

“Saudi Arabia and the Heart of Islam in Vision 2030: Impact on International Relations”

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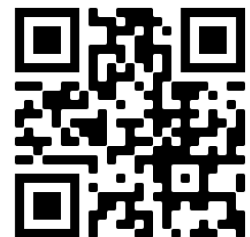
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Abstract:

The Vision 2030 program's transformation of Saudi Arabia based on religious tourism through Hajj and Umrah can be accomplished through gifted heritage for economic growth and development. This study aimed to investigate religious tourism as a diplomatic network for building on the international community and policy potential of Vision 2030 to broaden the creative technological systems and environmental sustainability of Saudi Arabia. Tourism propels economic growth and development via intergovernmental relations. Via time series analysis of the secondary data of domestic and foreign pilgrims from 2010 to 2020 based on the theory of forecast tourism demand, the present study revealed that Hajj and Umrah have a potential influence on GDP growth, employment opportunities, and network diplomacy among the nations globally. In addition, we explored the capacity for Vision 2030 to enhance the global business network based on religious tourism, relying on flexible diplomatic ties for sustainable, innovative technologies and the service sectors as part of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy development.

Keywords: Religious tourism; Vision 2030; Saudi Arabia; International relations

1. Introduction

1.1. Vision 2030 of Saudi Arabia Transformation Agenda

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program 2020 (NTP) are strategic plans that have set far-reaching goals and objectives to transform the country to make it sustainable, diverse, and at the center of international trade. Vision 2030 outlines the objectives of creating a vibrant society, economic drivers and the ambitious development of nations (Saudi Vision 2030 2016). The NTP particularly highlights religious tourism for the development of the tourism and national heritage aspects of Hajj and Umrah. Islamic heritage is promoted economically through the religious pilgrimages of Hajj and Umrah (National Transformation Program 2018). The Saudi Vision 2030 program aims to harness international exchanges and sociopolitical networks through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms. Religious tourism is developed through pilgrimage to Makkah, which is an example of Muslim unity, diversity, and international community-building (Jafar and Scott 2014). The NTP aims to market the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) globally through infrastructure development, policies, and institutional building capacities and gives priority to religious tourism, which is listed in the developmental plans of Vision 2030. Religious tourism is an essential resource, particularly Hajj and Umrah, and has a rich and diverse heritage. The phenomena of Hajj and Umrah have attracted millions of Muslims who live in and outside of Saudi Arabia throughout history and will continue to attract more Muslims in the future (Jafar and Scott 2014). Saudi Arabia has many geographic, civilizational, social, and economic aspects that enable it to assume a leading position in the world. The three pillars of the Saudi Vision 2030 program are being the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, a pioneering investment force, and a hub linking three continents. According to Vision 2030, the country's position in the Islamic world will enable it to play a leading role as the heart of the Arab and Islamic countries and will support them. Its investment power will be key to the diversification of its economy; furthermore, its strategic geographic location will enable it to be a hub connecting three continents.

While previous scholars have assessed the economic aspects of Vision 2030 (Grand and Wolff 2020), the present paper focuses on its first pillar—being the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds. Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion. The demand for pilgrimage puts pressure on Saudi Arabia, as the country sees it as its responsibility to accept all who want to come for Hajj and Umrah. However, until recent times, the Kingdom could not receive all pilgrims due to a lack of facilities. To keep up with the fast-growing demand, Saudi Arabia proposed a series of initiatives and projects. These projects included the expansion of facilities and services to cater to a better experience for the pilgrims. Through the implementation of these projects, more pilgrims will be able to visit for pilgrimage, which, in return, will foster relations with their home countries. The present paper aimed to investigate how the Vision 2030 Hajj and Umrah initiatives will influence international relations.

Saudi Arabia is the core of the Arab and Islamic worlds and represents the heart of Islam. Islam was and remains the most critical factor influencing the process of prioritizing Saudi foreign policy. Since its inception, Saudi Arabia has been working to mobilize and devote its resources to serve the causes of the Islamic world. To achieve Islamic solidarity, the Kingdom sought out and established with Muslim countries a system of governmental and non-governmental Islamic institutions, including the Association of the Islamic World in 1962 and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1969, and the Kingdom provided their headquarters (Liu and Fan 2018). This effort stemmed from the integrated vision of the meaning of Islamic solidarity. The most important efforts include collective security for Islamic countries, the settlement of disputes between them by peaceful means, the provision of economic aid to Islamic countries and communities with limited means, and the provision of emergency assistance and relief to affected Muslim countries, advocating for Muslims, defending their causes, and providing material and moral support to Islamic communities with generous contributions to the construction of mosques and the establishment of Islamic cultural centers.

Within the main framework, the essential principles of the foreign policy of the KSA are good neighborliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. This revolves around the idea of serving the common interests of Arab and Islamic countries and defending their issues, as well as the policy of non-bias and establishing relations of cooperation with friendly countries, and playing an active role in the frameworks of regional and international organizations. The country's current policies are aimed at strengthening of international relations based on the investment power of Saudi Arabia at the Arab, regional, Islamic, and international levels (Razaq and Griffin 2015).

1.2. Islamic Depth of Hajj and Umrah Pilgrimage

Religious tourism for Muslims is regarded as any form of travel undertaken for the motive of religion, or "Hajj and Umrah Pilgrimage" in the context of this study. Until recently, the term tourism was not used in Saudi Arabia, and pilgrimage was not even included in this term. There was a belief that tourism in its modern form does not involve pilgrimage. However, according to some scholars, pilgrimage has much in common with tourism (Vukonić 1996) and can be considered as the ancient forerunner and analog of modern tourism (Graburn 1977).

Hajj (to intend a journey) is the fifth pillar of Islam. Umrah (to visit a populated place) is an optional ritual performed in a short time. Over the last decade, Umrah participants increased from 2.79 in 2010 to 7.45 million in 2019 and are forecasted to reach 30 million by 2030. Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage is the heritage of the KSA: "They will come to you on foot and on a lean camel; they will come from far and the distant past. That they may witness benefits for themselves and mention the name of Allah on known days over what He has provided for them of sacrificial animals. So eat of them and feed the miserable and poor. Then let them end their untidiness and fulfill their vows and perform Tawaf around the ancient House" (Holy Quran; Surah Al-Hajj -22:27-28). This Quranic citation is the commencement of the journey to Hajj.

Hajj has always served as part of the unification of the Muslim community, encouraging diplomatic, political, and foreign policy exchanges across the globe to meet all nations' needs. The promotion of unity among Muslims at Hajj has sometimes been seen as a source of threat to non-Muslims, as some ethnic separatists and religious extremists use Hajj as an opportunity to export extremism and separatism. Many countries' governments are vigilant about this and intercept these unlawful attempts. For example, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement attempted to force Chinese pilgrims in Makkah to participate in separatism (Niu and Metwally 2016). Moreover, the portrayal of terrorist attacks such as 9/11 as "Muslim issues" has led to the depiction by some of a "global Muslim community" defined in terms of conflict with non-Muslims (Lynch 2015; Ahmed and Matthes 2017). Other scholars, however, have found that participation in Hajj increases belief in peace, equality, and harmony among different ethnic groups, Islamic sects, and adherents of different religions. Moreover, it decreases participation in localized practices and beliefs, such as the use of amulets and dowry, and increases the observance of global Islamic practices, such as prayer and fasting (Clingsmith 2009). Hajjis show more favorable attitudes toward women, including more support for girls' education and female participation in the professional workforce.

Some citizens' behaviors and political intentions are associated with extreme nationalism but have nothing to do with religion. Muslims worldwide differ in their interpretation of correct religious doctrine, political beliefs, and understanding in other areas. However, they do not disagree on the Five Pillars, which are the cornerstone of Islam. Hajj, one of the five pillars, is the most spectacular and the largest international religious event in the world and the sole religious activity that is explicitly regarded as a religious duty within the world religions.

Scholars have found that Hajj inspires feelings of unity with the Muslim community across the globe (Wolfe 1997). Other research has further proved that Hajj helps to integrate the Muslim world. This integration leads to a sense of unity and equality with others who are usually separated in everyday life by gender, ethnicity, nationality, or sect but are brought together during Hajj. As performers of Hajj embark on the tour, sequential rituals symbolize close bonds and strong unity among Muslims, performed by all of the pilgrims marking the Eid al-Adha celebrations. Other Muslims who cannot perform Hajj celebrate Eid al-Adha at different geographical locations globally. The existence of Hajj and Umrah enables broad access to goods, capital flow on the market, and socioeconomic, political, and foreign policy cooperation that maintains the relations of the inter-governmental development of Saudi Arabia. Although the Kaaba brings billions of Muslims from around the globe to Saudi Arabia annually, integrating different languages, one constitutional document (Quran) coordinates religious tourism or activism in Hajj (Fourati 2017). Moreover, Hajj strengthens global Islamic beliefs and weakens attachments to local religious customs (Clingsmith 2009). Interestingly, there is no evidence suggesting that shaping a common Islamic identity leads to opposition toward non-Muslims; on the contrary, the notions of equality and harmony seem to extend to followers of other religions. These results differ sharply with the view that increased Islamic orthodoxy is closely related to extremism.

1.3. Religious Tourism, Economic Benefits, and International Relations

Religious tourism in relation to “pilgrimage to the holy land of Makkah” is intertwined with international diplomacy and policy exchanges between the governments’ tendencies of broadening effective communication, as well as the socioeconomic and political dimensions. The theological base sentiments of Hajj as religious tourism are critical for governments to build network relations through trips to the holy sites and historical landmarks of Makkah. Religious tourist activism continues to influence Saudi foreign policy, devoting resources toward Islamic solidarity associated with Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage. The occasion engages Muslims to travel from near and far to the KSA. This activism in support of Islamic culture through religious tourism leads to interactivity with countries globally. The interconnectivity of countries through religious tourism signifies a paradigm shift within sociopolitical and economic relations.

While leisure and cultural tourism are at the beginning of their development, religious tourism is well-established in the Kingdom. Although the Saudi economy is mainly known for its crude petroleum as its single product, it is based on more than oil. Annually, Hajj generates around 8 billion USD, making it the second-largest income earner for the country after oil (Acca Global 2018). Even though religious tourism in Saudi Arabia is insufficient as a source of government revenue compared to oil, the overall importance of pilgrimages and their reflection on the economy should not be denied. Before discovering oil, the economy depended on pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah (Miller 2006). The first written records of Hajj describe it as a risky and challenging journey. While walking or riding camels to Makkah could take from eight months to up to two years (Coskun 2012), travel to Makkah by sea could take up to six months. Pilgrims had to prepare for this challenging journey. In particular, they had to make sure to provide arrangements for their family, pay all debts, and write a will (Utomo et al. 2017). Clearly, at this time, the journey to Makkah for Hajj required tremendous sacrifice and dedication, becoming the journey of a lifetime (Coskun 2012). Today, Hajj has been modernized and is quite a different experience from that of even 50 years ago. Undoubtedly, the physical quality of Hajj pilgrimage has improved due to the modernization of Makkah. The majority of pilgrims arrive by air transport, and there are now many high-rise hotels and apartment buildings in Makkah.

Hajj pilgrimage has always had a commercial component. During their journey overland, some pilgrims sold goods to other pilgrims in the same caravan. Others carried trade goods to sell in order to support their travel to Makkah and to return home. Because this journey could take months or even years, people going to Makkah for pilgrimage would also undertake trading to fulfill their needs for the journey. Hajj pilgrimage was also important for the people of Makkah who, to a large extent, depended on the income generated from the Hajj. Indeed, until the exploration and development of oil after World War II, Hajj was Saudi Arabia’s primary source of revenue (Peters 1996). This income came from the provision of goods and services within Makkah.

Furthermore, transporting pilgrims across large distances is also a significant business in its own right, and accommodation and catering in Makkah provide other business opportunities.

After World War II, oil became the primary source of income for Saudi Arabia (Peters 1996). Thus, the tourism sector did not grow, except for Hajj, as it was compulsory. However, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia did not manage Hajj seriously. During these periods, many problems occurred, such as health, accommodation, and transportation issues. The Ministry of Hajj was founded to manage those issues (Henderson 2011), which is the government body responsible for managing all aspects regarding Hajj.

The maintenance of acceptable standards by numerous companies is the aim of the Ministry of Hajj, which strives to ensure that “religious duties are not transformed into a commercial commodity” by ventures keen to maximize revenues (Ministry of Hajj 2013). Some scholars have argued that religion has unavoidably become the raw material for an industry driven by profit (Henderson 2011). Pilgrims are essential to private enterprises’ commercial success selling goods and services (e.g., souvenir vendors and the accommodation sector). Other authors have concluded that a suitable balance has been achieved, and the various elements of the occasion are blended into a “successful enterprise that is also respectful and spiritually appropriate” (Collins and Murphy 2010).

Other management challenges are officially acknowledged, such as meeting the spiritual and physical needs of a diverse multitude of pilgrims—from the poorest with little education to the very rich and sophisticated who desire service levels to which they are accustomed. Differences are apparent in the choice of accommodation, spanning from luxury hotels to very modest properties.

An annual pilgrimage for Hajj and Umrah could play an increasingly vital role in the Kingdom’s economic growth and development. If well planned, religious tourism’s contribution to economic welfare could be more significant than other economic forces. Religious tourism as an economic phenomenon fosters foreign exchange and visitor export, creates job opportunities, and improves the balance of payments.

Consequently, the Sustainable Tourism Development Plan in Saudi Arabia has been developed to diversify the Saudi economy, to create balanced regional development, and to develop small businesses. The diversification of economic bases and income sources necessitates the economic impacts of Hajj and Umrah revenues to be taken into consideration. The

Kingdom is responsible for providing pilgrims with infrastructure, accommodation, food and beverages, and medical care. Officials must work with commercial operators both in Saudi Arabia and overseas to provide accommodation, transport and other services. For Makkah's hotel sector, Hajj is the busiest season each year, and properties typically achieve 100% occupancies during the period. The ongoing infrastructure projects in and around Makkah pave the way for more Hajj and Umrah visitors and continue to boost investor confidence in Makkah's real estate market, where the hotel hospitality sector is the key beneficiary. As source markets and demographics diversify, there is a need for budget and midscale accommodation, serviced apartments for longer-stay guests, families, and groups, and specialist hospitality concepts that meet Hajj visitors' unique needs. Hajj creates multiple job opportunities. In 2019, during Hajj across all sectors, over 350,830 people were served, representing over 47 governmental and private entities and 353 primary and sub-services (General Authority for Statistics 2019).

Besides its economic effects, pilgrimage to Makkah has noticeable social, cultural, and political impacts. It is a unique occasion that gathers people of different races, nationalities, and languages in one place simultaneously (Daham 1982). Due to the differences in religions, ideologies, and social systems, there are many potential conflicts in Saudi Arabia's relations with other countries. First, Hajj usually serves as a platform for religious and political communication in terms of Saudi relations with the Islamic countries, especially with Shiite countries. Islamic countries follow different religious teachings. Saudi Arabia is a Sunni country. Shiite Muslims are often subjected to discrimination and restrictions in the Islamic world, which leads to a conflict between Shiite countries, such as Iran and Iraq, and Sunni countries, such as Saudi Arabia. This conflict has increased the complexity of international relations in the Gulf region. Saudi Arabia takes full advantage of Hajj as an opportunity to hold the Islamic World League meetings to enhance communication between Sunnis and Shiites.

Moreover, Hajj has become the best time for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to improve relations with Iran. In December 2007, 28 years after Iran's Islamic Revolution, Saudi Arabia invited Iranian President Ahmadinejad to perform Hajj in Makkah for the first time. Ahmadinejad's Hajj journey can be regarded as a symbol of a great leap forward of the relationship between Iran and the six Gulf countries (BBC 2007). Second, Hajj has been the source of a breakthrough in developing Saudi bilateral political relations with non-Islamic countries home to many Muslims. For example, after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Saudi Arabia had minimal relations with Beijing. In 1955, during the Bandung Conference, former PRC premier Zhou Enlai talked in person with Saudi Prince Faisal about Hajj for Muslims from mainland China. In the same year, the PRC successfully sent its first Hajj delegation to Makkah. Before Saudi Arabia established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1990, the most regular people-to-people exchange between the two countries was the annual Hajj (except from 1965 to 1978) (Niu and Metwally 2016).

In the global trend of sociopolitical development, most international communities, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, have successfully envisaged the main goals and objectives of achieving NTP in the area of Hajj and Umrah (Mohamed 1996). In order to comprehend the international policies of the Arab and Islamic world, it is necessary to investigate the potential influence of the network of players on global tourism and to forecast the potential for economic development through the movement of people and goods. Pilgrimage preparations and projects can be evaluated as part of a series of reform plans, such as increased investment into non-oil resources within Vision 2030. The Hajj and Umrah Vision Realization Program will allow the largest possible number of Muslims to perform Hajj and Umrah. The other goals are to expand the two holy mosques, spread the message of Islam, develop the world's tourism and cultural sites, and provide the best services before, during, and after pilgrims' visits to Makkah. Moreover, the program will serve as a platform to establish the effective role of the private sector in improving the economy of the sector.

The heart of Arabians is gifted with the two holiest mosques in Makkah and Madinah. The sanctitude of the interest in Hajj pilgrimage driven by the geographic location of the Kaaba connects political and diplomatic will, socioeconomic development, and sound systemic technological advancement (Al-Ban 2016). Vision 2030 affords the Holy Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque a special place, as the Kingdom derives its place as the Arab and Islamic heart from them. Since these sacred places have a unique position in the hearts of Muslims, the Saudi government allows Muslims from all corners of the world to visit whenever they want. Among other respected places for Muslims are the Quba Mosque in Madinah and other historical places.

More significantly, Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage has led to the building of bilateral and multilateral connections with sovereign states, increasing the economic strength of Saudi Arabia in terms of trade mobilization and immigration between nations (Fourati et al. 2017). The religious Hajj pilgrimage is increasing the bonds between Muslim and non-Muslim countries through the globalization of foreign investments (Al-Tawfiq 2016). This phenomenon has initiated and enhanced international communication among different regions, influencing foreign policies and diplomatic missions. The international communities reciprocate the gesture by building more relationships with Saudi Arabia to cement the ties through Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage, facilitated by technologically innovative mechanisms (Leslie and Sigala 2005).

2. Global Perspective on Tourism

According to the formal report of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the World Tourism Barometer 2019, the number of annual international tourists reached 1.4 billion. An extremely large increase of 6% in 2018 enabled this figure to be reached two years ahead of the rate forecast in 2010 (UNWTO 2019). The growth rate for 2018, the second most active year since 2010, reinforced the robust 7% increase of 2017. The Middle East (+10%) and Africa (+7%) led growth rate estimations. The growth rate in Asia and the Pacific and Europe (both +6%) was in line with the world average, which included the religious tourism forecast for the KSA. Generally, this growth has increased the demand for foreign interaction and economic growth for Saudi Arabia's significant outsourcing of international relations across continents. Based on the current demands of Hajj and Umrah inclusive tourism (pilgrimage) that complement economic prospects and the UNWTO Confidence Index, the UNWTO forecasted a 3%–4% growth rate of international tourist arrivals globally in 2019, which is in line with the historical growth trends exhibited by Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage (UNWTO 2019). In conjunction with the NTP, the mission of Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 is to strategically work on the tourism approach of the country, fostering economic prospects, global links, and international relations. The far-reaching inter-governmental goals set to change the Kingdom through the economic diversity of Hajj and Umrah are essential for the transformation of Hajj (Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed 2017). The government has recognized that Hajj and Umrah bring pilgrims who perform this religious obligation annually and the fact that it fosters international relations both sociopolitically and economically (Al-Kibsi et al. 2015). Therefore, the economic systemic events of Hajj pilgrimage are being widened for government transformational strategic models, which play an active role in the Vision 2030 program as a part of its "heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds" strategy. An increasing number of states that are interested in Hajj and Umrah are creating relationships based on religious tourism development, making tourism a critical socioeconomic enabler through export revenues and creating employment and technological innovation, as well as infrastructural development. Saudi's investment as a powerhouse and hub network connecting the ties in the Vision 2030 objectives are as follows: (1) The Kingdom is the Land gifted with the "Two Holiest Mosques," the most sacred places and the direction of prayer (Qibla) for 3 billion Muslims worldwide; (2) the vision highlights that the annual gathering of Hajj and Umrah entails substantial investment opportunities and capabilities of stimulating economic development; (3) transforming the unique strategic location of Kaaba as a hub-network connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa. Generally, the geographical position between key global waterways and the KSA provides unique opportunities for religious tourism and international foreign exchange (Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed 2017).

According to Vision 2030, Makkah and Madinah's projects will be successful in accomplishing programs and strategies related to the Islamic historical dimension. The Vision 2030 program provides an integrated strategy for the development of the Hajj and Umrah system, aiming to increase the capacity to receive 8–15 million pilgrims by 2020 and to further increase to 30 million by 2030 (National Transformation Program 2018). In order to achieve this goal, the government is working on motivating pilgrims to come and is providing a maximum optimum capacity of the facilities. In order to enhance pilgrims' experiences during their journey, the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has launched a package of initiatives and services for the deployment of pilgrim service centers in Makkah and Madinah to provide the best experience with the highest quality of services and facilities. This strategy includes five pillars: upgrading services to the highest quality standards; promoting health, security, and safety; creating a comfortable environment with easy solutions to problems; developing the culture of hospitality; enriching the emotional, cultural, and heritage experience.

It is essential to note the economic value of the pilgrimage season for the Kingdom as it is famous for the demand for many products on the market. The pilgrimage season represents the second largest economic resource after the oil sector. According to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Makkah, the revenues of the Hajj season in 2017 were estimated to be between 20 and 26 billion SAR. Some economists have estimated that the revenues of Hajj and Umrah exceed 40 billion SAR annually, pointing out that they are in the interest of the private sector and not in the state treasury and do not represent more than 4% of the GDP (Al Arabiya 2018). As a matter of fact, the state loses large amounts of money in the Hajj season in particular, and minor pilgrimage in general, as it harnesses its resources to develop and maintain holy sites every year and to offer services for the comfort of pilgrims, as well as spending money on the employees in the government sector by paying their salaries and bonuses and providing food, insurance, transportation, etc. Moreover, the state considers itself a servant of the Two Holy Places and guests of God, as it does not receive any fees from those who want to perform Hajj for the first time.

Vision 2030 aims to make the most of the pilgrimage season. Tourism used to be limited to the performance of religious rites only; now, investors' attention is being attracted to cultural tourism and the archeological sites abound in the Kingdom. The pilgrimage season also contributes to the revitalization of the economic cycle of the Kingdom through the 100% occupancy of hotels and provides thousands of career opportunities. Hajj is a valuable opportunity for commercial companies and factories to promote their goods among pilgrims.

Saudi Arabia succeeded in implementing international cooperation, even with non-Islamic countries, to attract investments in this region. The investments include infrastructure projects such as subways and fast trains and the development of airports and services for pilgrims. The government of the KSA strives to provide the best services and comfort to visitors from all nationalities and countries that continuously arrive at the Holy Mosque throughout the year. Saudi Arabia strives to develop international relations to make it easier for Muslims all over the world to perform the rituals of Hajj and Umrah. It does not interfere in the affairs of other countries. It puts its interest in the service of pilgrims of all nations that it has successfully built relations with.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Theory of Forecasting Tourism Demand (FTD)

This study adopted the forecasting tourism demand theory (FTD), which considers the potential engagement of Hajj and Umrah heritage of religious tourism to build international relationships with other parts of the globe. This study utilized secondary data from the annual archival pilgrims (both domestic and foreign) in Makkah, focused on the economic tendencies by forecasting the tourism demand of pilgrims in the “heart of Islam.” Witt and Witt (1995) made extensive reviews on the theory, techniques, and methodology used for forecasting tourism demand bounded by specific scope, definitions, and roles in the magnification of religion, culture, and diversity. The time series inductive technique was used, employing empirical data in the study analysis (Witt and Witt 1995). By extension, Song and Li (2008) expounded upon the improvement of forecasting tourism demand, mostly utilizing secondary data analysis of multi-functional demand. To forecast tourism demand, the influence of religious tourism on economic growth and development in the perspective of Hajj and Umrah is multi-dimensional. The present study used secondary data from empirical studies between 2010 and 2019 for the qualitative analysis. We adopted secondary archival data due to the qualitative techniques for economic prospects in the study of Hajj tourism potentials. The multi-dimensional factors were the economic performance of the annual Hajj and Umrah connecting international communities, the sociopolitical-cultural performance of Hajj and Umrah tourism diplomacy, and environmental and technological creativity. These expected novelties enabled reforms and recommendations for foreign policies for the effective implementation of the Vision 2030 agenda. In Vision 2030, projects for religious tourism are proposed for economic growth and developmental heritage. Tourism demand has grown over the last few decades (UNTWO 2018). Therefore, religious tourists’ arrivals from different destinations for different travel purposes (e.g., holidays or business trips) form part of Vision 2030 policymakers’ aims to broaden the creative technological systems and to increase environmental sustainability (Singh and Bhatia 2015). The revenues from tourism will propel economic growth and development, tourism human development, and tourism imports and exports for foreign investment exchanges (Wondirad and Agyeiwaah 2016).

The action from the national transformation agenda is indicative of government interest in Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage. The government has attributed the internationalization of Hajj and Umrah to networking diplomacy through religious tourism due to inter-government foreign policy exchanges. Therefore, as part of the national transformation and sustainability of government foreign policies, efforts are being made to enhance the technological innovations of Hajj and Umrah to boost economic growth and globalization (Clingsmith 2009). This can also improve infrastructure and employment for the citizens and can raise the standards of living. Undoubtedly, the geographical position of the two holy mosques positively influences international relations and alters the culture of positivity.

The NTP has taken into account the proportions of the inflow and outflow of economic trade factor impacts, infrastructure development, transportation, telecommunication expansion innovations, and the preservation of technology enhancing the tourism sector (National Transformation Program 2018). Similarly, the government has adopted policies to collaborate in technological innovations in all areas to ensure environmental sustainability and to satisfy the demands of tourists. Saudis’ capacity to adapt these facilities to the standards of the UNWTO demands allows the creation of an excellent package for networking relationships between nations.

3.2. Time Series Modality for Hajj and Umrah

“A time series model expounds on the secondary data and randomized perturbation term” (Stepčenko, and Čížovs 2016). In this instance, time series analysis can provide exploitative reasons for historical data patterns and can forecast future remittances of Hajj and Umrah (Reuters 2015). The present research was not purely based on econometrics, but rather on religious tourism’s potential to lead to the development of economic growth and international relations, as well as the causal impact of systematic international remittances. This study considered the increasing trends of Hajj and Umrah as economically integrated series of progressions toward the Vision 2030 agenda. The primary emphasis was to explore Hajj and Umrah patterns through time series based on the idea of innovative future technological performance. A time series is a forecasting approach that assumes that trends that were identified in the past will also occur in the future; therefore, the innovative capability will enhance better service delivery for pilgrims. A data-sourced estimation for time series models is less stressful and costly because it is based on archival data (Foster & Trout, 2006). The situation allows for derivations

and deviations, as time series are periodic. Song and Li (2008) argued that seasonality is a dominant characteristic of tourism trends, increasing policymakers' interest in the periodic variation of tourism demand (Song and Li 2008). The present study used qualitative time series data from a secondary source and relevant documents of the national statistics of the KSA. Table 1 presents comparative statistics of the year-in-year-out estimations of Hajj pilgrimages. In this study, we used this table to illustrate the trend of pilgrims coming for Hajj from inside and outside of Saudi Arabia from 2010 to 2019. Table 1 also shows more pilgrims from the foreign sector, at 74.5%, compared to the number of domestic tourists. The factor of foreign pilgrims outnumbering domestic tourists leads to estimations of foreign direct investment (FDI) to boost forecasted economic development based on time series analysis. The estimates from Table 1 show that the year 2012 had the highest number of pilgrims, indicating the highest economic growth and development as result of religious tourism demand. The economic development concern of Vision 2030 is steadily promoting peace talks and agreements through tourism demand (Eurostat 2015). As part of the financial sector development program, the efforts to develop religious tourism aim to widen the economic ties of the sub-region beyond the GCC. As planned in Vision 2030, creating international relations and economic ties with nations through Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage is a foundation for building religious tourism (Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed 2017). The number of pilgrims has decreased in number since 2012 due to the Grand Mosque expansion projects, which caused the Saudi government to reduce the number until the completion of the expansion project so that there was no risk to pilgrims. Numerous incidents have hit Hajj over the years that have resulted in pilgrims' deaths, usually through overcrowding. In 2015, a stampede in Mina during the Hajj season resulted in the deaths of approximately 2300 foreign pilgrims, including 464 Iranians, which is the worst crisis that has occurred during the Hajj seasons after the events of 1987. After this incident, the diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran hit an all-time low. Iran exhausted all means to politicize Hajj, including preventing its citizens from performing the ritual and demanding that Hajj be internationalized. Despite this, Saudi Arabia opened its doors to Iranians coming to Makkah from all over the world. Iranian citizens took advantage of the opportunity of going to Hajj through a third country, as hundreds of them rushed to apply for Hajj visas, disregarding the political goals of their rulers.

Table 1. Total number of pilgrims (from inside and outside of Saudi Arabia) in the 10 years from 2010 to 2019.

Year	Foreign pilgrims	Domestic pilgrims	Total pilgrims
2010	1,799,601	989,798	2,789,399
2011	1,828,195	1,099,522	2,927,717
2012	1,752,932	1,408,641	3,161,573
2013	1,379,531	600,718	1,980,249
2014	1,389,053	696,185	2,085,238
2015	1,384,941	567,876	1,952,817
2016	1,325,372	537,537	1,862,909
2017	1,752,014	600,108	2,352,122
2018	1,758,722	612,953	2,371,675
2019	1,855,027	634,379	2,489,406

Source: General Authority for Statistics.

Since the establishment of the Saudi state at the beginning of the 20th century, great attention has been paid to the Holy Mosque. As the number of pilgrims has steadily increased, the need for the expansion of the Grand Mosque has increased to meet the increasing number of worshippers. The first expansion was conducted between 1955 and 1973, and the second expansion was performed between 1982 and 1988. The government announced the third expansion under King Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz in 2008. In 2011, the government under King Salman further announced details of expansion. The third expansion is being implemented in three steps. The first is to expand the Great Mosque of Makkah to two million square meters. The second step is to renovate and expand the outer squares that contain toilets, corridors, tunnels, and other supporting facilities and to work on the flow of movement for the entry and exit of worshippers. The third step is to renovate and expand the area of services, air conditioning, power plants, water stations, etc. The area is projected to be

expended to 7,500,000 m². Therefore, the fluctuations of the numbers of pilgrims presented in Table 1 can be explained by the Grand Mosque expansion and depend on specific construction projects carried out during specific time periods. Although the number of total pilgrims dropped sharply in 2013, Table 1 indicates a generally increasing trend beginning in 2017, which indicates the successful implementation of the Hajj and Umrah programs. Beginning in 2017, the increase in the number of pilgrims has been due to annual investments in infrastructure and the sector's technology-driven innovations. The investments in Makkah's infrastructure come with a potential linkage of the country to a competitive advantage on the open market (Berger 2010). Many aid services cater employment to the comfort and needs of pilgrims during Hajj and Umrah. Therefore, we can conclude that the Vision 2030 initiatives are capable of enhancing the economic growth and development of the KSA.

Table 2 highlights Hajj pilgrims coming to Makkah from across the globe. The percentages indicate that African countries, excluding Arab countries, are higher on the international scale. In general, the centrality of religious tourism to Makkah invariably intensifies the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the international community. Increasing numbers of connections for the Muslim minority and the non-Muslim broader community worldwide are being built. Religious tourism is an integral roadmap to increasing the FDI to the KSA (Bunte et al. 2018). Hajj is full of increasing investment opportunities for entrepreneurs, business people, institutions, and national companies, and multiple business activities accompany the events. It is a powerful engine for many sectors such as housing, hospitality, retail, nutrition, communications, and transport, as well as other innovative products that serve pilgrims. Saudi Arabia is considered to be a fertile land for international investors to market their products.

Moreover, we can see an increase in the number of pilgrims coming from Asian countries, excluding Arab countries. This growth can be explained by the implementation of the Makkah Route Initiative, fully launched in 2019 for pilgrims from Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. This initiative has allowed pilgrims to benefit from immigration pre-clearance.

The growing numbers of pilgrims as presented in Table 2 indicate the significance of honoring Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage for Muslims. Kaaba is situated in Saudi Arabia, and the country must respect the time of the annual Hajj and Umrah, a form of observing the pillar as enshrined in the Quran and Hadith of the Prophet Mohammad (SAW).

Table 2. Comparison between the number of non-Saudi pilgrims who came (from inside and outside Saudi Arabia) to Makkah in 2018 and 2019 by groups of countries.

Countries group	Difference		Number of pilgrims in	
	Ratio(%)	Amount	1439	1440
GCC countries	-5.8	-2,089	35,794	33,705
Arab countries excluding GCC countries	2.2	10,320	465,510	475,831
Asian countries excluding Arab countries	6.9	74,392	1,083,528	1,157,919
African countries excluding Arab countries	13.6	22,805	167,959	190,764
European countries	-24	-21,436	89,368	67,932
North and South America countries and Australia	8.5	2,171	25,519	27,690
Total	4.6	86,163	1,867,678	1,953,841

Source: General Authority for Statistics.

Over the last decade, the number of Umrah participants increased from 2.79 in 2010 to 7.45 million in 2019 and is forecasted to reach 30 million by 2030 (Table 3).

Table 3. Total number of pilgrims coming (from inside and outside of Saudi Arabia) for Umrah.

Umrah season	Number of pilgrims
2014/10/25 - 2015/10/13	5,678,136
2015/10/14 - 2016/10/01	6,146,113
2016/10/02 - 2017/09/20	6,532,074
2017/09/21 - 2018/09/10	6,765,615
2018/09/11 - 2019/08/31	7,457,663

Source: General Authority for Statistics.

The pilgrimage season brings together millions of Muslims from inside and outside of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi authorities determine the share of each country by a decision endorsed by the OIC, which was held in Amman, Jordan, in 1988 at the level of foreign ministers. The resolution regarding measures for organizing and determining the number of arrivals to the holy sites to perform Hajj pilgrimage determines the number of pilgrims for each country by setting the share of Muslims in the country in relation to the total global Muslim population. With the aim of a fair distribution of pilgrimage quotas and to organize the number of pilgrims during the Grand Mosque expansion, the OIC decided to permit one thousand per one million people. There are two ways that the citizens of these countries can obtain a seat in Hajj: the first is through a random lottery, and the second is through private Hajj offices that hold a certain percentage of the state's share. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has been operating Hajj on a strict quota system for pilgrims' safety due to the ongoing expansion work inside the Grand Mosque. Hajj missions overseas deal with approximately 80% of pilgrims, with the remainder handled by tourism companies and agencies. The scheme permits visitor volumes to be controlled by the authorities.

The Saudi authorities set quotas for the number of citizens who can visit for Hajj every year. The countries then fill these quotas in the manner they deem appropriate. In some countries, corruption and inequity are involved in the process. Those secular republics under the long-term reign of authoritarian leaders often suppress Islamic organizations. For example, Turkmenistan put very tight controls on Hajj activities and even prohibited Turkmen Muslims from performing Hajj in some years. The Turkmen government takes strict control over mosques and Muslims and decides who can participate in the annual Hajj. In 2010, they only dispatched 188 Hajjis, far less than the Saudi government's quota for Turkmenistan of 4500, based on the proportion of 1% in accordance with the country's population (Ataeva 2010).

The government's foreign policies of developing a business environment are part of the initiative to harness the religious tourism sector through private and public sector development opportunities. The improvement of technology to enhance the facilities for Hajj and Umrah are part of Vision 2030's national heritage support of tourism globally. Therefore, the higher the number of foreign pilgrims, the higher the strategic economic developmental growth of international relations (Singh & Bhatia 2016). The high numbers, according to the FTD, affirm the contribution to the broadening of the religious tourism phenomenon within Saudi Arabia, which makes up to 4% of the country's GDP (UNWTO 2017).

The growing number of pilgrims also impacts the services and initiatives during the pilgrimage season. In 2019, the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah announced a package of projects, initiatives, and advanced services that aim to make a qualitative leap in the services provided to the guests of God from pre-arrival until the return of the pilgrim (Table 3). These quality technical services are a platform for launching a new concept of services provided to pilgrims in line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030. The "Smart Hajj" project coincides with a package of initiatives related to the equipment in a pilgrim's journey, starting from the "pilgrimage without a bag" initiative, and takes care of transporting the luggage of pilgrims from the Hajj and Umrah halls at King Abdulaziz International Airport in the airport lounges.

Table 4. The “Smart Hajj” program initiatives.

Initiative	Description
The Hajj Smart Card	a unified card for all pilgrims, containing their personal, medical, and residential information, can be read through an application on smart devices that are connected directly to the card via NFC technology reducing irregular hajj.
The Hajj Bank Card	a card issued by a local bank, enables Dhifur Rahman to deposit money from his country or upon arrival in the Kingdom, and contributes to protecting the pilgrims' money from theft or loss, and can be used within the network and various points of sale
The Internet of Things Network (IoT)	an infrastructure network that is the first of its kind in the Holy Places. This initiative manages hustle and pedestrian paths as well as helps in simulating crowds to improve the winning plan.
The Crowd Surveillance System	high-resolution cameras and panoramic cameras (Gigapixel) supported by artificial intelligence techniques, installed in Mina, calculate numbers of crowds and the density and analyze movement and calculate the flow rates in the tracks.
The Center for Observation of Crowd Control and Crowd Management	a unified center for analyzing all data from surveillance cameras and the Internet of Things in the Holy Places to support decision making using artificial intelligence and simulation systems.

3.3. The Influence of the Religious Tourism Network on International Relations

As presented in the data, during Hajj, millions of people from all around the world worship in unison around the Kaaba, connecting sovereign states, governments, and organizations. The FTD from the induced data incorporate economics, technology innovation, engineering, history, geography, and sociopolitics, all of which are impactful at the level of international relations (Mohamed 1996).

The religious activity of Hajj is comprehensive in terms of appreciating globalization and state sovereignty to ensure sustainability (Al-Tawfiq et al. 2015). Religious tourism is closely related to intergovernmental relations, facilitating infrastructural development and sociopolitical communities and leading to strategic peace and harmony (Duman 2012). Undoubtedly, the performance of Hajj represents the equity of humanity. The inflow and outflow of pilgrims increases pressure on airport facilities of the KSA, leading to requirements regarding the building of technology and the engineering of international port developments. Part of building an international relationship through Hajj and Umrah in Vision 2030 is to transform the technological infrastructure of airports with new and creative socioeconomic growth and development in the country.

The focus of this paper was Hajj and Umrah tourism as an international relationship-building network for Saudi Arabia with the rest of the world. It was observed from the secondary data that the forecasted demands from the Umrah will gradually increase the economic growth and development of the KSA. In terms of religious tourism, an extreme increase of

significance of Hajj and Umrah on international relations and social cohesion, as well as political and economic growth, can be observed (Levy 2009).

As a consequence of an economic breakthrough, Saudi Arabia's rates of tourism and economic emancipation have been increasing in the international market (Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed 2017). Archeological surveys and entertainment documents show that development, represented by forecasted demands of tourism, employment, market development, infrastructure, transportation, air development, and green city statuses, is based on technology-driven mechanisms (Cumbria Tourism 2016). The NTP opens up greater tourism potential for tourists globally, not only on the bases of Hajj and Umrah, but by successfully enhancing international relations. The majority of foreigners visiting Saudi Arabia come for Hajj and Umrah, thereby also building on the country's economic growth and development.

While pilgrimage strengthens the Kingdom's prestige in the world, it also poses a delicate political problem due to tense Sunni-Shiite relations. The foreign policy crisis between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a continuing phenomenon of a prolonged conflict that has been active since the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979. The conflict derives from their competition in the Middle East and the quest for leadership in the Muslim world. The rivalry has been reinforced by sectarianism, which was not the case before the 1979 revolution. However, afterward, the division between Sunnis and Shias has gradually appeared in their state-level relationships (Mamadkul 2017).

Iran has a long history of exploiting the Hajj season to stir up riots, chaos, unrest, and strife and to try to bring about sectarian conflicts, starting with the Makkah riots in 1987, which are the most well-known and most dangerous events, and the incident in Mina in 2015, in which diplomats and officers of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's intelligence were implicated among the Iranian pilgrims with ordinary passports. Although Tehran has attempted to impose political conditions and to introduce ceremonies and rituals beyond the Hajj rituals in 2016, Saudi Arabia rejected Iranian conditions. The proposed conditions and ceremonies would have only led to sectarian divisions that would have disturbed Hajj and served the policy of exporting the Khomeinist revolution by exploiting the Hajj season.

By 2020, the Saudi government planned for over 15 million Muslims to perform Umrah annually and to be completely satisfied with their pilgrimage experience (National Transformation Program 2018). However, due to the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, these plans were put on hold. Saudi Arabia implemented early and unprecedented precautionary measures to prevent the introduction of coronavirus into the country and to mitigate its impact when it arrived. The measures were implemented early before reporting of the first case in the country on 2 March 2020. As part of tackling the COVID-19 outbreak, the Kingdom imposed travel restrictions forbidding pilgrims coming from abroad. According to the General Authority for Statistics, the number of pilgrims from abroad in 2019 reached 1,855,027, constituting 75% of the total number of pilgrims in 2019. Pilgrims inside the Kingdom might have been affected by the movement restrictions and other preventative measures, including practicing social distancing and the avoidance of gatherings, which greatly affected pilgrimage-related ceremonies.

Although the work on the third expansion of the Great Mosque in Makkah was put on hold during the lockdown, it is planned to be completed within the next few months after the restrictions are lifted. Before the emergence of the virus, the expansion was set to be completed within one and half years. Although the expansion of the Holy Mosque and most of the projects in the Kingdom were stopped, the vital projects inside the Grand Mosque continued with precautions. The resumption of the work included work on the main gates, installing artificial stone roofs, and completing the architectural arches overlooking the courtyard.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah decided to scale back Hajj in 2020 to a limited number of pilgrims, further stating that health standards were the main determinants for choosing pilgrims. The Ministry proclaimed that 70% of the total pilgrims would constitute non-Saudis residing in the Kingdom. The other 30% of the total was granted to Saudi citizens who were health practitioners and security men who had recovered from COVID-19, as an appreciation of their role in caring for society and battling the virus during the pandemic. Non-Saudis residing in the Kingdom were chosen if they were 20–50 years old, had not previously performed Hajj, did not suffer from any chronic conditions, tested negative for COVID-19, and committed to adhering to the quarantine period set by the Ministry of Health before and after the ritual.

The World Health Organization (WHO) commended Saudi Arabia's successful efforts in organizing a safe Hajj in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah confirmed that there were no reports of COVID-19 infections during Hajj pilgrimage in 2020. The Saudi Public Security confirmed that no one could enter the holy sites without permission, noting that more than 2000 violators who attempted to infiltrate these areas were caught, and legal action was taken against them.

Once the situation stabilizes, the growth of pilgrims can be achieved by increasing the capacity and by improving the quality of the services offered to Umrah visitors. Additionally, visa application procedures will be improved, which will smooth the visa process, with the aim of full automation. E-services integrated into pilgrims' journey will improve the religious and cultural experience. As the government works to upgrade accommodation, improve hospitality, and launch

new services for pilgrims, the public and private sectors will play a vital role in this project. Thus far, the government has launched the Makkah Metro project in addition to the railroad and train projects, which will transport visitors to the Holy Mosque and holy sites. The network of the transport system has been reinforced to facilitate access and help pilgrims perform their visits with greater ease and convenience. At the same time, it is planned to prepare new tourist and historical sites and cultural venues, to establish more museums, and to improve the pilgrimage experience within the Kingdom. Undoubtedly, the nominal increase of foreign and domestic pilgrims will make a positive contribution to the economic growth and development of Saudi Arabia. According to the forecast, the number of religious tourists will continue to grow. Moreover, the religious tourism industry is continuously being developed, and new technology is being built to ensure that pilgrims have a more pleasant experience in Saudi Arabia. Hajj and Umrah are building stronger international relations on the basis of economic development through religious tourism.

4. Discussion

Saudi Arabia's proclamation of the Vision 2030 program is a plan to diversify the economy through dialog at the regional, national, and international levels. The economic boost consists of promoting and strengthening the values and vitality of developing religious tourism through Hajj and Umrah. Religious and human values are participatory ways of building global interactions in sociopolitical and economic development. Officials, experts, investors, and entrepreneurs are unanimous in the opinion that Hajj and Umrah present tremendous opportunities in light of the steadily increasing number of pilgrims as part of the NTP 2020 and the Saudi Vision 2030, as well as other major national projects and associated activities, which require many services and open up thousands of opportunities.

The present study illustrated that religious tourism in KSA spurs technological innovativeness and new jobs and attracts foreign investors to the country. The phenomenon of the dimensional policy of opening up the country for foreigners is a part of global network-building, because the country remained closed for tourism for a long time. The regular, systematic plan to open up tourists' access to the Kingdom would be the best practice in Saudi Arabia's case for harnessing the potential of international relations. The Kingdom opened up an e-visa-free system for Hajj and Umrah to pave the way for international relations. The Vision 2030 plan has unveiled entirely new markets in unexploited sectors of Saudi Arabia; for example, the launching of Saudi's first visit visa on 28 September 2019. This initiative has already proven to be an outstanding success, with 23,715 visas granted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its first 10 days. The new visa opens the way for tremendous opportunities in an entirely new tourism market, which is set to grow to 100 million annual domestic and international tourists in 2030. It is estimated that this will lead to an increase in the tourism sector contribution to Saudi Arabia's GDP by up to 10%, compared to just 3% today (Invest Saudi 2019).

One of the most important goals of Hajj is to promote communication between pilgrims who gather from all parts of the world to perform the rituals at one time in solidarity. This kind of collective action is not repeated anywhere else in the world. Pilgrims encounter and communicate with one another in an atmosphere of affection, mercy, and human solidarity, which takes many forms throughout this blessed journey. Pilgrimage needs to be an opportunity for dialog and convergence between the guests of God without the occurrence of disputes and clashes. Hajj is a unique experience in which people of various genders, age groups, socioeconomic statuses, and cultural and ethnic backgrounds come together, and its atmosphere can only be achieved through respect for the law, respect for one another, and the avoidance of endless disputes. Pilgrims gather from every corner of the Earth to communicate, understand, and share ideas, experiences, and cultures away from the disturbance and speculations presented by some international or local media that do not convey the facts. To avoid fruitless debate among pilgrims, the Saudi government allocates religious scholars to teach pilgrims the correct and moderate Islamic religion that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the difference between useful dialogue and harmful debate. This is especially important in light of the political divisions and sectarian conflicts that control the minds and behavior of the people of some Arab and Western countries. Our society has been plagued by division and wrangling that have led Muslims to fight and commit crimes against one another. Scholars educate pilgrims that God will hold them accountable for their wrongdoings. As more pilgrims come, more people will be educated on real Islamic ideology. This will foster international relations by lessening extremism.

Hajj and Umrah strengthen Islamic economic cooperation and enhance its role in promoting development work in the Islamic world, as well as strengthening its unity and independence and stimulating intra-Islamic trade. The culture and knowledge that benefit Muslims and reinforce their solidarity are spread through Hajj and Umrah. We must acknowledge the fact that there is no similar opportunity to achieve this kind of diverse gathering of representatives of all Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

At present, Hajj's demand is high; therefore, the state has implemented tighter measures to control it (Miller 2006). The Saudi government has declared that it will provide security and care for pilgrims to enable them to perform Hajj and Umrah in peace and tranquility (Ministry of Hajj 2013). The Ministry of Hajj implements policies and plans, oversees the pilgrimage, and coordinates the many public bodies and government departments that participate in organizing the event.

The royal family has assumed guardianship of the holy sites since the founding of the Kingdom—a stance disputed by some who resent this appropriation of Islamic heritage.

In practical terms, Hajj poses logistical problems. There is pedestrian, public, and private traffic congestion, especially within the city of Makkah (Kaysi et al. 2012). Nevertheless, the Saudi government is committed to increasing pilgrim numbers continually. To coordinate planning and to maximize safety, the Development Commission of Makkah, Madinah, and Mashair was formed (Al-Kodmany 2009). It carries out security and traffic plans and maintains public order in Makkah, Mashaer, and Madinah.

The government has exerted efforts aimed at the extension of capacity to accept the increasing number of pilgrims, which has attracted criticism (Henderson 2011). The current large expansion that started under King Abdullah took six years and cost 70 billion SAR. The Holy Mosque is now capable of accepting more than 3 million worshippers, and 105,000 people can perform tawaf. Capacity is being increased through structural alterations and new courtyards, while enhancements are being made to lifts, air conditioning, and security systems. These physical changes have not always been welcomed by critics who complain about heritage loss and the erosion of the place's identity (Independent 2013). The government's approach may be explained by the fact that some of the Prophet's tangible reminders encourage idol worship, condemning this as sinful. Officials also claim that sanctity is intangible and undiminished by transformations to the physical environment, which are necessary to provide to the growing number of pilgrims.

In Saudi Arabia, the way of life is based on Islam and its teachings. They are the basis of laws, decisions, actions, and goals. The government proclaims that the only war that there can be is against terrorism, the enemy that has been condemned by all; therefore, it is necessary to stand against it in every way.

As one of the UN founding members, the Kingdom constantly calls for more transparent foundations of justice in dealing with countries in the political, economic, social, and other fields as the only way to achieve prosperity and stability in the world. Therefore, during the reign of King Salman bin Abdulaziz, the Vision 2030 plan was developed to strengthen international relations in all areas, including serving pilgrims and spending enormous amounts on expanding the two holy mosques and other services in order to accommodate 30 million pilgrims annually in the month of Hajj. The number of participating countries, as well as media outlets and international organizations that broadcast these achievements in the month of Hajj, is enormous. The Vision 2030 plan also includes accepting 30 million pilgrims for Umrah a year.

5. Conclusions

Religious tourism is a significant and justifiable aspect of the heart of Islam for Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage. The adoption of the Vision 2030 plan has created a path according to the principle of Hajj and Umrah and allows the development of the potential for international tourism for the KSA. The secondary data show the significant influence of religious tourism on economic growth and development (Witt and Witt 1995). The economic antecedence of Hajj and Umrah increases the inflow of pilgrims to Saudi Arabia, which is important for the development of religious tourism (Shakouri et al. 2017). The growing number of religious tourists positively affects the continuous development of the religious tourism industry. New creative facilities are being built to ensure pilgrims have a more comfortable experience in future visits to Saudi Arabia for Hajj and Umrah. Opening the country to international relations will boost its economic growth and development (An Na'im 1987).

The position of Saudi Arabia as the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, which is one of the pillars of Vision 2030, is closely linked to international relations and a successful plan to fulfill the Hajj and Umrah initiatives. Since there are increasing numbers of Muslims in every country (Hackett and Lipka 2018), Saudi Arabia needs to maintain good relations with them in order to help these people come for Hajj and Umrah.

This study established and rationalized the idea that, as custodians of the two holy mosques, national strategic innovations are vital through government and civil society organizations as enshrined in the Vision 2030 agenda. Therefore, the existence of Hajj and Umrah as a form of religious tourism will enable Saudi Arabia to build formidable international relations with other countries.

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