience, professionalism, security and reliability, as compared to the typical paper-based methods. It also makes budgeting and organization a lot easier because everything that is needed is outlined on the registration page, which eliminates the need to travel to and from the physical registration offices. Other advantages offered by this online registration approach include time-saving, automation and reliability (Key, 2004). Requiring online registration for business and conference events should especially work in favour of the KSA owing to the high internet penetration in the country as compared to other regions in the Gulf, such as Qatar and Dubai (Abdullah, 2011). However, data released by the World Bank (2017b) shows that in the year 2015, Saudi Arabia had an internet penetration of 69.6%, which is much lower than some of its GCC neighbours such as Bahrain (with 93.5% penetration), Kuwait (with 82.1% penetration) or United Arab Emirates (with 91.2% penetration) (World Bank, 2017b). Nevertheless, this degree of penetration is high enough to support online-based activities such as registration, not only for conference tourism, but also for other sectors. In addition, the conference tourism sector also targets professionals from different countries, including those that have higher internet penetration than that of Saudi Arabia (Abdullah, 2011). Apart from just easing the conference registration process, the internet is important for live-streaming the conference events to attendees who could not physically make it to the event location, and perhaps chose to watch it from the comfort of their hotel rooms. The internet is also important for making the conference proceedings available to a much larger global audience who could not make it to Saudi Arabia.

Perhaps, KSA needs to increase its internet penetration in the country in order to supersede its immediate neighbours as the foremost international business and conference tourism destination, with regards to internet connectivity. Previous studies have shown a direct relation between the internet connectivity of a destination and its attractiveness as a tourism destination; the study by Oulasvirta (2015) showed that internet penetration in a destination directly influences the capability of customers checking their tours in the destination and communicating with specific tourism-related agencies in the destination. In a similar manner, Abdullah (2011) observed that the internet, as an access point to external media sources, has led to the opening up of information channels in KSA and that possible future scenarios with

regards to conferences in the country include that internet connections would be used for more interactive business meetings and conferences. The current lower internet penetration within KSA has strong political links. There is strong political surveillance on the internet channels, designed to maintain social order and protect national security. The level of internet penetration in a country has been shown to be directly linked to the perceived attractiveness of a destination for tourism purposes. (Mohsin, Ramli & Alkhulayfi, 2016). An increasing level of competition in the global tourism market has encouraged tourism operators to invest more in quality, knowledge, resources and event promotion so as to have a satisfactory level of growth. As such, it is very important to be cognisant of recent technological trends, plus possess the knowledge needed for effectively responding to global competition challenges. Technology offered by the internet includes operations that are efficient and are of high quality in the tourism sector; these include opportunities for effective distribution channels as well as offering the selling services of the travel agencies on demand (Batinić, 2013).

Theme 2: The number of conferences held within The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is relatively low

Even though all the respondents have each previously attended more than one conference in the past, none of these conferences have been within Saudi Arabia. The conferences that the respondents have attended have all been outside KSA. For instance, when questioned if he has attended more than one conference in the past and where it was held at, D5 responded:

“Yes, Most of European countries, America and UK. In Saudi Arabia, I have only attended one conference before, as it was closely related to my field of education even though the conference was more about medical research. I hope that in future, there will be more conferences held locally in Saudi Arabia as it will be more convenient to me, as I will avoid the long inconvenience and expense of travels abroad”

The small number of conferences in Saudi Arabia can be attributed to several factors; one of these is the low capacity available to host these meetings, as stated by D1: *‘Dhahran city has one center, it is the Dhahran International Exhibition Centre. This is not enough. There is only one place to set up conferences, exhibitions and this is not enough. For example there is no possibility of establishing two conferences at the same time, or registering on the waiting list for a long period!!!’*

From this, it can be suggested that efforts need to be put in place to improve the number of conferences it hosts, which appears to be low at the moment. This is despite the existing plans to make Saudi Arabia a tourism destination. For instance, the Supreme Commission for Tourism has planned a tourist development fund with the aim of providing loans for projects related to business and conference tourism, among other types of tourism events (Supreme

Commission for Tourism, 2015). This can significantly improve the number of business and conference tourism events held in the country. This pursuit is aimed at attracting up to USD 50 billion in tourism-related investments (Supreme Commission for Tourism, 2015). Moreover, KSA has invested almost USD 5 billion in upgrading the number of terminals available at King Abdul Aziz Airport in Jeddah (Dsouza, 2015). As such, the number of business and conference tourism events held in Saudi Arabia need to be increased in order for Saudi Arabia to emerge as an international business and conference tourism destination. These business and conference tourism events in Saudi Arabia need to be considered from both the demand and supply perspectives. A demand perspective would entail determining who travels for these business and conference tourism events in KSA and why. This would also entail assessing who attends such kinds of events while on their travels within KSA. A supply perspective can show that these business and conference tourism events within KSA can lead to increased tourism numbers and act as a catalyst for infrastructure development. The current business and conference events in KSA could be observed as a resource that needs to be exploited, though this can emerge as problematic from social and political perspectives. KSA needs to make a decision on what it wants from these business and conference events and how it will gauge the value that these events bring to the country. One approach that can be used in this decision-making is the portfolio approach (Getz, 2008), which draws similarities between how an organization evaluates and grows its product and service line. From this portfolio approach, business and conference tourism events within Saudi Arabia can be mapped in terms of their demand and value. . As shown in Table 7.2:

Table 7.2: Portfolio Approach in Classifying Business and Conference Tourism Events according to their Demand and Value

| 1. High Demand Low Value | 2. High Demand High Value |
|---|---|
| Regional events | Occasional mega event on business and conference tourism; Periodic hallmark event on business and conference tourism |
| 3. Low Demand Low Value | 4. Low Demand High Value |
| One time event on business and conference tourism | Periodic events on business and conference tourism |

Adapted from: Getz (2008, p.407)

As such, in order for KSA to become an international business and conference tourism destination, there is need to focus more on activities in the 2nd quadrant above and focus less on activities in the 3rd quadrant above, according to Getz (2008).

Theme 3: Adherence to specific industry themes and the use of expert/widely-experienced speakers can increase business and conference tourism attendance

There are several factors that contribute towards the success of conference tourism, and one of these is the invitation of world-renowned speakers to address the conferences (Mair, 2013). This was also agreed upon by respondents who mentioned that there is a close relationship between the guests who speak at the events and their level of attractiveness. Most of the respondents claimed they were attracted to the events since the events concentrated on the specific themes pertaining to their relevant industry (D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6 and D7). For instance, when questioned on what attracted him to the conference, and why,

D1 responded:

“First, because I’m in the early stages in the metals market the conference themes serve my area. The speakers discussed issues that I could directly relate to, and this made me very attentive to the whole conference meeting and made me feel like I should attend another conference again owing to it being very informative.”

D2 responded:

“Conference Topics, Specialized Conference in aluminum industry, Speakers’ profiles: experts are very attractive.”

D3 responded:

“Hosted by Maaden company, one of the largest companies in the Middle East, for Minerals Speakers, all with extensive experience in the field.”

D4 responded:

“Conference Theme, because of my area. Often, when students graduate and enter the labor market, they can be away from the scientific research and the latest developments. When they attend specialized conferences related to their field they can learn about the latest

research and develop their performance in the work. As well as the researchers at the university they meet with specialists and identify the practical problems and what they need on the ground. Positive movement between the two parties begins.”

D5 responded:

“Theme of the conference and profile of the speakers are very strong in their experience and interesting research, the conference is held annually for the development of education in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia”

D6 responded:

“...theme of the conference because it is held annually for the development of education in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia”

D7 responded:

“This medical conference and the same specialist I am interested in research in the field of endocrinology. There is research presented at this conference by endocrinologists who are specially trained physicians who diagnose diseases related to the glands. In the sense that it is important to learn about the latest research and the participation of researchers in the latest research.”

There is a strong body of evidence from various past studies, such as Rittichainuwat *et al.* (2001) who showed that use of experts at conferences can significantly increase the attendance of international conference destinations; Rittichainuwat *et al.* (2001) had studied the facilitators, inhibitors and motivations that influenced attendance to international conference destinations. Moreover, concentrating on one particular theme in the conference can improve conference destination attendance, as Mair (2013) observed. In this manner, the conference destinations currently in KSA need to use experts and stick to specific themes, rather than general themes, in order to enhance the feasibility of KSA becoming a business and conference tourism destination. Business conferences can emerge to be powerful marketing tools that bring lots of value to KSA. These conference attendees get to the conference in order to learn more from thought-leaders present in their relevant industries and to network with other conference destination attendees. If KSA would wish to grow the attendance of its business and conference tourism destinations, it needs to invest in key note speakers for these conferences. These speakers need to be engaging and interesting, as they

need to motivate the conference attendees. This also implies that all the sessions need to have meticulously hand-picked speakers so as to offer the most value to the attendees.

Theme 4: There is optimism about the social and political feasibility of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia developing as an international business and conference tourism destination

A key theme that emerged from the responses is that of optimism about the social and political feasibility of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia developing as an international business and conference tourism destination. For instance, with regards to political feasibility, D4 answered:

“The government aims to diversify revenues through privatization in health care and education. Also, expanding the country’s manufacturing base and investing in alternative energy sources. I think it is very important for the conference market now to view opportunities and the participation of the world and bring in investments to the country”

And with regards to social feasibility, D2 answered:

“Saudi society is generous and kind and loves to make relationships with others, and through the conferences and scientific-relations generated process, economic and social, and scientific networks are composed and research groups, and the exchange of experience and information helps to do business deals”

None of the respondents displayed any pessimism with regards to the topic at hand. What is especially noticeable about the responses on the socio-political feasibility of Saudi Arabia is that the respondents felt that the image of Saudi Arabia had a strong impact on the decision to visit by business and conference visitors; indeed, one response by D4 was that:

“...the Saudi society has evolved over the years, their values and traditions from customs, hospitality to their style of dressing, are adapting with modernization.”

This image held of a destination by a visitor or a potential visitor plays a significant role in the decision to visit, as was earlier observed by Yoo & Chon (2008). Another significant observation from this emerging theme is that even though the perception of the respondents concerning Saudi Arabia as a tourism destination in future was overall optimistic, the perception of the country that they held was dominantly tied to the social attributes within Saudi Arabia, such as religion and culture. Even though D5 held the observation that some negative perceptions of Saudi Arabia to outsiders were not founded on actual experiences but on what they had heard, nevertheless the tourism image of Saudi Arabia is likely to be affected by images of its past and this might have a direct impact on its future success as a business and conference tourism destination:

“...society itself is in general deeply religious, conservative, traditional, and family oriented. Many attitudes and traditions are centuries-old, derived from Arab civilization.” (D5)

D5 expressed sentiments that a reason people might be hesitant about business and conference events in KSA could be due to an existing misperceptions concerning attending events in a country whereby Islam is the major religion, and which has a number of women’s rights issues. D3 placed focus on politics by making the argument that a number of individuals could be hesitant in attending conferences in KSA as a result of a misunderstanding of the political situation in KSA and confusing the political situation in the country as being the same as that of more turbulent neighbours. This misperception can thus be considered to be a weak aspect in the feasibility of KSA emerging as an international business and conference tourism destination.. However, other responses such as that by D2 based on the image of KSA placed more emphasis on personal experiences of the individual visitor rather than on the general perception existing outside on how the KSA image could impact on the success of the tourism industry within.

According to D3, *‘the government has ambitious and comprehensive plans to diversify its economic and fiscal base’*. This response brings to light the fact that there may be challenges now, but there is a bright future not only for the business and conference tourism sector, but also for the larger Saudi Arabia economy. The political goodwill of a country plays a major role in supporting different sectors (Bramwell, 2015; Mowforth & Munt, 2015). By diversifying the economic and fiscal base, the overreliance on oil resources will be reduced. This is good for the Saudi economy given that there is a current dip in oil prices which has contributed to the deterioration of the country’s credit profile (Farmaki *et al.*, 2015). The commitment of the Saudi government to develop other sectors of the economy provided an opportunity for the conference and business tourism sector to benefit from these changes.

Theme 5: The Saudi cultural element is significant in the development of Saudi Arabia as an international business and conference tourism destination

One of the elements that differentiates people from different countries is their culture. This is even more pronounced if the delegates comes from regions where many elements of their culture diverge. The culture of Saudi society therefore emerged as an important aspect in attracting conference attendees. D4 observed:

“...the culture of Saudi Arabia is defined by its Islamic heritage, its historical role as an ancient trade centre, and its Bedouin traditions... being a crossroads of cultures and a bridge for cultural communication”

Despite the increased modernization of Saudi Arabia which has resulted into its hospitality infrastructure being on a par with that of many western countries, the Saudi culture, with its deep Islamic roots, makes KSA an interesting destination. Jago & Deery (2005) observed that a number of characteristics improved the attractiveness of a destination, which included the culture existing in that location. The attractiveness of this culture is however hampered by the low degree of openness to other cultures that are different from the deeply Muslim culture of the Saudis (Abdullah, 2011). This means that tourists from countries that have an Islamic culture, and hold expectations that are similar to those in Saudi Arabia, are more likely to enjoy the tourism environment of Saudi Arabia than those from countries that are somewhat liberal (Alexander *et al.*, 2017). This is a challenge for the political leadership to formulate and implement policies that will make the wider Saudi population accommodate other cultures and, as such, make tourists from other regions comfortable as they interact with the locals during conferences. Richards (2018) had observed that early approaches to the connection between culture and tourism were hugely based on the approach of 'sites and monuments', in which the cultural attraction of a region was basically considered as the physical cultural sites that had significance for tourism. Nonetheless, in recent times, there has been a broader perspective of the connection between culture and tourism, to include architecture, cultural events, crafts and performing arts. Potential tourists can visit a destination to experience the everyday customs, cultures and lifestyles of the residents there. Tourism in KSA has increasingly shifted away from the previous emphasis on desert landscapes, and the tourists have become deeply involved in the sensory and symbolic consumption of ideas and images linked with KSA (Abdullah, 2011). Tourists want to visit destinations associated with the Islamic religion, such as Mecca, and this broadening concept of the tourists' cultural consumption makes it harder to define culture-inspired tourism. What KSA has to offer to these business and conference tourism attendees is not just dependent on the economic aspects in KSA, such as the standard of living, but also on the intangible aspects like the local culture. In looking at the attractiveness of a destination, a number of studies have relied on the work of Porter (1990) touching on competitiveness; with regards to tourism, the 'factor conditions' of Porter's diamond model can be considered to be important for the attractiveness of the destination. These factor conditions encompass the infrastructure, capital resources, knowledge resources, physical resources and human resource in KSA. A recent study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development observed that culture is among the main factors that tend to be considered when making a decision to visit a particular destination, and there is a tendency that the cultural aspect is most valued by the highly educated, especially those with arts-related education (OECD, 2009). Indeed, the aspect of culture was expressly mentioned by D4:

“The conferences are trying to arrange and prepare presentations showing those cultural activities, seen by the audience, and shown by the media to the public community culture society. The culture of Saudi Arabia is defined by its Islamic heritage, its historical role as an ancient trade centre, and its Bedouin traditions. The Saudi society has evolved over the years, their values and traditions from customs, hospitality to their style of dressing, are adapting with modernization”

And D5:

“There are impacts by the events; socio-cultural impacts on host communities. Saudi Arabia is an Islamic theocracy, Arab, and society itself is in general deeply religious, conservative, traditional, and family oriented. Many attitudes and traditions are centuries-old, derived from Arab civilization. However, its culture has also been affected by rapid change as the country was transformed from an impoverished nomadic society into a rich commodity producer in just a few years in the 1970s, most people in the past feel that tourism has an impact on their way of life during the tourism but in my opinion after the development and opening up to the world now, I think that this has become of the past Especially since most of the citizens are in the young ages, most of them cultured and educated and looking forward to the development and bright future.”

Interestingly, D4 has a BA in History and D5 has a PhD in Social Sciences, which seem to affirm the position of OECD (2009), that the influence of culture can be more appreciated by those with arts-related degrees. This notion of destination competitiveness has previously been applied in the discussion of tourist destination decision-making. In 1999, Crouch & Ritchie tailored the diamond model by Porter and made the suggestion that the attractiveness of a tourism destination was dependent on four elements: qualifying determinants such as the location; destination management such as resources stewardship; supporting factors such as infrastructure; and core attractors such as culture (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). As such, a destination could have particular attractiveness on the basis of inherited assets. However the ability of the destination to compete with other destinations in attracting tourists could also be dependent on its capability to organise its resources in highly efficient ways so as to come up with competitive advantages. Moreover, Bellini *et al.* (2007) had earlier observed that a region with a higher development level can make better use of its tourism resources. As such, the organization capacities can make it possible for KSA to make more efficient use of its present assets and make itself a more attractive destination to business and conference tourists.

Theme 6: A number of socio-political challenges surround the development of Saudi Arabia as a business and conference tourism destination

Another major theme that emerged from the responses is that the development of Saudi Arabia as a business and conference tourism destination is surrounded by a number of challenges including strong international competition and superficial conference themes, with the speakers lacking in professionalism. D1, for instance, stated:

“Saudi Arabia it is close to the United Arab Emirates which advanced in the field of conferences industry, especially Dubai, a very strong competition with Dubai. This means Saudi Arabia must work to keep abreast of developments.”

D3 stated: *‘In my personal opinion the most important challenges facing the tourism business are the government’s direct intervention in sector management; they will transfer the bureaucratic procedures such as working in government agencies. This will hinder the sector to grow and develop; the government should be in a partnership with the private sector and give them ultimate freedom and full powers to manage this sector, especially in its early stages. It needs to develop, there are many competitions with other countries.’*

These interview responses can be said to be dwelling on three main challenges: the challenge of continuity with the status quo versus change; the challenge of political stagnation versus political reform; and the challenge of an increasingly globalizing world. These challenges are closely interlinked but each of them has its own characteristics. Of the three challenges, the challenge of continuity with the status quo versus change can be said to be a challenge that is old and intricate. It has also proven to be a challenge which is very constant and is unlikely to be overcome soon, since it has permeated into the other two key challenges (Abdullah, 2011). Certainly, there exist a number of changes as well as a number of preserved areas within KSA, but a question that is likely to remain perennial is how the old thinking has influenced the new thinking in Saudi Arabia, or how much the new thinking has borrowed from the old thinking.

This challenge of change versus maintaining the status quo is particularly tricky in KSA as there have traditionally been two opposite views concerning how this challenge can be addressed. The first view holds that all socio-political elements have changed in the KSA, while the second view holds that no socio-political element has changed within KSA. In an ironic manner, both of these views can be said to hold true as there exists considerable evidence supporting the existence of the status quo as well as the presence of change.

Over the past two decades, KSA has undergone massive socio-political transformations which have been considered deep and multifaceted, encompassing all aspects of life in KSA. Nonetheless, KSA remains one of the countries within the Gulf with the strictest forms of political inflexibility. Even though physical changes in the country in terms of infrastructure

developments have clearly been massive, the socio-political landscape of the country displays a heavy adherence to the old status quo. Many elements of Saudi life, including relations, institutions and values, have resisted these changes. As such, with regards to change versus maintaining the status quo, a more popular view is that the status quo within KSA has long been maintained and this has presented considerable challenges to doing business in the country (Henry & Springborg, 2010). This thought pattern makes the assumption that KSA, underneath its façade of change, is basically at its pre-modern development stage as it has been for decades; this view means that in essence, KSA is still a traditional society covered in a veneer of modernity. Political relations inside the country are chiefly governed by traditionalism, which also is a determinant of the social structure in the country and the manner in which KSA attends to its day to day businesses. Irrespective of its massive oil wealth, globalization and modernity, KSA appears to have stayed virtually unchanged. It has previously been observed that rather than leading to change, the massive oil wealth of the country has fortified the socio-political status quo that has been in existence for decades, and maintaining the status quo rather than change has emerged to be the order of the day in KSA (Abdulla, 2010).

Theme 7: A number of opportunities support the development of Saudi Arabia as a business and conference tourism destination

Whereas a number of challenges have been shown to surround the development of Saudi Arabia as a business and conference tourism destination, a number of advantages support its development. With regards to the interview responses, D2 observed:

“We have enormous untapped opportunities and a rich blend of natural resources. There is a high business opportunity... our country is rich in its natural resources. We are not dependent solely on oil for our energy needs. Gold, phosphate, uranium, and many other valuable minerals...”

D7 also observed:

“We have many successful medical conferences. Distinguished doctors [attend], for example Dr Abdullah al-Rabiah, of the medical team who carried out the separation surgery, the twins.”

This presents opportunities for different kinds of tourism such as medical tourism in the country. Khan & Alam (2014) conducted a comprehensive literature review and analysed statistical data obtained from the Saudi Ministry of Health. Medical tourism has risen to be a key component in the world economy. The travelling to another country in search of medical care has increased steadily for both the developed and emerging economies; travellers from

emerging economies seek new skills and technology from the developed economies, whereas travellers from developed economies seek more traditional forms of treatment in developing economies. At present, KSA does not happen to be one of the most popular medical tourism destination countries, despite the fact that its close neighbour, the United Arab Emirates, is. However, opportunities nonetheless support the KSA as a centre of medical tourism in the Gulf. KSA can take advantage of the well-stocked hospitals that it has, supported by a private health care sector that is well established. KSA is also an important religious centre and home to Mecca, one of the most holy places in Islam. As such, KSA can take advantage of its position by combining medical tourism with religious tourism. These present immense opportunities for both medical-related as well as religious-related visits to the country. At the moment, tourism is the second largest income earner for KSA after oil sales. By 2019, it has been predicted that tourism and travel into KSA would almost reach USD 64 billion. In KSA, the heart of tourism lies in religious tourism.

Studies have indicated that many foreign visitors to KSA have a spiritual life and consider their physical and spiritual health to be equally significant. Moreover, a number of studies have suggested that during times of illness, the spiritual needs of the patients increase (Davison & Jhangri, 2013). It has been suggested that when a patient involves himself or herself in religion and spirituality, better health outcomes are experienced, such as faster recovery from the illness (Davison & Jhangri, 2013). Through good and effective planning, a patient can be offered medical treatment that has been combined with religious tourism, for example visiting a holy site to assist in the healing process.

However, it is possible that a number of challenges would stand in the way of effective medical tourism in KSA. One of these potential challenges is the strictness in visa-issuing for KSA visits. The delay in acquiring the visa could become unfavourable with regards to medical ailments, in which an early diagnosis and treatment of the patient is an issue of priority. As such, it is important for the Saudi government to recognize the significance of medical tourism in the country and enact special policies and arrangements for such an activity. Even though offering all kinds of medical treatment appears to be an opportunity that is attractive to KSA, it is more commercially viable to begin focus on a few medical areas and master them, before proceeding to other areas. For example, one emerging economy, China, has focused on stem cell treatment, whereas another emerging economy, India, has focused on eye surgery (Turner, 2007). As such, KSA needs to have an understanding of which fields the medical and religious tourism will be focused upon. There is enormous potential in hosting medical conferences in the country, and Saudi Arabia has all the resources needed for this activity. The very notion that KSA has one of the most important sites for Muslims from all over the

world means that concentrating in religious and medical tourism can be a very significant game changer in the development of KSA as a business and conference destination.

7.3 Summary

This chapter has provided the results on the investigation of social and political feasibility of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Seven important themes have been observed in the study: the first theme is that “online registration processes are very convenient for business and conference events”. This also reflects on the importance of internet penetration in KSA, which has been debased by high levels of censorship and political interference. The second theme is that “the number of conferences held within Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is relatively low.” This could be attributed to a stiff socio-political climate when compared to the more relaxed socio-political climate of neighbouring countries in the Gulf region, such as UAE. The third theme is that “adhering to specific industry themes and the use of expert/widely experienced speakers can increase business and conference tourism attendance.” Some respondents in the interview observed that superficial event speakers dissuaded them from attending conference events within KSA, and therefore there is a need to bring in speakers who are not only experts in their given fields, but who are also highly experienced in their chosen fields. The fourth theme pointed out that “there is optimism on the social and political feasibility of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia developing as an international business and conference tourism destination.” These high levels of optimism are founded on various development blueprints that the government has laid out for the country, such as a development vision. The fifth theme has pointed out that “the Saudi tradition is significant in the development of Saudi Arabia as an international business and conference tourism destination.” Culture has been shown to be significant determinant of the sector. It is thus important to fix the cultural attributes that act as obstacles to KSA gaining a position as a business and conference tourism destination. The sixth theme has pointed out that “a number of socio-political challenges surround the development of Saudi Arabia as a business and conference tourism destination.” These socio-political challenges include the challenge of maintaining the current status quo versus changing. This can be difficult to overcome, and calls for a paradigm shift. The last theme shows that “a number of opportunities support the development of Saudi Arabia as a business and conference tourism destination.” These opportunities lie in the context of medical tourism and religious tourism, which KSA can blend into its business and conference tourism events. This section has met the objective of analysing the interview responses given by the internal conference delegates.

It is evident from these results that the respondents are well aware of the impacts of politics on the wellbeing of different sectors in the country. With the reliance on oil being hampered by the global drop in oil prices, the government in Saudi Arabia has realised the need to ensure

that the other sectors of the economy are revamped in order to cumulatively contribute towards the overall GDP. As a result of this, several concerted efforts have been put in place to support such industries as these. The responses provided in the interviews also indicate that whilst there is still a long way to go in order to get the conference tourism industry to the desired level, the political climate is feasible enough to provide assurance that there will be the necessary growth in future. There do however have to be more efforts undertaken by the country's political leadership to ensure that the goal set by different stakeholders in this sector are met. Whilst the social setup in Saudi Arabia is pegged to Muslim traditions and less tolerant than Western culture, which is less conservative and more indulgent, it is projected that in future there will be more openness towards accommodating other cultures, making Saudi Arabia a potentially top venue for conference tourism.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the industries that have a significant impact on gross domestic products of countries and offer alternative revenue sources. However, what makes the tourism in Saudi Arabia different from that of other countries, especially those from the Western world is the fact that the country's tourism mainly revolves around religious events such as the Hajj pilgrimages held in Mecca (Henderson, 2011). There are however several other forms of tourism available to Saudi Arabia on which it can capitalise and ensure that it increases its overall earnings from tourism. One of these is conference tourism which, as established by this research, is still not very developed in the country. It was noted that cultural dimensions influence this (Burns, 2007; Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010).

Whilst opportunities such as appealing to the wider Western world and incorporation of technologies exist for this sector, its expansion, as established in the research, is limited by the religious and cultural restrictions that exist in the country, similarly to the other Islamic countries.

In addressing the research aim and objectives of this study, a primary research approach was undertaken, and both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis were used. Qualitative data was obtained by using interviews with different respondents who were sampled based on their perceived experience and knowledge on the concept of business or conference tourism. Most of the respondents comprised participants and organizers of business conferences. Quantitative data, on the other hand, was collected using questionnaires designed with close-ended questions and were distributed to different external conference delegates at conferences. In this chapter, a summary of the results is provided, discussing how the different research objectives were met using the different respective approaches; see section 8.2. The recommendations based on these results for the business and conference tourism sector in Saudi Arabia are also discussed in this chapter, in section 8.3. The academic contribution of this research is discussed in section 8.4, outlining how it contributes towards the existing body of literature about conference tourism. Section 8.5 presents the limitations to the research and, based on this, suggestions for future research are presented in section 8.6.

8.2 Summary of Main Results

8.2.1 Objective 1. To examine the capacity of Saudi Arabia to become an international business and conference tourism destination

To address this objective, the staff members and managers from The Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau were interviewed, as explained in Chapter 5 of this study. More specifically, the personal views of the participants in regard to the conference tourism of Saudi Arabia reflect optimism for the sector's current performance and its prospects in the future (Ch. 5, Table 5.2, Question 1). Also, the participants have noted that the continuous increase of the sector's performance in Saudi Arabia has been secured mostly due to the government's support (Ch. 5, Table 5.2, and Question 2). However, one of the participants, a 35-year-old individual who works in the Business Development Department of SECB, argued that the lack of regulation and rules in the conference sector of Saudi Arabia has resulted in significant delays in the growth of the sector (Ch. 5, Table 5.2, and Question 1). Despite their optimism for the sector's prospects, a number of the participants, 3 out of 6, noted that Saudi Arabia is not ready, not yet, to become a conference tourism destination.

Among the factors that create obstacles to Saudi Arabia's transformation to a popular conference tourism destination are the following: lack of appropriate facilities, lack of investment and bureaucracy; the other participants show optimism for the sector's growth and note that such growth is expected to be achieved because of the high support of the government to the specific sector (Ch. 5, Table 5.2, Question 2). Particular emphasis should be given to the fact that 3 out of 6 participants consider culture and religious beliefs as factors that delay the opening up of Saudi Arabia to conference tourism (Ch.5, Table 5.3). In this regard, Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) established the association between Islam and tourism policies and management.

The Kingdom uses Islam to reaffirm Saudi legitimacy (Burns, 2007). Additionally, the participants do not seem to be convinced of the value of conference tourism to the Saudi Arabia economy; only one of the participants seemed to believe that this sector is of critical importance for the country's economy (Ch.5, Table 5.4). Despite the challenges that the sector faces in Saudi Arabia, the participants believe that the growth of the sector in The Kingdom could be secured by choosing an appropriate business model; this model could focus on flexibility, on culture or on international standards (Ch.5, Table 5.5). Concerns would exist though about whether the use of a strategic framework, such as a business model, could support the industry's growth since the sector seems to have critical weaknesses, especially in regard to the skills and specialisation of staff, the high bureaucracy and the high complexity of its processes (Ch.5, Table 5.6). Still, the country is located in a strategic geographic location and has the potential for high growth as a destination of conference tourism (Table

5.6). Abdullah (2011) also pointed out that save for the restrictions currently imposed in The Kingdom, its business conference tourism is rather promising.

From their responses of the interviews, it was established that at the moment, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) finds itself at crossroads. Irrespective of whether KSA would like to open up its borders to external businesses or not, a number of reasons point to the necessity of opening up economically. These reasons have been shown in the study to include an increasing population and over-dependence on oil revenue. These results reflect those of Al-Torkistani, Salisu, and Maimany (2016) whose study was on how to develop a successful business model for Saudi Arabia. These have laid immense pressures on the opening up of KSA. Against this background, the industry of international conferences promises a great deal of rewards to KSA and has laid pressure on KSA to change, irrespective of the direction of the change adopted. As such, hosting international conferences has been shown to be a good approach that the country can use for revenue generation. It has been likewise pointed out that the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia can be utilised to secure the stability of its national economy and to reduce the current economic dependency on oil incomes (Ageli, 2013).

The viability of this approach has been supported by relevant authorities in KSA such as the Supreme Commission for Tourism. In a number of ways and considering the significant level of resistance that a number of Saudis have to Western non-Muslim influence in their country, the argument that can be made is that the conference industry is appropriate for KSA given the existing conditions. This would make it possible for KSA to open up its borders in an approach that is measured and careful. This would offer alternative revenue sources that are viable, and which would provide all-year sources of high-yielding tourism revenues. This would not only encourage foreign investment into KSA but would also create opportunities that outsiders can use to visit KSA and establish business contacts. This would lead to employment generation. The close relationship between the increase of a sector's customers and the sector's employability is reflected by the following fact: the increase of international travellers from 700 million, in 2000, to one billion, in 2010, has been related to the creation of 245 million jobs, directly or indirectly linked with the sector, as noted in section 3.2 of this study (Trade Forum, 2008).

A number of opportunities have been shown to exist outside the conference sector. This not only involves macro opportunities like travelling to destinations that are desirable, but also entails opportunities to carry out activities like shopping, entertainment, sightseeing at religious centres, medical tourism and others (Lennon, 2006). These are important in selecting KSA as the international conference site and also in making attendance decisions. The high growth rate of Saudi Arabia, especially in urban areas, also provides facilities that effectively contribute towards the thriving of the conference tourism sector (SECB, 2013b). This also

positively impacts on the economy of Saudi Arabia through the creation of job opportunities for those with tourism-related skills (Meetmiddleeast, 2014b).

The results in the study are in line with the assertion from previous literature that such opportunities can be considerable 'pull factors' and a perception that a destination that is exotic and interesting functions as a significant motivator for attending conferences (Nassar, Mostafa, & Reisinger, 2015; Salazar *et al.*, 2010). Even with this high potential for growth in the industry, as established in the results, there still exist different challenges that ought to be addressed in order for the desired potential to be attained. For instance, the shortage of systems and facilities required to ensure that the industry runs smoothly has to be addressed in order for the country to be on par with other leading countries in this sector, such as the Western countries (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016). Overall, it was established that if the existing inadequacies are addressed, Saudi Arabia has high potential for effectively addressing the needs of tourists that are constantly evolving, as well as providing opportunities for potential investments in the tourism sector (Ageli, 2013).

Continuous improvement of some of the shortcomings in this sector will be beneficial in increasing Saudi Arabia's capability as a conference tourism destination. At the same time, emphasis should be given to the following fact: the Saudi Arabia economy is quite strong, being supported by the income from oil and gas production (Almajdoub, 2017). This means that the country's government could reserve funds for supporting the construction of buildings and facilities necessary in conference activities (Hobbs, 2017). The investment of \$7 billion in tourism, as part of Vision 2030, verifies the availability of funds in Saudi Arabia for the growth of the conference sector (Gould, 2017).

Additionally, the country's current tourism infrastructure, as supported by 600 hotels that meet the quality standards of first-class, indicates the potential of Saudi Arabia to perform well in the conference tourism sector (ITCM, 2017). The statement earlier this year by Prince Sultan that Saudi Arabia will become a top player in global tourism indicates the important prospects for growth in Saudi Arabia's conference sector. However, it has been noted in the literature that the current spending of Saudi Arabia's on overseas tourism is high (Townsend, 2016). This fact, combined with the country's strict visa regulations, would discourage potential visitors for conference tourism (Gould, 2017; JEG, 2016; Stankati, 2016). The limitation of the restrictions on visas, as first initiated in Saudi Arabia in 2016, could be a critical step towards the growth of the country's conference sector (Bassi & Wasfi, 2016; Forbes, 2017). The access to information in regard to business events currently held in Saudi Arabia and the improvement of the country's existing regulatory framework for the specific activities could be also critical for the enhancement of the conference sector in Saudi Arabia (ITCM, 2017).

8.2.2 Objective 2. To understand the positive and negative factors affecting business tourism and the business tourism policy of Saudi Arabia

This objective was addressed by collecting data from interviews. Interviewees included staff and managers of private companies and service providers at conferences in Saudi Arabia. These were mainly officials from the Third Saudi Conventions & Exhibitions Forum, held in November 2015. Among the factors that have resulted in benefits for business tourism and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia, as noted by participants, emphasis should be given to governmental support and the high economic growth of the country, a fact that attracts investors and entrepreneurs. However, cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and other countries, especially the countries of the West, set difficulties to the development of conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. The lack of appropriate facilities is also likely to prevent the industry's growth. Under these terms, the participants have suggested an emphasis on culture, on the appropriate organisation of services and the improvement of the services' quality. Technology could also highly benefit the sector. The participants argue that the technology currently used in the conference/ business sector is inappropriate to cover the relevant needs of the sector. More specifically, the participants have explained that the use of advanced communication machines, such as smart-phones, across Saudi Arabia should not be related to the technology available for the support of the country's conference sector.

The participants highlight the importance of the country's landscape, as a means for attracting tourists interested in different types of tourism, including conference tourism. Additionally, the prospects of the conference sector for high growth should be a motive for the country's government to support the sector's growth more effectively.

The results from the interviews have indicated that there are several positive factors about Saudi Arabia that provide room for a thriving conference tourism sector. This is contrary to the expectation that global issues like terrorism, and the negative image with which they have painted the Arab world, from the Westerner's perspective, would have resulted in negative safety concerns for the delegates in KSA (Maximiliano, Skoll, & Timmermann, 2014).

From the research, one of the positive factors was that the level of expertise at the conference venues and at the entire destination is high, and this factor seems to be ranked at a higher level than other factors in the interviews. Results from other studies, such as Alferaih and Alferaih (2017) and Alafi (2014) have however established otherwise, outlining the need for improving skills and competencies among the professionals in Saudi Arabia's tourism sector. An improved image of the country by the conference attendees at the end of their visit is a considerable factor that highlights the readiness of KSA to host high-profile international conferences. Whether the conference attendees hold a subconscious image of KSA or not, the image of the KSA is highly important in the attraction of international conference delegates.

What is however interesting is that irrespective of the image it appears that by hosting the conference in KSA, a by-product is the dynamic and positive change of the image of KSA that conference attendees had of the country prior to visiting it. Irrespective of the literature such as Stephenson (2014) showing that KSA's culture can improve the capacity of KSA to be an international conference destination, a few other factors such as closed information and gender segregation in public spaces can dilute this development. In this regard, these are issues that need to be worked on if there is indeed seriousness in portraying KSA as a conference tourism destination.

It can therefore be argued that in Saudi Arabia, one of the positive factors that can contribute to its achievement of its potential as a conference tourism destination is that there is a reasonably high level of expertise among the different professionals as compared to the neighbouring countries in the region, making it attractive for delegates from other countries to come and learn from them in conferences (Zamani-Farahani & Eid, 2016). It was also established that the location of the country is a positive factor for the growth of this sector. It was established from the research that Saudi Arabia's strategic location mediates continents of the world from the east and west, north, and south, as well as it is having a competitive advantage in the Muslim world through the holy sites located there.

This fact is also stated by Al-Tawfiq and Memish (2014) who mention that the country's strategic location is one of the reasons it was selected as a destination for Hajj. There is also the support from the government, which is exhibited by its efforts to set up the Saudi Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB), an organization that is responsible for the conferences in Saudi Arabia, including its supervisory committee, advisory group members and its organisational structure (SECB, 2013b). Funding from other revenue generating sectors such as oil and gas has also been committed to this sector by the government. This can be attributed to the realisation by Saudi Arabia that reliance on oil and gas may adversely affect the country's future economic sustainability. This is because of the fluctuation in oil prices and as well the fact that oil and gas reserves get depleted with time (Al-Maamary, Kazem, & Chaichan, 2017).

There are also different negative aspects that may hinder the degree of growth and development of this sector. As established in this research, these include the rigidity of the country's cultural and religious doctrines, which make it difficult for people from other countries, religions and cultures to fit comfortably (Jafari & Scott, 2014). The fact that the Saudis have minimal interaction with people whose culture differs from theirs also makes it a challenge for the sector. Whilst this is regarded as being a negative in this research, there are other researchers who may argue that the cultural and religious rigidity exhibited in Saudi Arabia shows an element of pride in their culture and religion (Al-Heialy, 2016; Ali, 2010; Bassi

& Wasfi, 2016; Zakir Hussain, 2016). Several other challenges that limit the growth of the country's business and conference tourism sector have also been identified, including the shortage of skills and facilities, and insufficiency of supporting industries for this sector (Ageli, 2013; Ellinger *et al.*, 2010; Graetz and Smith, 2010; Jeddah Chamber, 2016). The lack of appropriately skilled staff and the obstacles in accessing information related to business events in Saudi Arabia need to be addressed in order for the country's conference sector to be developed (ITCM, 2017).

8.2.3 Objective 3. To analyse the quality of service and its effects on business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia

External conference delegates were the respondents used in addressing this objective. Being from outside, they are the ones who relied heavily on supporting services such as accommodation, entertainment, and transportation, among others. It was evident from the results obtained from questionnaires given to the external delegates that even though there are diverse services offered to the desired quality and quantity, there ought to be steps made to ensure that other services are improved in order to ensure that the overall experiences of these tourists are satisfactory. In terms of accommodation, for instance, it was established that that a large percentage of external delegates preferred staying in 4-star and 5-star hotels. The fact that these hotels were available for these delegates meant that the hospitality industry in Saudi Arabia is big enough to accommodate conference tourism. Along the same lines, the size of the Saudi hospitality industry was also examined by Alharbi *et al.* (2016) who mentioned that the major Saudi cities such as Madinah, Mecca, Jeddah and Riyadh not only have a high concentration of four- and five-star hotels, but that the level of customer satisfaction that they offer is also relatively high.

This aspect was also noted in the research results where the respondents were asked about their degree of satisfaction with the services that they were provided with, both at the conference and at the different accommodation facilities that they used. A high degree of satisfaction was reported by the respondents. The literature also noted the importance of sufficient flexibility with regard to applicability of various business and cultural contexts across Saudi Arabia (Ageli, 2013; Andrews & Playfoot, 2015).

Another major result was that the responders indicated that entertainment was unsatisfactory, and the quality of the shopping malls was poor. This could have been one of the reasons why a large number of participants did not remain in the country after the conference. The results regarding the poor quality of entertainment are consistent with the findings from the literature, as Colliers (2012) indicates that despite the fast growth of the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia, the country still offers little information to help tourists (e.g. leaflets, tourist guides etc.), and there are not enough leisure facilities to capitalise on its domestic tourism industry.

Furthermore, Colliers (2012) noticed there are few opportunities for leisure and entertainment, and the progression of the provision of facilities remains very slow. The results from the primary data collected in the context of the current study confirm that the quality of entertainment still remains an issue to this day, as Colliers (2012) found. This may also be related to cultural aspects, as the Muslim religion has stricter rules than are adhered to by Western forms of entertainment. The theory of cultural differences influencing people's decisions to either remain a few extra days in Saudi Arabia after the conference or visit the country without a conference was also tested, and the results show that the two factors are significantly and negatively correlated.

On the other hand, the responders indicated satisfaction with the conference location and content of the conference. In fact, the data revealed that, in respect of the quality of services at the conferences the respondents attended in Saudi Arabia, the majority of participants indicated that they were satisfied with the different elements of services received, including the accommodation arrangements that were available, the cost, and the security and safety of the venues in which they were residing. This level of satisfaction with the quality of services was also observed within the literature, and it has a positive impact on businesses, motivating them to participate at an increasing number of conferences in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the positive experiences that external conference delegates have with the hospitality services provided to them throughout their entire stay in Saudi Arabia have a positive effect on business and conference tourism in the country.

The data also suggested that the majority of the participants were particularly interested in the content of the conference they took part in, and less in the leisure and touristic aspect of their visit. Ageli (2013), on the other hand, pointed out that demonstrating a smooth pattern of communication with stakeholders is an important aspect of the overall concept of service quality management, as this will in turn be reflected in clients' consideration of the benefits of participating in business tourism conferences in the Kingdom.

The results are in line with the arguments issued by Saleem and Anderson (2013), that there is a strong connection between safety and tourism, and Saudi Arabia, just like other Arab countries and destinations, faces the stereotypical perception of harbouring terrorists. Additional accessibility issues concern visas (Al Essa, 2014). There are certain formalities foreigners who travel to Saudi Arabia need to accomplish, especially when it comes to business travel, and some can become quite difficult, increasing the cultural gap. Moreover, a correlation between the decision to extend their stay and the motivation for participating at a conference revealed that participants welcomed the opportunity to visit the country during their conference but were reluctant to extend their stay due to safety and security reasons and cultural differences. Considering the fact that the majority of responders were from Europe,

this suggests that the image other cultures have about Saudi Arabia contributes to the cultural barrier. It was also found that the quality of services has had a positive impact on participants' satisfaction with their stay during the conference. It can therefore be argued that if the quality of services is good, they will positively influence the growth of business and conference tourism in the country (Salazar *et al.*, 2010).

The fact that most respondents mentioned that they were satisfied with the services offered in conferences and in the different hospitality facilities provided is an indication of the effectiveness of Saudi Arabia, not only as a conference destination, but also in accommodation for the tourists or delegates. The three correlations conducted revolve around the same information, which is that there are three main factors of influence that appeared throughout all correlations: cultural tolerance, safety and security and country accessibility. The data suggests that Western tourists are having trouble accommodating to the culture of Saudi Arabia. The data also indicated the responders were dissatisfied with the entertainment available and the quality of the shopping malls. This is understandable, as Saudi culture does not encourage similar forms of entertainment to the West. However, the data also shows that once the tourists arrive, they are satisfied with the hospitality services they receive. This seemingly conflicting information suggests that despite the Saudi conference tourism industry's efforts, the country remains an enigma to foreigners and they may perceive it as inaccessible or unsafe. As a consequence, the industry may need to focus on promoting cultural differences as an attraction, countering the cultural barrier the media is promoting in relation to Arab countries. As Western media covers extreme cases of terrorism, Arab countries continue to be perceived as intolerant and dangerous, limiting people's willingness to visit these countries.

This perception can be explained using Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The first aspect that was noticed is the one related to the masculinity versus femininity index. The majority of the participants were male, as Saudi Arabian culture imposes strict rules relating to gender. According to Hofstede's theory, as presented in the literature review (Dellner, 2014, 2017), and as reflected in the results of this research, Saudi Arabia is a country with high masculinity, which means that religion has a high importance in people's lives and there is a large gender gap in all aspects of living (e.g. social interactions, work, family and school). Furthermore, the results indicate that culture also plays an important role in people's perceptions of the quality of services overall.

As shown in the literature (Serra, 2006), the notion of quality of service is strongly connected to tourists' perceptions. The literature review developed for this study also revealed an important fact: the contribution of foreign tourists to the growth of the country's sector is higher than the contribution of domestic tourists (JEG, 2016). Relatedly, it has been shown that Saudi

Arabians tend to spend high amounts on overseas travel (Townsend, 2016). At the same time, domestic trips dominate the country's travel sector, far outnumbering inbound and outbound trips (MAS Centre, 2016a). This means that Saudi Arabia would need to convince the conference industry of its potential, not just among foreign tourists but also domestic ones. The most effective way to achieve the above target would be by emphasising service quality. As indicated in the literature presented earlier, service quality is closely related to customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Al-Ababneh, 2016; Gupta, 2017; Kim, 2016; Ramseook – Munhurrun *et al.*, 2016; Romiti & Sarti, 2016; Yarhands *et al.*, 2016).

In the modern era, where the role of social media in customer decision-making is critical, the efforts of the Saudi Arabia government to improve the quality of services in the tourism sector should be heavily based on Internet; for example, advanced technology could be employed for improving user infrastructure in the websites of organisations involved in the country's conference sector (Al-dweeri *et al.*, 2017). At the same time, these organisations could employ social media for attracting new customers and for improving their communication with existing customers (Al-dweeri *et al.*, 2017). Tourists' needs and expectations vary, but the most important thing is to ensure service quality, since when this is met, positive tourist perceptions will certainly be ensured (Eid, 2013; Kozak & Kozak, 2016). However, Saudi companies within the tourism industry are facing difficulties in carrying out service quality management within their organisational culture (Ageli, 2013). On the other hand, Andrews and Playfoot (2015) emphasised change receptivity as a relevant factor that contributes to the effectiveness of organisational change strategies to ensure a high level of service quality management.

8.2.4 Objective 4. To explore the social and political feasibility of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia developing as a business and conference tourism destination

To address this objective, interviews were carried out with internal conference delegates. It was established from the results that there is a close relationship between politics and the performance of business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. There are several elements of the political environment that have a bearing on not only tourism, but other sectors in the country. One of these is infrastructure; with proper infrastructure, which can only be attained with proper political planning, the running of many industries will be smooth. This study has established that KSA has the infrastructural capability of hosting international conferences and its organizational capabilities are good. These results are in line with those of Al Mallakh and el Mallakh (2015) who carried out a survey on the recent high pace of development that is being experienced in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East at large. Good organization has been shown in the literature to be important for the hosting of conferences in a successful manner. It makes it possible for delegates to travel across the country smoothly (Williams & Baláž,

2013). There is considerable of support from the government through the allocation of a substantial amount of money to grow this sector.

Whilst it is evident that KSA has suitable capacity and good infrastructure for hosting the international conferences, some of the hindrances include bureaucracy and restrictive visa application regulations, which have restricted the number of international conferences hosted in the country (Bradley, 2015; ITCM, 2017). The complex procedures and entry requirements can be stressful for visa applicants and can have a negative impact on the decision to visit the country. The literature that has been reviewed in the study has indicated that the visa is a factor that affects not only the process of site selection but also the delegates' decision-making for attending the conference (Yusuf, 2014). However, a few studies have indicated that the ease in acquiring visas is a significant factor in selecting the country as a conference tourism destination, and also impacts on the delegates' decision-making (Liu & McKercher, 2016; Zengeni, 2012; Zibanai, 2016). It should be noted that for the period 2016 to 2020 The Kingdom's government aims to invest a total of \$100 billion in supporting initiatives, about 755 in total that would help to enhance the country's tourism sector (ITCM, 2017). This means that the development of the conference sector in Saudi Arabia is feasible, in terms of political, economic and social support.

8.3 Recommendations

From the results obtained in the research, there are several recommendations that, when implemented in Saudi Arabia's business and conference tourism sector, could be instrumental in expanding the sector. For example, the efficiency of the specific sector could be increased through appropriate updates to Saudi Arabia's existing educational framework. More specifically, current curricula in the country's universities could be expanded with material related to the management of conferences. Relevant courses should be introduced in colleges and universities across the country, so that the country's young people can acquire the knowledge and competencies required for supporting the sector's activities. Another opportunity that is available to Saudi conference tourism comes from the fact that it is strategically placed as a location to which people from different countries visit for the Mecca pilgrimage (Graetz & Smith, 2010). This provides an opportunity for the different partners and organizers in this industry to market themselves, as well as making the country an ideal destination for conference tourism. This is one of the surest ways of attracting conference tourists to the market. It also has the opportunity of serving as host to its neighbouring countries, given that it is one of the better-placed countries in the region.

Respondents also made recommendations that could be put in place to improve the country's conference tourism sector. For instance, there should be higher involvement of the media in promoting Saudi Arabia as a conference tourism destination. This reflects the sentiments of

Andrews and Playfoot (2015) who acknowledged the role played by media, especially in the present-day where the internet can be effectively utilised to promote Saudi Arabia and increase awareness of it as a destination across the globe. Capitalising on the country's current capabilities can also be effective in increasing the growth of the conference tourism sector. For instance, as established from interview responses, the country already has approximately 170 professional association healthy scientific societies. These societies can organize conferences and invite health professionals from different countries to share ideas or knowledge on how to improve global healthcare.

The success of the conference tourism sector in Saudi Arabia is partly reliant on the supporting industries that exist in the market. These include hospitality industry, transport, infrastructure, and entertainment, among others (Yusuf, 2014). Whilst it has been established that there is a relatively high level of satisfaction with services from these industries in Saudi Arabia, concerns may lie in the fact that if left as they are, they may be insufficient for the conference tourism sector if it grows to its projected potential. In this regard, it is recommended that the government makes it easy for businesses in these sectors to set up and grow their operations to match the growth of this sector. In addition to this, foreign entities in sectors such as hospitality should also be encouraged to invest in the country. This will not only expose the Saudis to different cultures from outside countries but will also ensure that conference tourists from other countries find the services that they are accustomed to, and this will make their stay in Saudi Arabia simpler and more pleasurable (Bradley, 2015). These are some of the recommendations that if implemented, will contribute to the growth of Saudi Arabia's conference tourism sector, increase its contribution to the country's GDP and as well, make the country recognised as one of the key conference tourism destinations

8.4 Key Contributions of the Research

The results obtained in this research make contributions not only to the development of the conference tourism industry in Saudi Arabia, but also to the overall body of knowledge on the current and projected status of the Kingdom's conference tourism sector. In an exploration of the country's capacity to be an international conference tourism destination, for instance, the current status of the sector from the perspective of the participants who were interviewed was established. Efforts are indeed being made by the government in the development of this sector, evident from the introduction of organisations such as the SECB, whose key role is the development of the conference tourism sector. This research contributes to the current knowledge in the sector since it highlights the opportunities that currently exist, not only for delegates intending to attend conferences, but also for those who look forward to making investments in this sector. Among the factors that are considered as obstacles to Saudi

Arabia's transformation to a popular conference tourism destination are the lack of appropriate facilities, lack of investment, and tangled bureaucracy. These findings can be used as a basis for informing which strategies might be implemented to ensure this sector improves.

Another key contribution of this research is the finding that the business and conference sector of Saudi Arabia can be positively affected by the country's performance in quality management within the services industry (Yusuf, 2014). Service delivery and quality are vital aspects that determine the competitiveness of a country, or even an organisation, that provides conference tourism services. In the current tourism industry, customers expect a very high level of service quality in the different destinations or types of tourism that they pay for. Competition is intense and, therefore, service quality has become an important dimension in terms of adding value. Effective management of the quality of service is vital if the Saudi conference tourism sector is to grow. Managers need to identify crucial aspects of service quality, measure performance, and evaluate their contribution towards profits and customer retention. The satisfaction of customers positively contributes towards driving them to make positive reviews of services offered, and as such, word-of-mouth advertising is crucial in the travel and tourism industry. Therefore, as the Saudi government focuses on ensuring the growth of this sector through focusing on service quality, this research makes contributions by recommending how this can effectively be achieved,

Moreover, the study has revealed that business and conference tourism could help the country to achieve economic diversification, breaking the current dependency of the country on oil (Al-Kawaz, 2005; El-Garaihy, 2013; Henderson, 2011; Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016; Yousif & Bakr, 2017). In other words, the study has revealed the potential of the specific sector to become a key industry in Saudi Arabia. The main area of focus for Saudi Arabia has for a long time been oil and gas exploration. Whilst this sector has indeed been supportive of the Saudi economy, uncertainties such as the fluctuations in prices that have been experienced, and an increased focus on renewable energy, make it evident that excessive reliance on oil resources and negligence of other sectors may be adverse to the country's future economic state. In addition to this revelation on how the Kingdom can benefit from increased investments in this sector, the results from both primary and secondary sources outline what needs to be addressed in order to provide a higher level of success. Reference has been made to other countries that have been successful in this sector and, with suitable adaptation, their models can be taken as blueprints for emulation by Saudi Arabia. Even with the industry's current contribution to Saudi GDP, which is relatively low, there is immense potential.

The research has also provided an overview of the scarcely explored field of conference and business tourism in Saudi Arabia. This is not only informative for people outside Saudi Arabia who were not initially aware of the existence of this industry, but also for

local Saudis who probably also do not have much information about the sector. This has several related benefits, one of these being that it will contribute to a higher incidence of organising conferences in the available facilities in the country. The current state of the industry, as mentioned, is lagging behind its potential. As such, this information will contribute to attracting different interested parties, both from the public and private sector, to contribute more towards improving the sector. Some of the existing studies have provided a detailed look into tourism in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region, but with little attention paid to the conference and business tourism industry (Al-Torkistani, Salisu, & Maimany, 2016). This research therefore contributes to filling this gap.

There is also minimal statistical data available that can be used to quantitatively evaluate the state of business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia, which remains a challenge for research. This information mainly concerns the key performance indicators that can be used to carry out an accurate estimation of the number of companies in the conference tourism industry in Saudi Arabia, as well as the contribution that this specific sub-sector could make to the country's overall GDP, along with the sector's performance in relation to other countries within the region and across the globe. Whilst this research has not provided the exact statistics that can address this gap, it has made an attempt to explore these key indicators in Saudi Arabia's conference tourism sector. Future studies and surveys should provide more accurate information regarding these aspects of the conference tourism industry. The different interview and questionnaire responses evaluated in this research have also been instrumental in providing valuable information on the status of conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. Future studies could build on this research to provide more information on the concept of conference tourism in the country.

The results of this research also provide information regarding the factors that affect business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia, which may also be applicable to other sectors of tourism. For instance, this study has revealed that the current performance of business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia is rather low – a fact related to several factors, such as the difficulty entrepreneurs face entering specific business areas (Ageli, 2013), the critical power of social elites (Ali, 2010), and the low attractiveness of the country as a tourism destination, which can be attributed to the Kingdom's strict visa rules (Gould, 2017; Townsend, 2016). Also, the review of the literature has indicated that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been incorporated by Saudi Arabia companies only relatively. It can be noted that businesses in all industries in Saudi Arabia have faced significant difficulties in the past in trying to establish trust and confidence as their values (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). Within business or conference tourism, environmental pollution and the need for environmental sustainability are rarely considered. However, this research has re-emphasised

the need for the stakeholders involved to consider environmental sustainability through ensuring that the slightest adverse impacts or environmental hazards are addressed. Whilst some of these efforts may remain unseen and have minimal impact on the experience of consumers, adherence to sustainability efforts in conference tourism leads to the general well-being of the environment, which is important since more and more consumers are conscious about environmental sustainability; therefore this could be used as a selling point for this industry in Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, the study has revealed the strong efforts made by the Saudi Arabian government to support tourism (Graetz & Smith, 2010), especially the business and conference tourism sector (Stankati, 2016). The key aspects that need to be addressed to ensure that that conference tourism sector improves include ensuring that there are effective support sectors, such as hospitality, the hotel sector, technology, and infrastructure.

The contributions that this research has made add to the existing knowledge and literature on conference tourism in Saudi Arabia; the milestones that have so far been reached, and the challenges and opportunities that exist, which can be capitalised on to improve the position of this sector in the global arena. It is, however, necessary to acknowledge that there are still aspects of this sector that need to be further explored.

8.5 Limitations of the Research

The methodological approaches that were applied in this study provided satisfactory results for addressing the research objectives. As mentioned previously, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used, with interviews and questionnaires being the data collection instruments respectively. However, there were certain limitations that were experienced in the course of the research. Some of the respondents refrained from providing honest and open opinions, especially on the negative aspects of Saudi Arabia's conferences tourism. This is despite the fact that they were assured of their anonymity. There were reservations among some contributors about recording interviews because of the lack of freedom of expression in many areas in Saudi Arabia, especially in the government sector. Though their interviews had been recorded already, they could not be used. Respondents from the public and private sector also requested for their positions in the tourism sector not to be mentioned. This request was respected in adherence to research ethics.

The language barrier also was a challenge for this research, especially when collecting data from questionnaires. The questionnaires were drafted in English and whilst a section of the respondents understood and could effectively answer the questionnaire, there were some who did not understand English and therefore, translation was required for them to understand the

research questions. This particularly affect the the external delegates of different nationalities and languages.

When collecting the qualitative data through interviews, there was also a challenge in the fact that there could be no verification of whether the responses being provided were true or false, or whether they were biased for or against the conference tourism sector in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A large volume of data was collected from the interviews with the respondents. Even though this could be considered as good for the study, the limitation emerged from the difficulty in identifying which responses to quote in the research, and which ones to leave out because not all the transcript responses could be quoted in the report. Even with these limitations however, the objectives of the research were effectively addressed. Recommendations on how future research can be carried out and how some of the limitations outlined here can be overcome are provided below.

8.6 Future Research

It is necessary for future research to be carried out on this subject in order to provide a better understanding of tourism in Saudi Arabia, and more specifically, the conference tourism sector. Based on the above limitations, one of the recommendations for future research is to carry out a study that explores effective tourism initiatives and strategies that address the cultural issue surrounding a tourism destination, for example, Saudi Arabia. This suggestion will bring to light possible measures that the Saudi government and tourism organisations can undertake to tackle the perceived culture-related restrictions that tourists have of the country. Another is that a study on the prospects of tourism profitability in Saudi Arabia should be undertaken, to establish the extent to which business tourism may be a major source of income for the Kingdom. Not only will this study enable tourism organisations to conduct their own strategies for more effective tourism activities, but Saudi Arabia itself will be able to diversify its income-generating capacities towards alternatives to oil.

Future studies should also be carried out on more specific issues, which will cumulatively provide a deeper understanding of the issues and opportunities in this sector. For instance, some studies could specifically focus on the conference tourism facilities while others can focus on the role of politics in shaping the future of conference tourism. Application of these suggestions in future studies will ensure a better understanding of Saudi Arabia's business and conference tourism sector. Future studies should also look at the relationship between satisfaction with hospitality services in the conference tourism sector in Saudi Arabia and the participants' willingness to take part in other conferences which can also be organised in this country. Qualitative interviews may be used for in-depth exploration of the reasons why participants are willing or unwilling to return to the country for a conference.

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Appendices

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Appendix 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Correlations between the decision to extend the stay and the motivation for participating in the conference.- Correlations between visiting without a conference and satisfaction factors.- Correlations between visiting other cities and satisfaction factors. |
| Appendix 2 | Interview Questions for Government Organizations |
| Appendix 3 | Interview Questions for Staff and Managers of Private Companies Service Providers (management and organization) in Conferences Tourism |
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| | |
|--------------------|--|
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Appendix

1

- **Correlations between the decision to extend the stay and the motivation for participating in the conference.**
- **Correlations between visiting without a conference and satisfaction factors.**
- **Correlations between visiting other cities and satisfaction factors.**

| Notes | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Output Created | 06-JUN-2018 04:57:54 | |
| Comments | | |
| Input | Data | |
| | Active Dataset | DataSet1 |
| | Filter | <none> |
| | Weight | <none> |
| | Split File | <none> |
| | N of Rows in Working Data File | 124 |
| Missing Value Handling | Definition of Missing | User-defined missing values are treated as missing. |

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|--|
| | Cases Used | Statistics for each pair of variables are based on all the cases with valid data for that pair. |
| Syntax | | NONPAR CORR /VARIABLES=Nights_confer A8 B2 B3 B4 B7 B8 B9 B10 B11 B12 A1 /PRINT=SPEARMAN TWOTAIL NOSIG /MISSING=PAIRWISE. |
| Resources | Processor Time | 00:00:00.02 |
| | Elapsed Time | 00:00:00.02 |
| | Number of Cases Allowed | 52428 cases ^a |

a. Based on availability of workspace memory

[DataSet1]

| Correlations | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| | | | Additional nights |
| Spearman's rho | Additional nights | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| | | N | 108 |
| | Packages & Offers | Correlation Coefficient | .295** |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|------|
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .004 |
| | N | 91 |
| The range of accommodation available | Correlation Coefficient | .054 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .598 |
| | N | 99 |
| The quality of conference facilities | Correlation Coefficient | .175 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .071 |
| | N | 107 |
| The quality of accommodation | Correlation Coefficient | .023 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .824 |
| | N | 100 |
| Restaurant quality and range | Correlation Coefficient | .010 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .922 |
| | N | 103 |
| Destination cleanliness | Correlation Coefficient | .073 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .462 |
| | N | 103 |
| Tourist information and availability | Correlation Coefficient | .169 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .108 |
| | N | 91 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------|--------|
| | Shopping malls quality | Correlation Coefficient | .042 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .727 |
| | | N | 71 |
| | Transportation costs | Correlation Coefficient | .008 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .938 |
| | | N | 88 |
| | Entertainment | Correlation Coefficient | .260* |
| Spearman's rho | Entertainment | Sig. (2-tailed) | .020 |
| | | N | 80 |
| | The content of the conference programme | Correlation Coefficient | -.145 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .145** |
| N | | 103 | |

***correlation is significant at the 0.05 level**

Correlations between visiting without a conference and satisfaction factors

| Notes | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|----------|
| Output Created | 06-JUN-2018 04:58:26 | |
| Comments | | |
| Input | Data | |
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| | Filter | <none> |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| | Weight | <none> |
| | Split File | <none> |
| | N of Rows in Working Data File | 124 |
| Missing Value Handling | Definition of Missing | User-defined missing values are treated as missing. |
| | Cases Used | Statistics for each pair of variables are based on all the cases with valid data for that pair. |
| Syntax | NONPAR CORR /VARIABLES=Visit_KS A A8 B2 B3 B4 B7 B8 B9 B10 B11 B12 A1 /PRINT=SPEARMAN TWOTAIL NOSIG /MISSING=PAIRWISE. | |
| Resources | Processor Time | 00:00:00.03 |
| | Elapsed Time | 00:00:00.02 |
| | Number of Cases Allowed | 52428 cases ^a |

a. Based on availability of workspace memory

[DataSet1]

Correlations

| | | | Visting without a conference |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Packages & Offers | Correlation Coefficient | -.072 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .481 |
| | | N | 97 |
| | The range of accommodation available | Correlation Coefficient | -.026 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .795 |
| | | N | 104 |
| | The quality of conference facilities | Correlation Coefficient | -.028 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .770 |
| | | N | 113 |
| | The quality of accommodation | Correlation Coefficient | -.073 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .465 |
| | | N | 104 |
| | Restaurant quality and range | Correlation Coefficient | .026 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .790 |
| | | N | 109 |
| | Destination cleanliness | Correlation Coefficient | .023 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .812 |
| | | N | 108 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------|--------|
| | Tourist information and availability | Correlation Coefficient | -0.040 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .699 |
| | | N | 96 |
| | Shopping malls quality | Correlation Coefficient | -.143 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .222 |
| | | N | 75 |
| | Transportation costs | Correlation Coefficient | -.018 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .863 |
| | | N | 91 |
| | Entertainment | Correlation Coefficient | -.065 |
| Spearman's rho | Entertainment | Sig. (2-tailed) | .558 |
| | | N | 84 |
| | The content of the conference programme | Correlation Coefficient | -.008 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .930 |
| | | N | 110 |

***correlation is significant at the 0.05 level**

Correlations between visiting other cities and satisfaction factors

| Notes | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Output Created | 06-JUN-2018 04:59:06 | |
| Comments | | |
| Input | Data | |
| | Active Dataset | DataSet1 |
| | Filter | <none> |
| | Weight | <none> |
| | Split File | <none> |
| | N of Rows in Working Data File | 124 |
| Missing Value Handling | Definition of Missing | User-defined missing values are treated as missing. |
| | Cases Used | Statistics for each pair of variables are based on all the cases with valid data for that pair. |
| Syntax | NONPAR CORR /VARIABLES=DidYouVisit_ A8 B2 B3 B4 B7 B8 B9 B10 B11 B12 A1 /PRINT=SPEARMAN TWOTAIL NOSIG /MISSING=PAIRWISE. | |
| Resources | Processor Time | 00:00:00.00 |
| | Elapsed Time | 00:00:00.00 |

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Number of Cases Allowed | 52428 cases ^a |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|

a. Based on availability of workspace memory

| Correlations | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| | | | Visit other cities |
| Spearman's rho | Visit other cities | Correlation | 1.000 |
| | | Coefficient | |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . |
| | | N | 120 |
| | Packages & Offers | Correlation | -.104 |
| | | Coefficient | |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .292 |
| | | N | 104 |
| | The range of accommodation available | Correlation | -.013 |
| | | Coefficient | |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .892 |
| | | N | 109 |
| | The quality of conference facilities | Correlation | .083 |
| | | Coefficient | |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .369 |
| | | N | 119 |
| The quality of accommodation | Correlation | .160 | |
| | Coefficient | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .096 | |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|------|
| | N | 109 | |
| Restaurant quality and range | Correlation Coefficient | -.122 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .198 | |
| | N | 114 | |
| Destination cleanliness | Correlation Coefficient | .079 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .404 | |
| | N | 114 | |
| Tourist information and availability | Correlation Coefficient | -.142 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .154 | |
| | N | 102 | |
| Shopping malls quality | Correlation Coefficient | -.143 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .203 | |
| | N | 81 | |
| Transportation costs | Correlation Coefficient | -.084 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .411 | |
| | N | 97 | |
| Entertainment | Correlation Coefficient | -.216* | |
| Spearman's rho | Entertainment | Sig. (2-tailed) | .042 |
| | | N | 89 |
| | The content of the conference programme | Correlation Coefficient | .029 |

| | | |
|--|-----------------|------|
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .758 |
| | N | 115 |

***correlation is significant at the 0.05 level**

Appendix Interview Questions for Government Organizations

2

1. Could you please tell me about yourself: degree, position, previous experience, age?
2. How many years have you been working in the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia?
3. What did you do before this?
4. Conference tourism is my focus; could you tell me what you think about it and how you imagine the future of the conference tourism in Saudi Arabia?
5. In your view, is the potential of Saudi Arabia is ready to become an international business and conference tourism destination? If yes, how; If no, why?
6. Do you think Saudi Arabia has the desire to open itself up to this kind of tourism or are there still some reservations? Can you give me an example?
7. What is the overall impact of tourism business on the Saudi economy?

8. What is your proposed model of business and conference tourism that may optimally work in The Kingdom? Can you give me an example?
9. What are the strengths and limitations of the Saudi Arabia conference tourism organisations that you have observed?
10. Are there any other issues that you want to clarify for me?

Appendix 3 Interview Questions for Staff and Managers of Private Companies Service Providers (management and organization) in Conferences Tourism

1. Could you please tell me about yourself: degree, position, previous experience, age?
2. How many years have you been working in the business tourism sector in Saudi Arabia?
3. What did you do before this, if relevant?
4. What type of agency are you in and can you provide me more details – establishment number of employees, etc.?
5. What is the main business of the agency?
6. Is it a local company, Middle East, or global?
7. Conference tourism is my focus; could you tell me is there any difference to organising a conference in Saudi Arabia or outside? Why?
8. What do you think about the advantages of Saudi Arabia in relation to the expansion of business and conference tourism?
9. In your view is the quality of service essential to the success of a conference?
10. Do you think Saudi Arabia has adopted Western business models related to

business tourism? How?

11. Are there any other issues that you want to clarify for me?

Appendix 4 Interview Questions for Internal Conference Delegates

1. Could you please tell me about yourself: where are you from, degree, age? What do you do?
2. How did you learn about this conference?
3. Did you have any difficulties attending this conference?
4. Have you been to more than one conference in the past? Where?
5. What attracted you to this conference? Why?
6. What do think about social and political feasibility of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia developing as an international business and conference tourism destination?
7. In your opinion, what are the challenges you perceive for the development of business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia?
8. What are the weaknesses and the strengths of conference tourism in the Saudi Arabia?
9. Would you recommend the Saudi Arabia as a conference destination to your friends, and colleagues? Why? If not, then why not?



**Research Title: Tourism Policy and Services Quality
Management in Business Conference Tourism in Saudi
Arabia**

International Delegate Questionnaire

By: Khalid ALmubark

kaa202@Exeter.ac.uk



Dear respondents:

I am Khalid Al Mubark, PhD student at Exeter University, United Kingdom.

This survey is an important part of my PhD research on service quality management in business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia. I would be grateful if you could please answer the following questions, The questionnaire will take about 5 minutes to finish both sections completely. All the information you share through this questionnaire is confidential and anonymous. It will be solely used for the purpose of the current academic research. It will not be shared with any other organisations or individuals.

Thanks for your time.

Sincerely

Khalid Al Mubark

Section A: Background Information

1. Gender:

Male

Female

2. Age:

Less than 25

25 - 35

36 - 45

46 - 55

56 - 60

60 and above

3. What is Your Nationality?

4. Please tell us your occupation.

5. In which type of organization do you work?

Private sector

Public sector

Other (Please specify) -----

6. How did you hear about the conference?

Conference website

Social media

Email Word of mouth

Press Sales Rep

Online media Other

Please specify-----

7. Which of the following responses best describe your accommodation arrangements while attending the conference?

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Staying home | 1 | |
| Friends' or relatives' home | 2 | |
| Motel/Hotel | 3 | |
| Apartment | 4 | |
| Others (Please specify) | 5 | |

8. If your answer to question 8 is Motel/Hotel or Apartment, please indicate rating

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Luxury (5 star) | 1 |
| Deluxe (4 star) | 2 |
| Standard (3 star) | 3 |
| Budget | 4 |

9. Please indicate how you booked your accommodation

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Through a conference organiser | 1 |
| A travel agent | 2 |
| Direct with a hotel | 3 |
| Using internet | 4 |
| Other (Please specify) | 5 |

10. Please indicate the number of nights you spent in Saudi Arabia while attending the conference in the box below:

11. How many more nights did you spend in Saudi Arabia in addition to the conference? Please indicate in the box below:

12. Would you have visited Saudi Arabia had the conference not been held?

Yes

No

Section B

Motivation and Satisfaction

13. What factors influenced you to attend the conference? Please use the scale of 1 to 5 to give your answers; note that 1 represents 'low influence' and 5 represents 'high influence'.

| The factors | Low influence | | | | | High influence | |
|---|---------------|---|---|---|---|----------------|--|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| The content of the conference programme | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | |
| The social programme of the conference | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | |
| The exhibition | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | |
| Business networking or opportunities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | |
| Conference location | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | |
| Conference fee | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | |
| The opportunity to visit the country | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | |
| Packages & Offers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| The accessibility of the destination | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Security and safety of the destination | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Previous visits to the destination | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Directed by an employer to attend | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| I attend this conference every year | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Others (Please specify) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

14. How satisfied were you with the following aspects while attending the conference destination? Please use the scale of 1 to 5 to give your answers; note that 1 represents 'very dissatisfied' and 5 represents 'very satisfied'.

| The factors | Very dissatisfied / Very Satisfied | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| The accessibility of the country | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| The range of accommodation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| available | | | | | | |
| The quality of conference facilities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| The quality of accommodation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Destination safety and security | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Cultural tolerance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Restaurant quality and range | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Destination cleanliness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Tourist information and availability | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Shopping malls quality | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Transportation costs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Entertainment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Others (Please specify) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

15. If you felt dissatisfied in any of the aspects above while attending the conference destination, could you please explain the reason why?

16. What about the conference fee & travel expenses? Are they:

Sponsor paid Organizers paid

Self-paid Other (Please specify)

17. How likely would you be to recommend to your colleagues to attend the business destination or conference? Please use the scale of 1 to 5 to give your answers; note that 1 represents 'very unlikely' and 5 represents 'very likely'.

| | | | | |
|---------------|----------|----------------------|--------|-------------|
| Very Unlikely | Unlikely | Don't Know/Undecided | Likely | Very Likely |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

18. Were you satisfied with this destination as a tourist country? Please use the scale of 1 to 5 to give your answers; note that 1 represents 'very dissatisfied' and 5 represents 'very satisfied'.

| | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Very Dissatisfied | Very Satisfied |
|-------------------|----------------|

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

19. Do you have any reasons for your ratings in the question above?

20. How many times have you visited Saudi Arabia before?

21. Did you visit other cities and towns during the trip? Please tick below

Yes No

22. Would have you visited this country if the conference was not here? Please tick below:

Yes No

23. Would you extend your stay after the conference? Please tick below:

Yes

Appendix Case study interview - Private sector : R-E

6

1. Could you please tell me about yourself: degree, position, previous experience, age?

I am 30 years old. I hold a Masters degree in Management, my Position. Director and company owner

2. How many years have you been working in the business tourism sector in Saudi Arabia?

5 years

3. What did you do before this, if relevant?

I was working in a private company in the administration department.

Yes, it's relevant to the sector.

4. What type of agency are you in and can you provide me more details – establishment number of employees, etc.?

Limited Liability Company, Providing logistical services, The number of employees: 9 employees full time and more than 100 employees part time.

5. What is the main business of the agency?

Providing logistical services.

6. Is it a local company, Middle East, or global?

Yes, it's a local company.

7. Conference tourism is my focus; could you tell me is there any difference to organising a conference in Saudi Arabia or outside? Why?

Each place has specific characteristics but in general there is no difference. The conference includes a specific topic or subject, discussion topics, speakers, audience, workshops... but in Saudi Arabia they are gracing the ceremony to prepare the particular prestige of the person who will open the conference and the presence of important personalities (All just a show up) ...it takes effort and time greater than the topic of the conference and the most of the audience on the first day belongs to the honorary personal.

I think there is no difference in places such as registry, regulations; however, organizing a conference in Saudi Arabia is different than outside; sometimes on the first day of the conference, most of the time between 4-5 hours are spent waiting for an important person who is sponsoring the conference, which results in a delay in the time-Table during the day of the conference, and the delay extends to the last day.

8. What do you think about the advantages of Saudi Arabia in relation to the expansion of business and conference tourism?

I think a strong economy and a promising sector supported by the government; the active and fast-growing market, also the existing value of the investments I think do not exist anywhere else in the world, thereby giving Saudi the opportunity for businesses and clients to link together, and presenting the scope for companies to publicise themselves and their products among the leaders of communications industries from all over the world.

I think tourism conferences are commensurate with Saudi Arabia because there is no type that attracts tourists business tourism and is suitable with the strength of the economy of Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, most of our customers for conference activities come from government sectors. The Government ministries have abundant money that they use to seek fame through conferences and provide their activities

In fact, despite the advantages there are some negative things... there are no services in small towns, which increases the cost of conferences Especially for those who organize a conference; also not enough conferences halls.

9. In your view is the quality of service essential to the success of a conference?

More importantly, time management.. As I mentioned earlier, sometimes on the first day of the conference, people have to wait between 4 to 5 hours for the important person sponsoring the conference to come, which results in a delay on the time-Table and this extends even to the last day.

Also, to provide quality services, facilities must correspond to the type of conference. This means that a lack of good facilities for holding conferences leads to poor services and consequently affects the success of the conference.

10. Do you think Saudi Arabia has adopted Western business models related to business tourism? How?

There is no specific model. This side lacks a scientific article or courses to adopt a model suited to development of the sector. Hence, the lack of this research about Saudi Arabia's conference tourism has made it inadequate.

11. Are there any other issues that you want to clarify for me?

There is a very important issue, such as that the sector needs qualified people who graduate from universities in subjects serving the sector. Such as events management and conferences.

Appendix 7

29 July 2015

To Whom It May Concern


Our ref: Khalid Abdulaziz ALmubark

This is to confirm that the above mentioned is PhD Researcher will be conducting a research study in "Tourism policy and Service quality management in business and conference tourism in Saudi Arabia".

Mr Khalid has informed us about the design of the study, Qualitative, including semi-structured interviews and we support this effort, by helping them to contact the concerned organisations in Saudi Arabia.

Sincerely,

CEO



Dr. Zohair Al Sarraj



Appendix 8



7936759298312154



Dear Khalid Almubark,

Thank you for registering to attend the [ARABAL 2015](#) conference which starts tomorrow - Sunday 15 November 2015, at the DIEC, Dammam, Saudi Arabia.

Please [click here](#) for directions to the venue.

The opening ceremony starts at 09.30. Registration from 08.00. Please [click here](#) for the latest conference program and speakers.

Prior to your arrival **please print out this email and bring it with you to the event.**

You will need to scan the barcode above at one of the e-ticket desks in order to have your individual badge printed. This badge will give you access to the event. If you cannot see a barcode at the top of this email, [view it in your browser](#).

We look forward to seeing you at the event.

Best Regards,

The ARABAL organisers



15 - 17 November 2015

Dhahran International Exhibitions Center, Dammam, Saudi Arabia

The Leading Aluminium Conference and Exhibition in the Region

Order information:

Order number: 00272
Order date and time: 2015-10-30 22:12:00
Paid date and time: 2015-10-30 22:12:00

Mr Khalid Almubark
Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia
Cultural Bureau in London
18 Culm Grove
Exeter
United Kingdom
EX27QX
GB

Event organiser:

BME Global Limited
8 Tyers Gate
London
SE1 3HX
United Kingdom

VAT Number: 945397481

Phone: +44 207 511 9582

Fax: +44 207 022 1722

Email:
larelle@bme-global.com

| Order Details | | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|----------|-------------|---------------|
| Line | Description | Quantity | Unit Price | Line Price |
| 1 | Delegate place for conference | 1 | \$2,200.00 | \$2,200.00 |
| 2 | Promotional code: Student foc | 1 | -\$2,200.00 | -\$2,200.00 |
| Order Total | | | | \$0.00 |

Thank you for your business.



15 - 17 November 2015

Dhahran International Exhibitions Center, Dammam, Saudi Arabia

The Leading Aluminium Conference and Exhibition in the Region



7936759298312154

This is your Conference e-ticket.

Please print it out and bring it with you to the show.

Your conference ticket also gives you access to the ARABAL exhibition, you will not need to complete another registration.

Mr Khalid Almubark
Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia
PhD Researcher
Cultural Bureau in London, 18 Culm Grove, Exeter, United Kingdom,
EX27QX, United Kingdom

VENUE

Dhahran Exhibition Centre
4344 Exhibition Rd, Rakkah
Dammam 34213
Saudi Arabia
Tel: +(966) 13 859 1888

Appendix 9



Dear Mr. Khalid ALmubark

We are pleased to invite you to the "3rd International Conference of Endocrinology and Diabetes" - (3rd ICED). The 3rd ICED is organized by the Saudi Society of Endocrinology and Metabolism (SSEM) under the Patronage of **Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdul-Aziz, the past governor of Riyadh**. As a scientific health society in the field of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism for both adults and children, the SSEM has the vision of promoting the delivery of quality health care in providing education and training services to the healthcare providers in this field.

Aiming to deliver content packed scientific programme with value based sessions across 3 days Conference shall have workshops too and the focus will be on clinical aspects of diabetes to update our current knowledge and understanding for treatment of type 1& 2 diabetes & its complication or co-morbid diseases. It also will address the latest evidence based update in the diagnosis and management of common endocrine disorders in clinical practice. The conference is expected to be accredited with 30CME hours.

We look forward to a positive confirmation, an honor for us indeed.

Sincerely,

Dr. Atallah Al-Ruhaily

President, Saudi Society for Endocrinology and Metabolism (SSEM)

Invitation to the "3rd International Conference of Endocrinology and Diabetes" - (3rd ICED)

Appendix 10

القياس
التأصيل
المرفقات

المؤتمر الدولي الثاني للقياس والتقييم
THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

قياس
ICA - 2015

إفادة حضور

إلى من يهمه الأمر...

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته. وبعد:

تفيد لجنة أمانة المؤتمر بأن السيد/ خالد بن عبدالعزيز المبارك هو أحد المسجلين في المؤتمر الدولي الثاني للقياس والتقييم والمقام برعاية كريمة من معالي وزير التعليم الدكتور عزام بن محمد الدخيل تحت عنوان (قياس نواتج التعلم) بقاعة الملك فيصل للمؤتمرات بفندق الانتركونتيننتال في مدينة الرياض. وذلك في الفترة من ١٩ - ٢١ محرم ١٤٣٧هـ الموافق ١ - ٣ ديسمبر ٢٠١٥ م.

وبناءً على طلبه أعطي هذه الإفادة

والله الموفق...

أمين المؤتمر



خالد بن عبدالعزيز المبارك

ica.qiyas.sa

Tel + 966 11 490 5090
Fax + 966 11 210 1097
ica@qiyas.org
P.O. box 555 - Riyadh 11511

شهادة حضور مؤتمر

CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDANCE AT THE CONFERENCE

The National Center for Assessment Certifies that

Khalid al-mubark

Has attendatnd the Second International Conference on

Assessment & Evaluation Entitled (Learning Outcomes Assessment)

2015 December 01-03,Riyadh

يشهد المركز الوطني للقياس والتقييم أن

خالد المبارك

قد حضر وقائع المؤتمر الدولي الثاني للقياس والتقييم
تحت عنوان (قياس نواتج التعلم) والمنعقد في
مدينة الرياض خلال الفترة من ١٩ - ٢١ صفر ١٤٣٧هـ
الموافق ١ - ٣ ديسمبر ٢٠١٥م

رئيس المركز الوطني للقياس والتقييم

President, The National Center for Assessment

الدكتور فيصل بن عبدالله المشاري آل سعود

Dr.Faisal bin Abdullah Al Mishari' Al-Saud



رئيس اللجنة العلمية

Chairman, Scientific Committee

الدكتور عبدالله بن علي الفاطمي

Dr.abdullah A. Alqataee



Appendix 11

التاريخ: ١٤٣٧/٠١/٣٠ هـ



البرنامج الوطني للمعارض والمؤتمرات
Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau
secb.gov.sa

معالي رئيس مدينة الملك عبدالعزيز للعلوم والتقنية

الدكتور / محمد بن إبراهيم السويل

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

الموقر

نفيد معاليكم بأن الباحث/ خالد بن عبدالعزيز المبارك سعودي الجنسية طالب مبعث ببرنامج الدكتوراه بالمملكة المتحدة تخصص معارض ومؤتمرات ويقوم بإجراء عدد من البحوث العلمية في قطاع المعارض والمؤتمرات كجزء من متطلبات الدرجة العلمية، ونظراً لإقامة الندوة الرابعة للحرب الإلكترونية ٢٠١٥م والمقرر انعقادها خلال الفترة ٢٢- ٢٣ نوفمبر ٢٠١٥م بمدينة الرياض ورغبتنا في حضور الباحث/ خالد المبارك المنتدى والمشاركة بفعالياته المصاحبة، فإننا نأمل من معاليكم التكرم بتوجيه من يلزم طرفكم الموقر لتمكين الباحث من الحضور والمشاركة للمنتدى إيماناً منا بأهمية دور الباحثين في مجال المعارض والمؤتمرات و عطفاً على جهود الباحث المتميزة والتي يتمتع بها بموازاة ما قدمه خلال مسيرة بحثه العلمية لخدمة الأهداف الوطنية في مجال قطاع المعارض والمؤتمرات.

ولكم تحياتنا،،،

المدير التنفيذي للبرنامج الوطني للمعارض والمؤتمرات

م. طارق بن عبدالرحمن العيسى

Appendix 12



برنامج الوطني للمعارض والمؤتمرات
Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau
secb.gov.sa

To Whom It May Concern

Subject: Khalid Abdulaziz AlMubark

This is to confirm that the above mentioned PhD Researcher will be conducting a research study in "Tourism policy and Service quality management in business conference tourism in Saudi Arabia"

Mr. AlMubarak has informed us about the design of the study which is qualitative, including semi-structured interviews. He should return to Saudi Arabia for one month between **7th November** and **7th December 2015**. This is an essential part of his research as he needs to make important interviews at a number of major events and meetings during this time.

We support this effort and will provide any assistance found necessary for the study implementation success.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Eng.Tariq Al-Essa
Executive Director



Appendix 12



البرنامج الوطني للمعارض والمؤتمرات
Saudi Exhibition & Convention Bureau
secb.gov.sa

الرقم: ب/١٩٦/٣٧
التاريخ: ٠٤ / ٠٣ / ١٤٣٧ هـ
الملفات: -

الموضوع: إفادة المبتعث خالد المبارك

يحفظه الله

سعادة /الملحق الثقافي السعودي في بريطانيا

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

إشارة إلى طلب المبتعث / خالد بن عبد العزيز المبارك سجل مدني رقم (١٠٥٦٢١٤٣٥٤) المتضمن قيامه برحلة علمية إلى المملكة العربية السعودية لجمع البيانات وإجراء المقابلات اللازمة لبحثه لدرجة الدكتوراه، نفيكم بأن المبتعث قد قام بالرحلة العلمية وذلك بحضور عدة مؤتمرات بالمملكة لغرض جمع البيانات وإجراء المقابلات اللازمة للبحث خلال الفترة من ٢٠١٥/١١/٦م الى تاريخ ٢٠١٥/١٢/٠٦م.

ولسعادتكم خالص تحياتنا،



المدير التنفيذي

للبرنامج الوطني للمعارض والمؤتمرات



م. طارق بن عبدالرحمن العيسى