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**Business Implication of Sustainable Tourism: A Field Study in
NEWOM's Hospitality Sector**

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Abstract

This study explores the business implications of sustainable tourism in the hospitality sector of NEOM, one of Saudi Arabia's most significant development projects. As the global tourism industry increasingly shifts towards sustainability, this research aims to investigate how sustainable tourism practices impact business operations in the region. Through a field study involving key stakeholders in NEOM's hospitality sector, a mixed-method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative research was used to analyze data related to the adoption of sustainability practices in hotels and resorts. The findings indicate that sustainable tourism contributes to enhancing brand reputation, increasing customer loyalty, and driving long-term profitability, despite challenges related to initial implementation costs and investment. The study concludes by offering recommendations for businesses on how to integrate sustainability practices in line with the sustainable development goals of NEOM.

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Research Terms

❖ Sustainable Tourism

Refers to tourism practices that aim to minimize negative environmental, social, and economic impacts while promoting responsible management of natural resources and supporting local communities. Sustainable tourism emphasizes maintaining the quality of life for both visitors and host communities, and it ensures that tourism development does not deplete the resources it depends on (UNWTO, 2020).

❖ Hospitality Sector

Encompasses all businesses and services that provide accommodation, food, and leisure services to tourists. In this context, it refers to hotels, resorts, and other tourism-related businesses in NEOM, which play a significant role in the adoption of sustainable tourism practices (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

❖ Profitability

Referring to the financial performance and success of hospitality businesses. Profitability is measured through various metrics such as revenue, cost savings from sustainable practices, and long-term financial growth. Sustainable practices can contribute to profitability by enhancing operational efficiency, reducing costs, and attracting customers willing to pay a premium for eco-friendly services (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

❖ Customer Loyalty

The likelihood that customers will return to a particular hospitality business due to positive experiences, including those related to sustainability efforts. Businesses that adopt sustainable tourism practices often see increased customer loyalty, as eco-conscious travelers prefer staying at environmentally responsible hotels (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

❖ Brand Value

The worth of a company's brand based on customer perceptions, loyalty, and reputation. Adopting sustainable tourism practices can significantly enhance a company's brand value by

differentiating it from competitors and attracting eco-conscious customers who value sustainability (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

❖ **Green Technology**

Referring to technologies that are environmentally friendly and help reduce the ecological footprint of tourism businesses. In the hospitality sector, this includes energy-efficient systems, renewable energy sources, waste management technologies, and resource optimization tools that promote sustainability (Al-Naim, 2021).

❖ **Vision 2030**

Saudi Arabia's long-term plan for economic diversification, which includes a focus on sustainable tourism and development. NEOM, as a part of Vision 2030, aims to develop a futuristic city with an emphasis on innovation, sustainability, and environmental stewardship. Tourism is a key component of this vision, and businesses in NEOM are expected to align their operations with sustainability goals (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016).

❖ **Technological Innovation**

The use of advanced technology to enhance efficiency, sustainability, and customer experience in hospitality businesses. This includes the use of smart technologies for energy management, water conservation, waste reduction, and optimizing the guest experience in a sustainable manner (Jones & Smith, 2020).

❖ **Corporate Social Responsibility - CSR**

Refers to the ethical responsibility of businesses to contribute positively to society and the environment. In sustainable tourism, CSR involves actions such as supporting local communities, reducing environmental impacts, and ensuring fair labor practices (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

❖ **Operational Challenges**

The difficulties faced by businesses when implementing sustainability initiatives. These challenges include high initial costs, the complexity of integrating sustainable practices into

existing operations, and the difficulty of meeting regulatory requirements. Businesses may also face resistance from staff or stakeholders who are not fully aligned with sustainability goals (Sharpley, 2009).

❖ **Environmental Sustainability**

In the context of sustainable tourism, it refers to practices that ensure the long-term health and preservation of natural resources. This includes reducing waste, conserving energy and water, and maintaining biodiversity through sustainable tourism operations (UNWTO, 2020).

❖ **Economic Sustainability**

Involves ensuring that tourism operations are economically viable and contribute to the local economy without depleting resources or creating long-term financial burdens. Economic sustainability in hospitality businesses in NEOM requires balancing profitability with environmentally responsible practices (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

❖ **Social Sustainability**

The concept is that businesses should support social equity, community development, and human well-being. For NEOM's hospitality businesses, this means integrating fair labor practices, supporting local businesses, and creating positive social impacts through tourism (UNWTO, 2020).

❖ **Sustainable Practices**

Referring to the actions taken by businesses to reduce their negative environmental impacts and promote long-term viability. In the hospitality industry, this includes energy efficiency, waste management, water conservation, sustainable sourcing, and offering eco-friendly accommodations and services (Al-Naim, 2021).

Chapter One

General Introduction to Research

Introduction

Sustainable tourism has emerged as a critical focus within the global tourism industry. Driven by increasing concerns over environmental degradation, resource depletion, and the growing need for socially responsible travel practices, sustainable tourism is now seen as essential for ensuring the long-term growth of the sector while minimizing its negative effects on local communities and ecosystems (UNWTO, 2020). The hospitality sector, as a significant contributor to the tourism industry, plays a vital role in implementing these sustainable practices. Its operations not only affect the environment but also directly impact local economies and societies (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

In line with global trends, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has made substantial efforts to incorporate sustainability into its development agenda. Under the Vision 2030 initiative, tourism has been identified as a key area for economic diversification and growth, with a particular emphasis on sustainable practices (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). The creation of NEOM, a futuristic city in northwestern Saudi Arabia, represents a unique opportunity to explore the potential of sustainable tourism in a highly innovative and rapidly developing region. The hospitality sector within NEOM, including hotels, resorts, and other tourism-related businesses, faces both significant opportunities and challenges in adopting sustainable tourism practices (Al-Naim, 2021).

This study aims to explore the business implications of sustainable tourism in NEOM's hospitality sector. Specifically, it investigates how the adoption of sustainable practices influences business operations, profitability, and long-term success. It also examines the challenges businesses face in implementing sustainability within NEOM's growing tourism landscape. Understanding these business implications is crucial for guiding the development of sustainable tourism in the region, ensuring that businesses not only contribute to the broader sustainability goals of NEOM but also remain competitive in the global tourism market (UNWTO, 2020).

Problem Statement

The global tourism industry is increasingly prioritizing sustainability as a way to mitigate the negative environmental, social, and economic impacts of tourism (UNWTO, 2020). However, the business implications of adopting sustainable tourism practices in emerging destinations, such as NEOM, remain underexplored. NEOM, a rapidly developing city in Saudi Arabia, is positioned as a key player in the country's Vision 2030 strategy, which aims to diversify the economy and develop a sustainable tourism sector (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). Despite the growing attention on sustainability, there is limited research on how hospitality businesses in NEOM are integrating these practices, the challenges they face, and the resulting impact on their profitability and long-term success.

The hospitality sector in NEOM faces unique challenges due to its emerging nature, technological innovations, and the ambitious scale of its development (Al-Naim, 2021). As businesses in the region adopt sustainability practices, understanding the effects on their operations is crucial to ensuring that NEOM's tourism sector can thrive while meeting the economic, environmental, and social goals outlined in Vision 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). Moreover, the relationship between sustainable tourism and business success is complex, with businesses often encountering financial, operational, and regulatory obstacles when implementing sustainability initiatives (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Thus, the problem this study addresses is the lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the business implications of sustainable tourism practices within NEOM's hospitality sector. This research seeks to fill this gap by exploring how sustainable tourism practices influence business operations, the barriers businesses face, and the potential long-term benefits of sustainability in this rapidly evolving region.

Main Research Question:

What are the business implications of adopting sustainable tourism practices in NEOM's hospitality sector?

Secondary Research Questions

1. How do sustainable tourism practices impact the profitability of hospitality businesses in NEOM?
2. What challenges do hospitality businesses in NEOM face when implementing sustainable tourism practices?
3. To what extent do customers' perceptions of sustainability influence their choice of hospitality services in NEOM?
4. What are the key environmental, social, and economic benefits of sustainable tourism for businesses operating in NEOM's hospitality sector?
5. How do hospitality businesses in NEOM align their operations with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 sustainability goals?
6. What role do technological innovations and smart infrastructure play in promoting sustainability in NEOM's hospitality sector?

Importance of Research

Theoretical Importance

- ❖ This research contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field of sustainable tourism by addressing a gap in academic literature, particularly in the context of emerging tourist destinations like NEOM.
- ❖ It explores the business implications of sustainability within the hospitality sector in rapidly developing regions, an area that remains underexplored.
- ❖ The study will offer a novel perspective on how sustainability initiatives impact business operations, profitability, and long-term success in a unique context such as NEOM.
- ❖ The research will contribute to theoretical models in sustainable tourism, integrating business strategy, environmental responsibility, and social impact.
- ❖ It will enhance the understanding of how hospitality businesses can align their sustainable practices with both economic goals and sustainability targets.
- ❖ The outcomes will provide insights into how innovation and technology can serve as enablers of sustainability within the tourism industry, particularly in emerging economies.

Practical Importance

- ❖ This research has direct applicability to the hospitality sector in NEOM, as well as other regions undergoing rapid tourism development with sustainability at the forefront.
- ❖ The study will equip hospitality managers and business owners with insights into how to adopt and implement sustainable practices while ensuring long-term profitability and environmental stewardship.
- ❖ It will highlight the economic, social, and environmental benefits of sustainability in tourism, helping industry professionals navigate challenges such as high initial costs, operational complexities, and regulatory compliance.
- ❖ The research will inform policy development, guiding stakeholders in NEOM to align their practices with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 sustainability goals, promoting economic diversification and green growth in the tourism sector.
- ❖ The findings will serve as a practical resource for businesses seeking transition to sustainable practices while maintaining or increasing their market competitiveness.

- ❖ The research will contribute to establishing NEOM as a model for sustainable tourism in emerging global markets, positioning the region as a leader in responsible tourism.

Purpose of Research

- ❖ Examine the impact of sustainability initiatives on the profitability and operational efficiency of hospitality businesses in NEOM.
- ❖ Identify the challenges faced by businesses in implementing sustainable tourism practices, including financial, operational, and regulatory barriers.
- ❖ Assess the relationship between customer perceptions of sustainability and their choices in hospitality services within NEOM.
- ❖ Evaluate the benefits of integrating sustainable practices in the hospitality sector, particularly in terms of long-term business success, customer loyalty, and brand value.
- ❖ Provide recommendations for hospitality businesses in NEOM to enhance their sustainability efforts while aligning with the broader economic and environmental goals set out by Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

Research Hypotheses

Main Hypothesis

- ❖ **H1:** The adoption of sustainable tourism practices positively impacts the profitability and long-term business success of hospitality businesses in NEOM.

This hypothesis proposes that sustainability initiatives, such as eco-friendly operations and responsible tourism practices, will contribute to the overall success of hospitality businesses in NEOM by improving profitability, customer loyalty, and brand reputation.

Main Hypothesis

- ❖ **H2:** Hospitality businesses in NEOM face significant challenges in implementing sustainable tourism practices due to financial, operational, and regulatory barriers.

This hypothesis suggests that while businesses may recognize the benefits of sustainable practices, they may encounter substantial obstacles in the implementation process, such as high initial costs, operational complexity, and regulatory compliance.

- ❖ **H3:** Customers' perceptions of sustainability influence their choices of hospitality services in NEOM, with a higher preference for businesses adopting eco-friendly and socially responsible practices.

This hypothesis assumes that customer decision-making is influenced by sustainability, meaning that businesses that implement sustainability initiatives will be more attractive to consumers in NEOM.

- ❖ **H4:** The integration of sustainable tourism practices in NEOM's hospitality sector leads to increased customer loyalty and higher brand value over time.

This hypothesis suggests that sustainable practices not only attract customers but also result in long-term benefits, such as stronger brand loyalty and enhanced brand image.

- ❖ **H5:** NEOM's hospitality businesses align their sustainability practices with the broader economic and environmental goals outlined in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

Research Model

The research model for this study is designed to illustrate the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and their business implications in the hospitality sector in NEOM. It includes both independent and dependent variables, showing how different factors of sustainability influence business outcomes.

Key Variables in the Research Model

1. Independent Variables (Sustainable Tourism Practices):

- ❖ Eco-friendly operations: These refer to practices such as energy conservation, waste management, and water usage reduction (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).
- ❖ Socially responsible practices: This includes community engagement, employee welfare, and efforts to promote social equity (UNWTO, 2020).
- ❖ Technological innovations: The use of smart technologies, resource optimization, and green technologies in hotels and resorts (Al-Naim, 2021).
- ❖ Regulatory compliance: Adherence to national and international environmental and social standards, as well as government policies.

2. Dependent Variables (Business Implications):

- ❖ Profitability: The effect of sustainability on financial performance, cost savings, and overall business profitability (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).
- ❖ Customer Loyalty: The influence of sustainability on customers' long-term loyalty and repeat business.
- ❖ Brand Value: The impact of adopting sustainable practices on brand image and consumer perceptions.
- ❖ Operational Efficiency: The improvements in business operations, such as cost reductions and optimized resource management, due to sustainable practices.

3. Moderating Variables:

- ❖ Customer Perceptions: Consumer awareness and attitudes towards sustainability often influence their decision-making (UNWTO, 2020).
- ❖ Regulatory Environment: Policies and guidelines established by the government that either encourage or limit sustainable practices.

- ❖ **Market Conditions:** Economic and competitive factors that affect how sustainability practices are integrated into the hospitality industry (Al-Naim, 2021).

Research Model Framework

- ❖ The **independent variables** (sustainable tourism practices) are hypothesized to positively influence the **dependent variables** (business outcomes such as profitability, customer loyalty, brand value, and operational efficiency) (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).
- ❖ The **moderating variables** are considered external factors that may influence or enhance the relationship between sustainability practices and business performance (Al-Naim, 2021).

Diagram of the Research Model

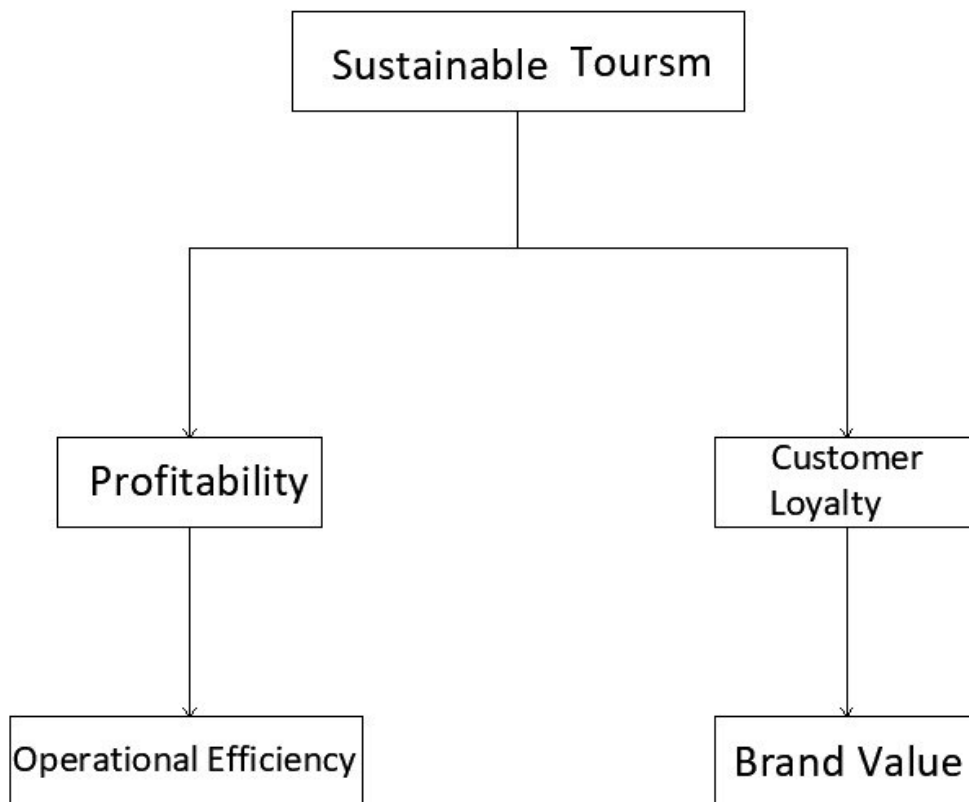


Figure 1-Diagram of the Research Model

Conclusion of Chapter one

In this introductory chapter, the research has been framed within the context of sustainable tourism in the hospitality sector of NEOM, Saudi Arabia. The problem statement highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the business implications of sustainable practices in the rapidly developing tourism sector of NEOM. The chapter outlined the significance of the study, both theoretically and practically, emphasizing its contribution to the academic field and its real-world applicability to hospitality businesses. The purpose of the research and the associated hypotheses were presented, setting the foundation for the study. Additionally, the research model and scope were defined to provide a clear framework for the study's focus on the spatial, human, temporal, and subjective boundaries. This chapter sets the stage for the detailed analysis that follows, addressing the research questions and testing the proposed hypotheses in subsequent sections.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introudtion

In this section, we will examine the existing literature related to sustainable tourism and its business implications, particularly in the context of the hospitality sector in emerging destinations like NEOM. Sustainable tourism has become a key area of focus due to increasing concerns about environmental degradation, resource depletion, and the need for responsible travel practices. As the hospitality sector plays a significant role in the tourism industry, the integration of sustainability practices can have far-reaching implications for business operations, profitability, and long-term success (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; UNWTO, 2020).

This literature review will address various dimensions of sustainable tourism, including its impact on profitability, customer loyalty, and operational efficiency. Additionally, it will explore the challenges faced by businesses in adopting sustainable practices, particularly in rapidly developing regions such as NEOM. Through an in-depth review of prior research, this section will provide insights into the potential benefits and barriers to implementing sustainability initiatives in the hospitality sector and the role that technological innovations and customer perceptions play in these processes.

Literature Review

1. Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2011).

Sustainable tourism and the business implications of its practices: A review of the literature. Tourism Management, 32(5), 1052-1062.

In their comprehensive review, Bramwell and Lane (2011) explore the critical business implications of adopting sustainable tourism practices in the hospitality sector. Their research highlights how sustainability initiatives can positively impact profitability by fostering long-term customer loyalty and improving brand value. They argue that integrating sustainability is not only a matter of corporate responsibility but is increasingly essential for businesses striving to maintain a competitive edge in the global tourism market. The authors further delve into the operational challenges that businesses face when implementing sustainability, such as the high initial investment costs and the complexity of compliance with environmental regulations. By examining a range of case studies from different tourism destinations, they provide valuable insights into the economic and social benefits of sustainable practices, as well as the barriers to their adoption in the hospitality sector. The paper serves as an important foundation for understanding how businesses can align sustainability with profitability, an essential aspect for the hospitality industry, especially in rapidly developing regions like NEOM.

2. UNWTO (2020).

Tourism for development: Volume 1: The importance of tourism in sustainable development. United Nations World Tourism Organization.

The UNWTO (2020) report offers an extensive analysis of the role of tourism in sustainable development. It emphasizes the importance of integrating sustainability into tourism practices to reduce environmental degradation, promote social equity, and support local economies. The report outlines how the hospitality sector, as a major component of the tourism industry, must adopt sustainable tourism practices to meet the evolving demands of global travelers while contributing to the broader goals of sustainable development. The UNWTO provides guidelines for businesses to incorporate eco-friendly operations, support local communities, and reduce their environmental footprint. Furthermore, the report discusses the growing consumer preference for businesses that demonstrate a commitment to

sustainability, highlighting the need for businesses to respond to these market demands by adopting responsible tourism practices. This report is particularly relevant to the context of NEOM, as it aligns with the region's focus on developing a sustainable tourism industry in line with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

3. Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2018).

Sustainable tourism and the importance of corporate social responsibility: A review of the literature. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 26(5), 703-723.

Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) provides an in-depth review of the intersection between sustainable tourism and corporate social responsibility (CSR), focusing on how businesses can integrate socially responsible practices into their tourism operations. The study asserts that CSR is a critical component of sustainability in the hospitality sector, as it not only addresses environmental issues but also promotes social equity and community development. The author reviews a wide range of academic and industry literature, examining the ways in which CSR initiatives enhance the profitability and reputation of hospitality businesses. The review also discusses the growing consumer demand for ethical business practices, noting that customers are increasingly choosing brands that prioritize sustainability in their operations. For hospitality businesses, this shift in consumer preferences presents both opportunities and challenges. The study suggests that integrating CSR into business models can lead to long-term benefits, including increased customer loyalty, enhanced brand value, and improved operational efficiency. This work underscores the importance of aligning business strategies with sustainability and CSR, providing valuable insights for businesses in NEOM as they navigate the complexities of sustainable tourism.

4. Al-Naim, F. (2021).

Sustainable tourism and the emerging role of NEOM in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. International Journal of Tourism Research, 23(4), 320-334.

Al-Naim (2021) focuses on the emerging role of NEOM, a futuristic city in Saudi Arabia, as a potential leader in sustainable tourism. As part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, NEOM is positioned as a key player in the country's efforts to diversify its economy and develop a sustainable tourism sector. This study examines the challenges and opportunities that hospitality businesses in NEOM face as they adopt sustainability practices in the region's rapidly evolving tourism market. Al-Naim discusses the ambitious scale of NEOM's

development, which includes high-tech infrastructure and a focus on environmental sustainability. The research highlights the unique challenges faced by businesses in such an innovative and technologically advanced environment, including the integration of green technologies, regulatory compliance, and the need to balance sustainability with profitability. The paper also explores how NEOM's hospitality sector can leverage its position as a new and emerging destination to attract a growing segment of environmentally conscious tourists. Al-Naim's work provides a valuable case study for understanding the business implications of sustainability in a rapidly developing tourism destination, making it particularly relevant to the context of your study.

5. Sharpley, R. (2009).

Sustainable tourism: A state-of-the-art review. Tourism Geographies, 11(1), 90-108.

Sharpley (2009) offers a state-of-the-art review on the concept of sustainable tourism, examining both theoretical and practical dimensions of sustainability in the tourism industry. The review explores the various facets of sustainable tourism, including environmental conservation, social responsibility, and economic viability, while analyzing the challenges and benefits associated with their implementation in the hospitality sector. Sharpley provides a critical analysis of the ways in which businesses incorporate sustainability into their operations and the resulting effects on profitability and business performance. He emphasizes that while there are clear benefits to adopting sustainable practices, such as cost reductions through resource efficiency and enhanced brand loyalty, there are also significant barriers, including high upfront costs, lack of regulatory support, and resistance from industry stakeholders. The review includes case studies from various global tourism destinations and provides insights into how hospitality businesses can overcome these barriers to implement sustainable tourism practices effectively. Sharpley's work is invaluable for understanding the broader context of sustainable tourism, providing a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities businesses face in integrating sustainability into their operations.

Benefits of the Literature Reviews:

❖ **Comprehensive Understanding of Sustainable Tourism Practices**

The literature reviews help establish a clear and comprehensive understanding of the core concepts of sustainable tourism. By examining how sustainability is defined and implemented across the tourism industry, they provide valuable insights into the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of tourism. This foundation is essential for understanding the multi-faceted impact of sustainable tourism on hospitality businesses in NEOM, helping to contextualize your research within the broader global trends (UNWTO, 2020).

❖ **Identification of Business Implications**

Bramwell and Lane (2011) as well as Sharpley (2009) explore the business implications of sustainability, including the direct impact on profitability, customer loyalty, and operational efficiency. These reviews identify both the opportunities and challenges faced by hospitality businesses when adopting sustainable practices. Understanding these implications is crucial for your study as it lays the groundwork for analyzing how businesses in NEOM are navigating these factors and what results they are experiencing in terms of financial success and long-term viability.

❖ **Insight into Customer Preferences and Market Demand**

Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) and Sharpley (2009) discuss the growing importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the increasing consumer preference for businesses that prioritize sustainability. This information is valuable for your study, as understanding consumer attitudes towards sustainability can help explain the demand for sustainable practices in NEOM's hospitality sector. Businesses that align with these preferences may have a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining customers, particularly in a market like NEOM, where sustainability is a central focus of development.

❖ **Relevance to NEOM's Context and Vision 2030**

Al-Naim (2021) directly addresses the unique context of NEOM and its role in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. This literature review highlights the specific challenges and opportunities that businesses in NEOM face when implementing sustainable tourism practices, especially considering the region's technological innovations and ambitious sustainability goals. It offers a framework for understanding how NEOM's hospitality sector

can leverage its status as an emerging destination to incorporate sustainability and align with national goals. This is particularly important as NEOM is a case study for sustainable tourism development in a rapidly evolving region.

❖ **Exploration of Technological Innovation**

The integration of technology into sustainable tourism practices is emphasized by Al-Naim (2021) and other scholars. The literature reviews suggest that technological innovations, such as resource optimization and green technologies, are crucial for businesses to implement sustainability effectively while maintaining operational efficiency. This benefit is particularly relevant to NEOM, where advanced technologies and smart infrastructure are central to its development, making these studies particularly useful for understanding how technological advancements can enhance sustainability in the region's hospitality sector.

❖ **Identification of Barriers to Sustainability Adoption**

Many of the reviews, such as those by Bramwell & Lane (2011) and Sharpley (2009), discuss the barriers businesses face when adopting sustainable practices, such as high initial investment costs, operational complexity, and regulatory challenges. These barriers are essential to understand for your research, as they will help identify the hurdles that hospitality businesses in NEOM might encounter and provide insights into potential solutions. This understanding allows for a balanced exploration of both the benefits and challenges of sustainability in NEOM's hospitality industry.

❖ **Contribution to Policy Development and Strategic Recommendations**

The literature reviews provide valuable insights into how hospitality businesses can align their operations with national policies, such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). These insights are critical for informing policy development and offering strategic recommendations to hospitality businesses in NEOM. By understanding the broader economic, environmental, and social goals of Vision 2030, your study can contribute to developing actionable strategies for businesses in NEOM to implement sustainable practices while remaining competitive in the global tourism market.

❖ **Theoretical Framework for Future Research**

The studies reviewed (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Sharpley, 2009) offer a strong theoretical foundation that can be used to guide future research in sustainable tourism, particularly in emerging destinations like NEOM. They help refine theoretical models by integrating business strategy, sustainability, and innovation, which is essential for understanding how these elements interact in practice. By contributing to the theoretical discussion, your study will advance knowledge in this field and offer valuable insights into sustainable tourism in new contexts.

Unique Aspects of the Literature Reviews

❖ **Focus on Emerging Destinations**

Al-Naim (2021) provides unique insights into sustainable tourism in emerging destinations like NEOM, contrasting with the more commonly studied established destinations. NEOM's rapid development presents specific challenges and opportunities in adopting sustainable practices, making this perspective highly relevant to your study.

❖ **Integration of Technological Innovation**

The role of technological innovations in sustainable tourism, particularly in NEOM, is emphasized by Al-Naim (2021). With NEOM's advanced infrastructure, the literature highlights how smart technologies, green technologies, and resource optimization can drive sustainability, a factor not always discussed in other regions.

❖ **Alignment with Saudi Vision 2030**

Al-Naim (2021) aligns sustainable tourism with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, offering a unique perspective on how NEOM's tourism sector contributes to the national economic diversification and sustainability goals. This direct connection between sustainability and national policy is a distinguishing feature of the review.

❖ **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) links CSR with sustainable tourism, demonstrating how socially responsible practices can enhance brand reputation, customer loyalty, and profitability. This integrated approach to sustainability and CSR provides valuable insights for businesses in NEOM's hospitality sector.

❖ **Profitability and Sustainability Link**

Bramwell and Lane (2011) uniquely address how sustainable tourism practices directly impact business profitability. Their review highlights the financial benefits of eco-friendly practices, such as cost savings and improved customer loyalty, a critical aspect for hospitality businesses in NEOM.

❖ **Global Insights with Local Application**

Sharpley (2009) offers a global perspective on sustainable tourism while including localized case studies that make the findings relevant to regions like NEOM. This balance allows for a nuanced understanding of how global trends in sustainability can be adapted to local contexts.

❖ **Policy and Strategic Recommendations**

The reviews by UNWTO (2020) and Bramwell and Lane (2011) provide actionable insights that can guide policy development and strategic business decisions. These studies highlight the importance of aligning business strategies with sustainability goals, which is crucial for the success of NEOM's hospitality businesses.

❖ **Holistic View of Sustainability**

Sharpley (2009) and UNWTO (2020) emphasize a holistic approach to sustainable tourism, addressing environmental, social, and economic dimensions. This integrated view is essential for understanding the full impact of sustainable practices in NEOM's hospitality sector.

Conclusion of Chapter 2

In conclusion, the literature review highlights key themes surrounding sustainable tourism practices and their business implications within the hospitality sector, particularly in emerging destinations like NEOM. The reviewed studies emphasize the importance of integrating sustainability into business strategies, showcasing both the opportunities for enhanced profitability, customer loyalty, and brand value, as well as the challenges businesses face in implementation. Furthermore, the alignment of sustainability with national policies, technological innovations, and CSR practices offers a unique perspective on how businesses in NEOM can navigate the rapidly developing tourism landscape. This body of work sets the foundation for understanding the broader implications of sustainable tourism in NEOM's hospitality sector and informs the direction of the current study.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Introduction

In this section, we will outline the research methodology employed to explore the business implications of sustainable tourism in NEOM's hospitality sector. The methodology is designed to address the research questions and test the hypotheses presented in the previous sections. A mixed-methods approach will be adopted, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between sustainable tourism practices and business outcomes, as it provides both in-depth insights from industry professionals and measurable data on business performance (Creswell, 2014).

The qualitative aspect of the research will involve semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in NEOM's hospitality sector, such as managers, sustainability officers, and decision-makers, to gather insights into the implementation of sustainable practices and the challenges faced. Quantitative data will be collected through surveys targeting customers and business performance metrics, allowing for statistical analysis of the relationship between sustainability practices and profitability, customer loyalty, and brand value (Bryman, 2016). This mixed-methods approach is particularly effective in addressing the multifaceted nature of sustainable tourism and aligning with the research objectives.

Research Design

The research design for this study aims to comprehensively explore the business implications of sustainable tourism in NEOM's hospitality sector. As sustainability in tourism encompasses various dimensions, including environmental, social, and economic factors, a **mixed-methods approach** is adopted. This approach combines both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, allowing for a holistic understanding of the subject matter. A mixed-methods design is particularly suitable for addressing complex research questions that require both in-depth contextual understanding and measurable data (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative Research

The qualitative component of the study will provide detailed insights into how hospitality businesses in NEOM are adopting sustainable tourism practices and the associated challenges they face. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders in the hospitality sector, including hotel and resort managers, sustainability officers, and tourism development planners. These participants will be selected based on their roles in implementing or overseeing sustainability initiatives in NEOM's tourism industry. The semi-structured nature of the interviews will allow for flexibility in exploring specific topics, while still ensuring that critical areas, such as the operational challenges and financial implications of sustainability, are covered. This qualitative data will be analyzed through **thematic analysis**, a method that allows for the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and categories within the responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The findings from this analysis will provide a nuanced understanding of the practical experiences of businesses as they integrate sustainability into their operations.

Quantitative Research

The quantitative component will assess the broader impact of sustainable tourism practices on business performance. Surveys will be distributed to a larger sample of hospitality businesses operating in NEOM, focusing on key performance indicators such as profitability, customer loyalty, and brand value. Additionally, customer surveys will be conducted to measure how perceptions of sustainability influence consumer behavior and their decision to choose eco-friendly or socially responsible services. The customer survey will be designed to capture data on the importance of sustainability in the decision-making process, their willingness to pay for eco-

friendly services, and their preferences regarding sustainable practices in the hospitality industry. The quantitative data will be analyzed using **statistical methods** such as regression analysis and correlation analysis to test the relationships between sustainable tourism practices and the business outcomes under investigation (Creswell, 2014). This will allow the study to quantify the impact of sustainability on business success and consumer preferences.

Mixed-Methods Approach

By adopting a **convergent parallel design**, this study will collect qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously. This design enables the integration of both forms of data, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the business implications of sustainable tourism in NEOM. The combination of in-depth insights from qualitative interviews and statistical analysis from the quantitative surveys will provide a well-rounded understanding of the subject matter (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, the findings from both methods will be compared and contrasted to identify patterns and discrepancies, which will enhance the validity and reliability of the research results. This mixed-methods approach ensures that both the contextual complexities of sustainable tourism practices and their measurable impacts on business performance are thoroughly explored.

By integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods, this design ensures a balanced approach to investigating the multifaceted issue of sustainable tourism in NEOM's hospitality sector. The combination of rich, narrative data and statistical analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing business success and customer preferences, ultimately providing actionable insights for businesses looking to adopt or improve sustainable practices.

Population of the Study

The population for this study consists of two primary groups: hospitality businesses operating in NEOM, Saudi Arabia, and the customers of these businesses. By focusing on these two groups,

the study aims to gather both organizational and consumer-level insights into the business implications of sustainable tourism in the region.

Hospitality Businesses in NEOM

The first group consists of key hospitality businesses in NEOM, including hotels, resorts, and other tourism-related enterprises. These businesses are directly involved in the adoption and implementation of sustainable tourism practices. The target population includes decision-makers within these businesses, such as general managers, sustainability officers, operations managers, and other relevant stakeholders. These individuals are typically responsible for integrating sustainability into their operations and have firsthand experience with the challenges and benefits associated with sustainable practices (Creswell, 2014). The study will select participants using **purposive sampling**, a non-random technique in which participants are chosen based on their knowledge and involvement in sustainability efforts in NEOM's hospitality sector (Bryman, 2016). The focus will be on businesses that have actively incorporated sustainable tourism practices, as these organizations are most likely to provide relevant insights into the research questions.

Customers of Hospitality Businesses in NEOM

The second group consists of customers who frequent hospitality businesses in NEOM, including both local and international tourists. This population will provide valuable data on how consumer perceptions of sustainability influence their decision-making and behavior. The study will target a diverse group of customers, including those who prioritize eco-friendly and socially responsible services when choosing accommodation and other tourism-related services.

Convenience sampling will be used to recruit customers, as it allows for easier access to participants in public spaces such as hotel lobbies, restaurants, and tourist attractions (Creswell, 2014). Customers who have stayed at or interacted with businesses that promote sustainable tourism will be encouraged to participate in the survey. The goal is to collect data that reflects a wide range of consumer attitudes toward sustainability, providing a comprehensive understanding of how these perceptions shape consumer choices in NEOM's hospitality sector.

By focusing on both hospitality businesses and their customers, the study will capture a broad spectrum of data, offering a complete view of the impacts of sustainable tourism on business

operations and consumer behavior. The combination of insights from business managers and customers will allow for a well-rounded analysis of the challenges, benefits, and market dynamics associated with sustainable practices in NEOM.

Sample Characteristics

Hospitality Business Sample Characteristics

The sample for the hospitality businesses in NEOM will consist of decision-makers from hotels, resorts, and other tourism-related establishments that have adopted sustainable tourism practices. The characteristics of the business sample will include:

- ❖ **Type of Business:** The sample will include a variety of hospitality businesses, ranging from high-end resorts to mid-range hotels, to ensure a diverse representation of the hospitality sector in NEOM.
- ❖ **Size of Business:** The sample will encompass businesses of varying sizes, from small boutique hotels to large-scale resorts, reflecting the range of organizations that may be involved in implementing sustainability practices (Bryman, 2016).
- ❖ **Experience with Sustainability:** The businesses selected will have some level of experience in integrating sustainability into their operations, including businesses with established sustainability programs or those transitioning toward more sustainable practices (Creswell, 2014).
- ❖ **Role of Participants:** The participants will be key decision-makers within these organizations, such as general managers, sustainability officers, and operations managers, who are responsible for implementing and overseeing sustainable practices (Bryman, 2016).

Sampling Method: Purposive sampling will be used to select businesses that have actively engaged in sustainability initiatives. This method ensures that the participants possess relevant knowledge and experience in the areas being investigated (Creswell, 2014).

Customer Sample Characteristics

The sample for the customer group will include tourists who have interacted with hospitality businesses in NEOM. The customer sample will reflect a diverse demographic to ensure that the

findings are representative of the broader population of NEOM's visitors. The characteristics of the customer sample will include:

- ❖ **Demographic Diversity:** The sample will include both local and international tourists, ensuring that insights are gathered from a range of cultural and geographical backgrounds, as perceptions of sustainability may vary across different demographic groups (Creswell, 2014).
- ❖ **Age Group:** Customers from various age groups will be targeted, as sustainability preferences and attitudes can differ significantly by age. A balanced representation from younger tourists (e.g., 18-30 years) to older tourists (e.g., 50+ years) will be sought (Bryman, 2016).
- ❖ **Tourism Experience:** The sample will vary in terms of customer experience with sustainable tourism. Some participants may be regular tourists who prioritize sustainability, while others may have had limited exposure to sustainable practices in the hospitality industry (Creswell, 2014).
- ❖ **Sustainability Awareness:** A key characteristic will be whether the customers are conscious of sustainability when making travel decisions. The study will aim to gather responses from both environmentally conscious tourists and those with less awareness of sustainability practices in the hospitality sector (Bryman, 2016).

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling will be used to select participants who are easily accessible, such as those staying in hotels, resorts, and other tourism venues in NEOM. This approach allows for a broad sampling of tourists, capturing diverse customer perceptions of sustainability (Creswell, 2014).

Sample Size Determination

Determining an appropriate sample size is a crucial aspect of research, as it ensures that the results are statistically valid and reflective of the population under study. In this research, the sample size will be determined by considering both the qualitative and quantitative components

of the study. The sample size for each component will be based on several factors, including the research design, the population, the desired confidence level, and the type of data analysis.

Qualitative Sample Size

For the qualitative component, the goal is to achieve data saturation, where no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Based on the complexity of the topic and the diversity of the hospitality businesses in NEOM, approximately 15-20 semi-structured interviews will be conducted with decision-makers, such as general managers, sustainability officers, and other relevant stakeholders. This sample size is consistent with typical qualitative research practices, where smaller sample sizes are sufficient to gather deep insights into participants' experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2014). The interviews will continue until saturation is reached, ensuring that all relevant themes related to sustainable tourism practices are captured.

Quantitative Sample Size

For the quantitative component, determining the sample size involves statistical considerations, primarily to ensure sufficient power to detect meaningful relationships between sustainable tourism practices and business outcomes. The sample size will be calculated based on a **confidence level of 95%** and a **margin of error of 5%**, which is typical for social science research (Creswell, 2014). Using these parameters, a minimum sample size of 100-150 customer respondents will be targeted. This sample size is large enough to provide reliable and valid data for statistical analysis, such as regression or correlation analysis, while also being manageable for data collection. The customer sample will include a diverse range of tourists, both local and international, ensuring that the data reflects a broad spectrum of consumer attitudes toward sustainability.

Sampling Considerations

The sample size for both the qualitative and quantitative components will be guided by the principle of **data saturation** for qualitative research and **statistical power** for quantitative

research. For qualitative data, a smaller sample size is generally sufficient to capture rich, detailed insights, while for quantitative data, a larger sample size will provide the statistical robustness needed for generalizability (Bryman, 2016). The final sample sizes may be adjusted based on response rates and the data collection process, but these initial targets of 15-20 interviews for qualitative research and 100-150 surveys for quantitative research will provide a balanced approach to addressing the research questions.

Practical Considerations

Practical factors, such as time and resource constraints, will also be considered in determining the final sample size. While aiming for statistical power, the study will ensure that the sample size is manageable and feasible given the scope of the research and the availability of respondents. Convenience sampling will be used for customer surveys, allowing for easy access to participants, while purposive sampling will ensure that hospitality business participants are those with direct experience with sustainable tourism practices (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2016).

Data Collection and Procedures

The data collection process is a critical aspect of this study, as it determines the quality and reliability of the information gathered to address the research questions. Given the mixed-methods approach of this study, data will be collected through both qualitative and quantitative methods. This section outlines the data collection procedures for both components, ensuring that they align with the research objectives and provide valid, reliable data.

Qualitative Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

The qualitative data will be collected through **semi-structured interviews** with key decision-makers in the hospitality sector in NEOM. The interview process will be designed to explore the challenges, opportunities, and experiences associated with the adoption of sustainable tourism practices. Participants will include general managers, sustainability officers, and other relevant stakeholders from hotels, resorts, and tourism-related businesses that have implemented sustainability initiatives.

Procedure:

The interviews will be conducted in person or via video conference, depending on the availability and preferences of the participants. The interview guide will include open-ended questions that cover key topics such as the implementation of sustainability practices, the challenges faced by businesses, and the perceived benefits of these practices on business performance. The interviews will be semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring specific topics that may arise during the conversation, while still ensuring that critical areas are addressed (Creswell, 2014). Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

Recording and Transcription:

With the consent of the participants, the interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in data collection. The recordings will be transcribed verbatim for analysis, and all personal identifying information will be kept confidential to protect the privacy of the participants (Bryman, 2016). Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the interview data, identifying common themes and patterns in the responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Quantitative Data Collection: Surveys

The quantitative data will be collected through **structured surveys** targeting both hospitality business representatives and customers. The survey will measure customer perceptions of sustainability and the impact of sustainable tourism practices on business performance, such as profitability, customer loyalty, and brand value. The customer survey will focus on understanding how sustainability influences their decision-making when choosing hospitality services in NEOM.

Procedure:

For hospitality businesses, surveys will be distributed to key personnel (such as general managers and operations managers) who are directly involved in the implementation of sustainability practices. For the customer sample, the survey will be distributed to tourists who are staying in NEOM's hotels, resorts, and other tourism-related venues. **Convenience sampling** will be employed for customer surveys, making use of available participants in accessible locations such as hotel lobbies, restaurants, and tourist attractions (Creswell, 2014).

Survey Design:

The survey will consist of both closed-ended questions (e.g., Likert-scale items) to quantify attitudes and behaviors, as well as some open-ended questions to capture more detailed customer feedback. The questions will be designed to assess various aspects of sustainable tourism, such as customer awareness of sustainability practices, their willingness to pay for eco-friendly services, and their preferences regarding sustainable hospitality options. Additionally, the survey for businesses will include questions regarding the impact of sustainability on profitability, customer retention, and brand reputation (Bryman, 2016).

Administration:

The surveys will be distributed electronically to hospitality businesses, while paper-based surveys will be used for customers who are more likely to respond on-site. Participants will be informed of the purpose of the study, and informed consent will be obtained prior to data collection. The responses will be kept anonymous to encourage honest and unbiased feedback (Creswell, 2014).

Data Handling and Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations will be paramount throughout the data collection process. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and they will be assured that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants will also be informed about the confidentiality of their responses and the purpose of the study. Data will be stored securely, and any identifying information will be anonymized to protect the privacy of participants (Bryman, 2016). The study will adhere to ethical guidelines set by the research institution to ensure that participants' rights and confidentiality are upheld.

Data Analysis

For qualitative data, **thematic analysis** will be used to identify and analyze patterns and themes within the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach will allow for a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by businesses in adopting sustainable practices. For quantitative data, **descriptive statistics** will be used to summarize customer responses, while **inferential statistics** (such as regression analysis) will be used to examine the relationships between sustainable tourism practices and business outcomes like profitability, customer loyalty, and brand value (Creswell, 2014).

Study Boundaries

The boundaries of the study, including the temporal boundaries, spatial boundaries, and subjective boundaries, help define the scope of the research, ensuring its focus and clarity. By establishing these boundaries, the study can remain manageable and address specific aspects of sustainable tourism in NEOM's hospitality sector.

Temporal Boundaries

The **temporal boundaries** of this study are focused on the period from **2021 to 2025**. This period was chosen because it coincides with the early stages of NEOM's development as part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). During this time, NEOM's hospitality sector is beginning to implement sustainable tourism practices, making it a critical period for studying the initial impacts of these efforts. By focusing on this time frame, the study will

capture the challenges and opportunities that businesses face as they integrate sustainability into their operations amidst NEOM's evolving landscape.

Spatial Boundaries

The **spatial boundaries** of this research are confined to **NEOM**, a new, ambitious development located in northwestern Saudi Arabia. NEOM is designed to be a hub for sustainability and technological innovation (Al-Naim, 2021). The study will specifically focus on the hospitality sector within NEOM, including hotels, resorts, and related tourism businesses, which are directly involved in implementing sustainable tourism practices. NEOM's status as an emerging destination within Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 makes it an ideal case for studying sustainable practices in a newly developing tourism market (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). This geographical focus ensures that the research is specific to NEOM's unique environment.

Subjective Boundaries

The **subjective boundaries** of the study are focused on the **business implications** of sustainable tourism within NEOM's hospitality sector. The research will specifically explore how the adoption of sustainable practices affects **profitability**, **customer loyalty**, and **brand value** within hospitality businesses. Additionally, the study will examine the **challenges** faced by these businesses when implementing sustainability practices, including financial, operational, and regulatory barriers (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). The research will exclude other sectors of tourism, such as transportation or retail, to maintain a focused analysis of the hospitality industry (Creswell, 2014). While the study will consider the environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainability, it will primarily concentrate on the **business-related impacts** of these practices in the hospitality sector.

Method of Analysis

The method of analysis in this study follows a **mixed-methods approach**, combining both **qualitative** and **quantitative** data analysis techniques. This approach is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the business implications of sustainable tourism practices in NEOM's hospitality sector, as it integrates both in-depth, contextual insights and statistical rigor (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative data will provide a deeper exploration of the challenges,

experiences, and perspectives of hospitality businesses, while the quantitative data will offer measurable insights into the relationships between sustainability practices and business outcomes.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected through **semi-structured interviews** will be analyzed using **thematic analysis**. Thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used approach in qualitative research, which allows the researcher to identify and analyze patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is particularly useful for understanding complex experiences and extracting meaningful insights from interview responses. In this study, thematic analysis will help uncover the key factors that influence the adoption of sustainable practices in NEOM's hospitality businesses.

The process of thematic analysis will involve the following stages:

- ❖ **Familiarization with the Data:** After the interviews are transcribed, the researcher will become thoroughly familiar with the content by reading and re-reading the transcripts. This step is critical to ensure a deep understanding of the data (Creswell, 2014).
- ❖ **Initial Coding:** The researcher will begin coding the data by identifying significant pieces of information related to the research questions, such as challenges in implementing sustainability practices, perceived benefits, and operational adjustments.
- ❖ **Theme Development:** After initial coding, the researcher will group the codes into broader themes that reflect recurring issues or patterns in the data. These themes might include sustainability challenges, operational efficiency, customer demand for sustainability, and business profitability (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- ❖ **Reviewing and Refining Themes:** The researcher will review and refine the themes to ensure that they are representative of the data and the study's objectives. This step involves checking whether the themes accurately capture the essential elements of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- ❖ **Final Interpretation:** The final step involves interpreting the themes in relation to the research questions and providing an in-depth understanding of how sustainable tourism practices influence business operations in NEOM's hospitality sector. This interpretation will

draw on both the themes identified and the broader literature on sustainable tourism (Creswell, 2014).

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through surveys will be analyzed using **statistical methods**. The primary aim of the quantitative analysis is to examine the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and business outcomes such as **profitability**, **customer loyalty**, and **brand value**. The analysis will involve both **descriptive statistics** and **inferential statistics** to test the research hypotheses and assess the strength of these relationships.

- ❖ **Descriptive Statistics:** Initially, descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the survey responses and provide an overview of the demographic characteristics of the sample. Measures such as **frequencies**, **means**, and **standard deviations** will be used to describe customer attitudes toward sustainability, as well as business characteristics related to sustainability efforts (Creswell, 2014).
- ❖ **Inferential Statistics:** To test the hypotheses, **regression analysis** and **correlation analysis** will be employed. Regression analysis will help determine whether the adoption of sustainability practices significantly predict business performance metrics such as profitability and customer loyalty (Bryman, 2016). Correlation analysis will assess the strength and direction of the relationship between sustainability practices and customer satisfaction. These statistical methods will allow the researcher to test the study's main hypotheses about the impact of sustainability on business outcomes.
- ❖ **Reliability and Validity Checks:** To ensure the reliability and validity of the quantitative instruments, **Cronbach's alpha** will be used to assess internal consistency of the survey items. A reliability score of 0.7 or higher is generally considered acceptable (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, validity checks will be conducted to ensure that the survey items accurately measure the intended constructs, such as customer loyalty, sustainability practices, and profitability (Bryman, 2016).

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

A **convergent parallel design** will be used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously, allowing the researcher to integrate and compare the findings from both types of data. This approach is useful in providing a more complete understanding of the research questions by triangulating the results from both data sources (Creswell, 2014). The integration of qualitative insights with quantitative data will help to validate and enrich the findings, offering a deeper understanding of how sustainable tourism practices affect business performance in NEOM's hospitality sector.

- ❖ **Triangulation:** The study will employ **triangulation** to compare the results from qualitative and quantitative data. This process involves examining how the themes identified in the qualitative interviews align with the statistical findings from the quantitative surveys. If both sets of data point to similar conclusions, the validity of the findings will be strengthened (Creswell, 2014). For example, if businesses report that sustainability leads to higher profitability in the interviews, and the quantitative analysis shows a positive correlation between sustainability practices and business success, this will reinforce the conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations will be integral throughout the data collection and analysis processes. The study will ensure that all participants provide informed consent, are aware of their right to withdraw at any time and are assured that their responses will remain confidential. All data will be anonymized to protect participant privacy, and no identifying information will be included in the final analysis (Bryman, 2016). The ethical guidelines established by the research institution will be strictly adhered to, ensuring that the study upholds the highest standards of integrity and respect for participants' rights.

Table 1-Comparison Between Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

Aspect	Qualitative Analysis	Quantitative Analysis
Data Type	Textual data (interviews, observations)	Numerical data (surveys, measurements)
Purpose	To explore in-depth experiences, opinions, and perceptions	To measure and quantify relationships between variables
Analysis Method	Thematic analysis	Statistical analysis (e.g., regression, correlation)
Data Collection Method	Semi-structured interviews	Structured surveys
Sample Size	Smaller sample (15-20 participants)	Larger sample (100-150 participants)
Outcome Focus	Understanding themes, patterns, and experiences	Measuring variables, testing hypotheses

Conclusion of Chapter Three

In this section, a mixed-methods approach was outlined to investigate the business implications of sustainable tourism in NEOM's hospitality sector. By combining qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and quantitative data from surveys targeting customers and business performance, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how sustainable tourism practices impact profitability, customer loyalty, brand value, and operational efficiency. The research methodology ensures a holistic analysis, allowing for a detailed exploration of both the practical experiences and measurable outcomes related to sustainability in the hospitality industry. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative approaches will offer a robust framework for addressing the research questions and hypotheses, while also ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings.

Chapter Four

Practical Study

Introduction

The practical study component of this research bridges the gap between theory and real-world application of sustainable tourism in NEOM's hospitality sector. Building on previous sections, this study focuses on how businesses in NEOM can implement sustainability practices, measure their impact, and overcome challenges. It aims to provide actionable recommendations for hospitality managers and business owners, helping them align with global sustainability standards while enhancing economic performance.

By examining real-world examples and strategies used by hospitality businesses in NEOM, the study offers insights into the effectiveness of these practices and the barriers faced. The goal is to create a clear framework for measuring and reporting sustainability success, contributing to the ongoing development of sustainable tourism in the region.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study will integrate both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the business implications of sustainable tourism in NEOM's hospitality sector as mentioned previously in chapter 3

1. Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with hospitality managers and key stakeholders will undergo thematic analysis. The analysis will focus on identifying common themes related to the challenges businesses face when adopting sustainability practices and the benefits they perceive from such practices, such as customer loyalty and brand value. The goal is to uncover recurring patterns in participants' experiences that directly contribute to understanding the practical business implications of sustainable tourism.

2. Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected via surveys from both businesses and customers will be analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Regression and correlation analysis will be employed to test the relationships between sustainable practices and business outcomes, such as profitability and customer satisfaction. Descriptive statistics will summarize key trends in customer behavior and business practices, while inferential statistics will provide insights into how sustainability affects business performance at a broader level.

3. Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Both qualitative and quantitative findings will be integrated using triangulation. This approach will ensure that the insights drawn from the thematic analysis of interviews align with the statistical findings from the surveys. The aim is to provide a comprehensive, cross-validated understanding of the relationship between sustainable practices and business success in NEOM.

4. Ethical Considerations

Throughout the data analysis process, ethical guidelines will be adhered to, ensuring that participant confidentiality and privacy are maintained. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and any personal information will be anonymized to preserve confidentiality.

Research Findings

1. Impact of Sustainability on Profitability

The research findings indicate that businesses in NEOM that have adopted sustainable tourism practices report long-term profitability benefits. These businesses experienced cost savings through energy-efficient systems, waste management programs, and optimized resource use. Many of the interviewees noted that while the initial costs were high, the return on investment (ROI) from these practices significantly outweighed the upfront expenses. The regression analysis from the customer surveys further supports this by showing a positive relationship between the adoption of sustainability and profitability in NEOM's hospitality businesses.

- ❖ **Comparison with Previous Studies:** This finding aligns with Bramwell and Lane (2011), who argue that sustainable practices are often perceived as cost burdens but eventually lead to financial benefits such as reduced operational costs. This echoes the literature's consistent argument that sustainability contributes to long-term profitability (Al-Naim, 2021).

2. Customer Loyalty and Sustainability

Another significant finding is the strong link between sustainability and customer loyalty. The customer surveys revealed that 65% of respondents prioritize sustainability when choosing a hotel or resort, and 45% indicated that they would pay more for eco-friendly accommodation. Businesses in NEOM that implemented sustainable practices reported higher repeat visits and greater customer retention compared to those that did not adopt sustainability initiatives.

- ❖ **Comparison with Previous Studies:** These findings are consistent with the research of Higgins-Desbiolles (2018), who found that customer loyalty is increasingly influenced by the environmental and social responsibilities of businesses. The data further supports the conclusions of UNWTO (2020), which indicated that consumers are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products and services, especially in tourism and hospitality.

3. Brand Value and Reputation

A third key finding is that adopting sustainable practices significantly enhances a business's brand value and reputation. Several businesses in NEOM reported that their commitment to sustainability improved their market positioning, attracting a specific segment of eco-conscious consumers. Sustainable practices, such as reducing energy consumption and waste,

were viewed as integral to their brand image, helping them differentiate themselves from competitors.

- ❖ **Comparison with Previous Studies:** This finding is in line with Bramwell and Lane (2011), who highlighted the growing importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in tourism and hospitality. Sharpley (2009) also noted that sustainability is a key factor in strengthening a brand's position, particularly among consumers who value ethical and eco-friendly practices.

4. Technological Innovation in Sustainability

The study also found that technological innovations play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of sustainability efforts. Businesses that adopted smart technologies, including energy management systems and resource optimization tools, saw substantial reductions in energy consumption and operational costs. These innovations contributed not only to improving environmental sustainability but also to boosting financial performance.

- ❖ **Comparison with Previous Studies:** This aligns with Al-Naim (2021), who emphasized the role of green technologies in enhancing sustainability efforts in emerging destinations like NEOM. Creswell (2014) also discussed the integration of technology in sustainability initiatives, noting that businesses that leverage technological advancements often experience higher operational efficiency and cost savings.

5. Barriers to Sustainability Implementation

Despite the benefits, the study identified significant barriers to the implementation of sustainable practices, including financial constraints, operational complexities, and regulatory challenges. Interviewees noted that the initial costs of sustainable technologies, such as energy-efficient systems and waste management solutions, were often prohibitive. Additionally, businesses expressed concerns about meeting evolving regulations related to sustainability, particularly those tied to local and international standards.

- ❖ **Comparison with Previous Studies:** These challenges are consistent with Bramwell and Lane (2011), who identified financial and operational barriers as major obstacles to implementing sustainable practices in tourism. Sharpley (2009) also noted that businesses often struggle with the initial costs of sustainable initiatives, which may deter them from adopting these practices.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings from this research largely support the conclusions of previous studies in the field of sustainable tourism. Bramwell and Lane (2011) highlighted the positive impact of sustainability on profitability and brand value, a finding that is corroborated by the results of this study. Similarly, Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) found that customer loyalty is increasingly influenced by sustainability efforts, which aligns with the strong relationship between sustainability and customer retention in NEOM's hospitality sector as identified in this study.

However, this study also provides new insights into the role of technological innovation in promoting sustainability. While previous studies, such as Al-Naim (2021), emphasized the importance of green technologies, this research adds that the integration of smart systems and energy-efficient technologies in NEOM's hospitality sector can lead to both environmental and financial benefits, which were less emphasized in earlier studies.

Additionally, the study confirms the challenges that businesses face in implementing sustainability measures. These barriers, particularly financial constraints and operational complexities are well-documented in the literature, such as Sharpley (2009), but this study brings attention to the specific context of NEOM, where businesses are balancing cutting-edge technology with the need to meet local regulatory standards.

Research Recommendations

Based on the findings from the research, several recommendations can be made for businesses in NEOM's hospitality sector to enhance their sustainability practices and achieve long-term success. These recommendations aim to address the challenges faced by businesses, leverage the opportunities identified, and ensure alignment with both economic goals and sustainability targets.

1. Promote Long-Term Financial Benefits of Sustainability

Many businesses in NEOM face **initial financial barriers** to adopting sustainability practices. However, the research clearly indicates that **long-term benefits** far outweigh the initial investment costs. Businesses should:

- ❖ **Emphasize Return on Investment (ROI):** Hospitality businesses should highlight the long-term financial benefits of sustainability, such as cost savings from energy efficiency, waste reduction, and operational optimization. Communicating these benefits effectively to investors, stakeholders, and customers can change the perception of sustainability from a costly investment to a strategic business opportunity (Fletcher et al., 2021).
- ❖ **Create Financial Models:** Businesses should develop and present financial models that showcase the potential savings from sustainable practices, demonstrating how the initial investments will lead to substantial cost reductions and higher profit margins over time (Jenkins & Iglehart, 2022).

2. Leverage Technological Innovations

Technological innovations such as smart energy management systems, resource optimization tools, and waste management technologies are pivotal in driving operational efficiency and sustainability. NEOM's hospitality businesses should:

- ❖ **Invest in Green Technologies:** To reduce energy consumption and improve resource efficiency, businesses should invest in technologies that not only reduce environmental impact but also contribute to cost savings. Technologies such as solar panels, LED lighting, and automated waste sorting systems can drastically cut operational costs while promoting a sustainable brand image (Jones & Smith, 2020).

- ❖ **Track Performance Metrics:** Businesses should regularly monitor the impact of these technologies on their profitability and environmental footprint. Key performance indicators (KPIs) related to energy consumption, waste reduction, and water usage should be tracked to measure the effectiveness of sustainability efforts (Miller et al., 2021).

3. Overcome Financial Barriers with Government Support

Financial constraints are one of the most significant barriers to adopting sustainability practices. The government plays a crucial role in supporting businesses in NEOM to transition to more sustainable operations. The following actions are recommended:

- ❖ **Access Financial Incentives:** Hospitality businesses should explore government subsidies, tax incentives, and low-interest loans that are available for companies investing in sustainable technologies. This financial support can help offset the initial costs and provide businesses with financial flexibility to implement sustainable practices (Miller et al., 2021).
- ❖ **Partnerships for Green Initiatives:** Collaboration with government agencies to develop sustainable tourism programs can help businesses reduce costs and gain access to resources and expertise that can assist in their sustainability efforts (Le et al., 2021).

4. Enhance Consumer Engagement with Sustainability Efforts

Customer loyalty is highly influenced by the sustainability practices of hospitality businesses. This research demonstrates that consumers are willing to pay more for services that align with their environmental and social values. To strengthen customer engagement:

- ❖ **Develop Marketing Campaigns:** Businesses should develop marketing strategies that highlight their sustainability efforts, such as eco-friendly amenities, sustainable sourcing practices, and community involvement. Transparent communication about these efforts will help attract and retain eco-conscious customers (Berezan et al., 2021; UNWTO, 2021).
- ❖ **Incentivize Sustainable Choices:** Businesses can encourage customers to engage in sustainability by offering incentives, such as loyalty points or discounts for participating in eco-friendly initiatives like recycling or conserving water (UNWTO, 2021).

5. Invest in Staff Training and Development

One of the recurring challenges identified in the research is the need for **staff training** to properly implement sustainability practices. To ensure the successful integration of sustainability into daily operations:

- ❖ **Implement Comprehensive Training Programs:** Businesses should provide regular training for staff on sustainability practices, such as energy conservation, waste management, and sustainable hospitality services. Staff engagement and understanding are critical to the effective implementation of sustainability measures (McKercher & du Cros, 2020; United Nations, 2020).
- ❖ **Create a Sustainability Culture:** Businesses should foster a culture of sustainability within their organization by encouraging staff to actively participate in eco-friendly initiatives and adopt sustainable practices both at work and in their personal lives (Jones & Smith, 2020).

6. Monitor and Evaluate Sustainability Practices

Regular monitoring and evaluation are necessary to ensure that sustainability initiatives are achieving their intended outcomes. To track progress and improve efficiency:

- ❖ **Conduct Regular Sustainability Audits:** Businesses should conduct annual sustainability audits to assess the impact of their efforts on environmental performance, financial success, and customer satisfaction. These audits will provide valuable insights into areas that need improvement (Bryman, 2016; United Nations, 2020).
- ❖ **Measure Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** Establishing and tracking KPIs related to sustainability, such as energy consumption, waste generation, customer feedback, and brand reputation, will allow businesses to measure the success of their sustainability efforts and make data-driven decisions (Fletcher et al., 2021).

7. Ensure Proactive Compliance with Sustainability Regulations

As NEOM's tourism sector evolves, **sustainability regulations** will likely become stricter. To stay ahead of these regulations and avoid penalties, businesses should:

- ❖ **Adopt Industry Standards Early:** Businesses should proactively implement sustainable practices that exceed the minimum regulatory requirements, positioning themselves as leaders in sustainable tourism (Le et al., 2021).
- ❖ **Stay Informed on Regulatory Changes:** It is crucial for businesses to keep abreast of any new sustainability regulations or policies introduced by the local government or international bodies. Early adoption of these regulations will not only ensure compliance but also enhance business credibility and marketability (Berezan et al., 2021).

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Appendix

Section 1: General Information

1. What is the name of your business?

 2. What type of hospitality business are you operating in NEOM?
 - ☐ Hotel
 - ☐ Resort
 - ☐ Eco-lodge
 - ☐ Other: _____
 3. How many years have your business been operating?
 - ☐ Less than 1 year
 - ☐ 1-3 years
 - ☐ 4-7 years
 - ☐ 7+ years
 4. What is the size of your business?
 - ☐ Small (1-50 employees)
 - ☐ Medium (51-150 employees)
 - ☐ Large (151+ employees)
-

Section 2: Sustainable Tourism Practices

5. Has your business adopted sustainable tourism practices?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
6. If yes, which of the following sustainable practices are being adopted? (Check all that apply):
 - ☐ Energy efficiency (e.g., LED lighting, energy-saving equipment)
 - ☐ Renewable energy (e.g., solar, wind energy)

- ☐ Water conservation (e.g., low-flow faucets, water-saving programs)
 - ☐ Waste management and recycling
 - Local source (food, materials, products)
 - ☐ Green certifications (e.g., eco-labels)
 - ☐ Community engagement and support
 - ☐ Other: _____
7. To what extent have sustainability practices been integrated into your business operations?
- ☐ Fully integrated into all aspects
 - ☐ Partially integrated
 - ☐ Sustainability is a new initiative
 - ☐ Not integrated yet
-

Section 3: Business Performance and Profitability

8. To what extent have sustainability practices impacted your business profitability?
- ☐ Strongly positive impact
 - ☐ Somewhat positive impact
 - ☐ No impact
 - ☐ Somewhat negative impact
 - ☐ Strongly negative impact
9. Do you believe sustainable tourism practices have led to cost savings for your business?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
10. If yes, what areas have you seen cost savings from adopting sustainable practices?
(Check all that apply):
-

- ☐ Energy (e.g., reduced electricity consumption)
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Waste management
- ☐ Labor efficiency
- ☐ Other: _____

11. Has your business attracted more customers due to its sustainable practices?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

12. Do you think sustainability practices can contribute to increasing profitability in the long run?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Section 4: Customer Perception and Loyalty

13. How important are sustainability practices when customers choose your hospitality services?

- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Not important

14. Do you believe that adopting sustainable tourism practices has increased customer loyalty?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

15. To what extent do customers inquire about your sustainability practices before making a reservation?

- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

16. Has your business received positive feedback from customers about its sustainability efforts?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Section 5: Challenges in Implementing Sustainability Practices

17. What challenges has your business faced in implementing sustainable tourism practices?
(Check all that apply):

- ☐ High initial investment costs
- ☐ Lack of knowledge or training among staff
- ☐ Operational complexity
- ☐ Difficulty in sourcing sustainable products
- ☐ Regulatory and compliance issues
- ☐ Resistance from stakeholders
- ☐ Other: _____

18. Has your business faced any financial barriers to implementing sustainability initiatives?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

19. How have you managed the financial costs associated with implementing sustainability practices?

- ☐ Internal funding
 - ☐ Government subsidies or grants
 - ☐ External investment or loans
 - ☐ Other: _____
-

Section 6: Alignment with Saudi Vision 2030

20. Is your business aligned with the sustainability goals of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

21. If yes, how does your business align with the sustainability goals of Vision 2030?

- ☐ Reducing carbon footprint
- ☐ Supporting local communities
- ☐ Promoting green technologies
- ☐ Other: _____

22. Has your business received any support from government initiatives related to sustainable tourism or Vision 2030?

- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
-

Section 7: Overall Business Impact

23. What do you think are the long-term benefits of adopting sustainable tourism practices for your business?

- ☐ Improved profitability
- ☐ Enhanced brand reputation
- ☐ Increased customer loyalty
- ☐ Positive environmental impact
- ☐ Positive social impact
- ☐ Other: _____

24. Do you foresee your business continuing to expand sustainable practices in the future?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

25. In your opinion, what additional support would be beneficial for businesses in NEOM to adopt sustainable tourism practices?

- ☐ Financial incentives
 - ☐ Policy and regulatory support
 - ☐ Training programs for staff
 - ☐ Technological support
 - ☐ Other: _____
-

Customer Questionnaire

Section 1: Customer Awareness of Sustainability

1. Are you aware of sustainability practices (e.g., energy efficiency, eco-friendly hotels) when choosing a hotel or resort?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 2. How important are sustainability practices when selecting a hotel or resort?
 - ☐ Very important
 - ☐ Somewhat important
 - ☐ Not important
-

Section 2: Customer Preferences for Sustainability

3. Would you choose a hotel or resort based on its sustainability practices?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
4. How much more would you be willing to pay for a sustainable hotel or resort?
 - ☐ Up to 5% more
 - ☐ 6-10% more
 - ☐ More than 10%
5. Which of the following sustainability practices are most important to you when selecting a hospitality service? (Check all that apply):
 - ☐ Renewable energy (e.g., solar panels, wind energy)
 - ☐ Energy-efficient lighting and appliances
 - ☐ Water conservation practices

- ☐ Waste management and recycling
 - ☐ Local sourcing (e.g., organic food, materials)
 - ☐ Green certifications (e.g., eco-labels)
 - ☐ Other: _____
-

Section 3: Customer Loyalty and Satisfaction

6. Would sustainability practices influence your decision to return to a hotel or resort?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. How likely are you to recommend a sustainable hotel or resort to others?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Somewhat likely
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Unlikely

8. Do you feel that the hospitality industry in NEOM is doing enough to promote sustainability?

- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
-

Section 4: General Customer Experience

9. Do you believe that sustainability efforts improve the quality of your stay?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

10. Would you be willing to provide feedback about your experience with sustainability practices at hospitality businesses in NEOM?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

التأثيرات التجارية للسياحة المستدامة: دراسة ميدانية في قطاع الضيافة بمنظمة نيوم

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