

## RENEWING THE ECOTOURISM INVESTMENTS' STRATEGIES IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA: SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY PROSPECTS

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**Abstract:** The present study aimed to assess Saudi residents' attitudes toward tourism destination activities/initiatives using social exchange theory. In particular, we investigated the residents' perceptions of tourism's economic, sociocultural, environmental, and health impacts. A survey-based study was carried out on 190 residents from Saudi Arabia's biggest cities (Riyadh, Jeddah, Dhahran, Jubail, and Yanbu industrial area). Residents positively perceived tourism when it helped preserving the destination environment, economy and health benefits. Additionally, residents encouraged tourism investments and eco-initiatives as long-term projects that benefit residents. Saudi Arabian tourism managers have to consider the residents' living standards while formulating policies, plans, and strategies to improve the tourism industry.

**Key words:** Ecotourism development; Tourism impacts; Residents' perception; Social Exchange Theory; Socio-cultural Health and Tourism; Stakeholders

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### INTRODUCTION

The increase in tourism flow over the previous three decades has led tourism scholars to have attention to tourism's impacts on the environment (Birenboim et al., 2022). Early literature about the adverse effects of tourism on host destination societies has focused primarily on natural environment conservation because of over-tourism (García-Buades et al., 2022). Thus, tourism service providers started emphasizing tourism's adverse impact on societies by investing in social responsibility initiatives to mitigate such effects. For instance, they imposed regulations to measure the emission resulting from tourism movements and introduced new taxation and entrance fee systems, aiming to reduce the tourists' in overcrowded destinations (Birenboim et al., 2022). However, tourism service providers acknowledged that the increasing tourism flow leads not only has negative impacts on the environment but could also lead to conflicts between the host destination residents and tourists' demands (García-Buades et al., 2022). Residents at destinations consider the success engine of any tourism investments. Residents consider the essential destination stakeholders, as research in tourism sheds light on analyzing and understanding residents' behavior (García-Buades et al., 2022).

This research argued that if residents perceive tourism investments as beneficial, they will support them. Also, they significantly like to stay at these destinations, aid and cooperate in developing further tourism investments at destinations. According to Scarpi et al. (2022), residents perceive that tourism is beneficial from three main perspectives: first, an economic outlook, tourism investments can increase jobs, raise residents' income, and add value to host destinations' activities. Second, sociocultural perspective, tourism investments enhance recreational areas of cultural facilities/activities. Third, environmental perspective, tourism investments can attract tourists with preservation ideologies to preserve the place's nature. The perceived impact of tourism on residents' navigate the residents' actual behavior toward tourism engagement. A recent study was conducted by Saluja et al., 2022 to measure the residents' perception of Varkala city and its impact on their actual behavior. They found that Varkala residents perceived that tourism has an economic advantage, so they started to engage in direct and indirect investments related to tourism development. Residents of Varkala are involved in tourism activities when they consider that tourism helped alleviate local unemployment.

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Also, residents' perceptions could be negative; many theoretical approaches predicted that residents' negative perceptions of tourism or tourism investments could develop negative behaviors toward tourism investments (Saluja et al., 2022). The negative perception of residents about tourism also can be an indicator of host destination sustainability and could increase or decrease the number of tourists numbers in destinations (Patandianan and Shibusawa, 2020). The residents' responses to tourism strategies could be shifted from positive to negative if residents haven't received any benefit outcomes from tourism. Residents' behavior could reduce tourism limiting by more than 30 % if they encounter negative perceptions (García-Buades et al., 2022). Thus, while most tourism destinations and residents still don't encounter de facto tourism and environmental hazards because of tourism, the new destinations exemplar need more adoption and devise met to avoid residents' conflict in pre-operation for tourism strategies. In our study, we investigate the residents' perception of Saudi Arabia as a new destination exemplar to predict residents' perceptions about tourism and tourism investments.

This will lead to avoiding and attaining any potential conflict and dubiousness between residents and tourism service providers because of over-toured destinations. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia is one country that doesn't encounter de facto tourism as it is considered an emerging tourism country. Importantly, we will study the perception of KSA residents from the social exchange theory lens (SET). The SET theory is chosen because it is considered the most suitable theory to study residents' perceptions of tourism (Nunkoo, 2016). SET analyzes the core constructs of the network between tourism service providers and residents as an actor in the tourism supply chain for any tourism destination. So, this paper investigated residents' tourism, economicsociocultural, environmental, and health impacts through the SET lens.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Background

#### Tourism Development Theory

Economic impact, social impact, environmental impact, and cultural impact on tourism development are referred to as tourism development theory (Bianchi, 2018; Yoon et al., 2001). The tourism development theory was proposed by Butler (Butler, 1997). Many researchers have modified this theory based on their perceptions and impacts. This theory also implies that residents' support for developing tourism is in evidence. Tourism development can only be achieved through the help of residents of tourism destinations (Gannon et al., 2020; Woosnam et al., 2018). No component of this theory can be ignored to develop tourism in any destination.

#### Social Exchange Theory

Thibaut and Kelley (Thibaut and Kelley, 2017) modified the economic theory to formulate the social exchange theory (SET). This theory implies the study of the social psychology of groups and establishes a relationship between the benefits and costs of the socio-economic activity, e.g., tourism. All the connections are analyzed based on a comparison between the standards and perceived values of the individuals and groups. From the perspective of tourism, SET explains individuals' attitudes towards tourism and their subsequent level of support for its development. The support towards tourism development is affected by the evaluation of outcomes for themselves and as a whole for their community (Buckley, 2009; Eslami et al., 2019; Woo et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2019).

Social exchange theory has framed a concept based on comparing costs and benefits, negative and positive perceptions, and support for developing tourism in the country. However, these perceptions vary among various stakeholders of the tourism industry, e.g., the individuals directly associated with tourism may have more positive perceptions due to the relative benefits associated with their income and economics. Research has validated this theory and has concluded that many factors, i.e., social, environmental, and economic, have been associated with sustainable tourism development due to the positive and negative perceptions of the individual related to the tourism sector directly or indirectly.

#### Impacts of tourism development

Many countries have considered tourism the primary source of revenue, and its development has expanded worldwide. Besides, rural destinations have been developed as new alternative resources to reinforce the economy and empower traditional industries (Lee and Brahmastre, 2013). Therefore, tourism has significant positive impacts in different aspects such as government revenue, source of income for the community, foreign money exchange, new job opportunities, infrastructure development, and economic growth (Akadiri et al., 2017; FaladeObalade and Dubey, 2014; Martín et al., 2017; Mbaiwa, 2003; Suhel and Bashir, 2018). Furthermore, according to Sinclair-Maragh et al. (Sinclair-Maragh et al., 2015), tourism has associated positive impacts on the environment and social-cultural practices of the community by improving natural conservation, enhancing culture, and preserving history and heritage sites. Therefore, tourism promotes cultural awareness, identity, and destination image within the community (Le and Le, 2020). Moreover, tourism generates many benefits for the community's well-being and improves the living standard of the community members (Mousavi et al., 2016; Stylidis, 2020). In addition, there are indirect health impacts that affect residents to enhance their well-being in local destinations, such as by participating in sports activities, raising health awareness, and complying with sanitary & hygiene procedures, especially during times with higher health risks such as COVID-19 which directly affects the level of health in local areas (Couto et al., 2020; Duro et al., 2021; Foo et al., 2020).

However, previous studies have alluded that tourism development has associated costs (Gursoy et al., 2018; Sharpley, 2014). Usually, there are some negative impacts such as (e.g., crowding, increased cost of living, environmental destruction, changing family values, prostitution, alcohol consumption openly, and the commercialization of cultural practice) that are associated with tourism development (Archer et al., 2012; Zhuang et al., 2019). In addition, tourism

creates changes among communities, such as business inflation, cultural conflicts, tourism anxiety, local language changes, traditional lifestyle changes, drugs, increased crime, violence, and social conflicts (Eyisi et al., 2021; Ferreira et al., 2020). On the other hand, tourism also stimulates terrible habits of food eating because of international restaurants, and some diseases are brought from other countries to the local community, such as (AIDS and STDs). Hence, the balance between the tourism benefits and cost is essential for the marketing plans to acquire residents' support towards tourism development (Obradović and Stojanović, 2021; Polukhina et al., 2021; Vu and Ngo, 2019).

Therefore, creating sustainable tourism destinations is one of the significant issues of marketing challenge to maintain the tourism impacts by minimizing cost and maximizing benefits to make a positive image of tourist destination (Archer et al., 2012; Nunkoo and Gursoy, 2012; Solberg and Preuss, 2007; Tsai and Bui, 2020). Their findings show that a sustainable tourism destination depends on the host community's satisfaction and positive attitude towards tourism development and tourists. Therefore, residents' perceptions and relationships with their attitudes have become the most critical issue among researchers in identifying factors influencing tourism. In literature, scholars have examined various theories and models to explain host communities' perceptions of tourism impact (Easterling, 2005; Sharpley, 2014).

### **Resident Perception towards Tourism Development**

Various studies have investigated the perception of residents and their attitudes over the past fifty years. The compatibility of costs and benefits in tourism development impacts is essential to satisfy host communities (Easterling, 2005; Fakfare et al., 2021; Sharpley, 2014). In general, the local people have perceived more costs than benefits; they may be inclined to withdraw their support from tourism. As a result, understanding residents' perceptions has to be extensively investigated to successfully create a positive destination image and maximize the positive perception and attitude among the residents. Various theories describe how residents' perceptions can be influenced and how their attitudes can be predicted. Some scholars, including Doxey, 1975; Butler, 1980; Dogan, 1989; Ap, 1992 as cited in Ap (1992), have examined the economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts on residents' perceptions. For example, Doxey, 1975 explained the residents' attitude towards tourism development in stages; (euphoria, apathy, irritation, and antagonism), and it is identified as "Irritation Index Theory." Moreover, it explained that as the tourism development rate increased, residents' attitudes changed from euphoria to antagonism.

After that, Butler (R. Butler, 2006; R.W. Butler, 2006) suggested the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), which elucidated the lifecycle of the tourism process in the destination from growth to maturity and how residents' perception was affected. Butler (R. Butler, 2006) used the conceptual framework of favorable, unfavorable, and slight acceptance to specify the attitude of residents instead of the terms "withdraws or antagonists." He argued that residents have different degrees of behavior that might be unfavorable but not withdrawn or antagonistic. Furthermore, Ap [58] described the strategies of residents' response to tourism development and tourists as (embracement, tolerance, adjustment, and withdrawal). Despite that, the residents' attitude has changed over time from embracement to withdrawal of tourists based on the influx of tourists. Therefore, Ap (Ap, 1992), had developed the Social Exchange theory (SET) in the tourism sector to evaluate the resident's perceptions of tourism impacts as well as other ideas that were implemented to examine the residents' perception of tourism destinations. This paper discusses the SET to examine residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and their support for tourism development.

### **The model of the research**

Several studies have examined various theories to study the effectiveness of tourism's impact on the host community and determine the relationship between the residents' perception and tourism development. Social Exchange Theory (SET) has been widely used to describe the exchange between residents and tourists (Bimonte and Punzo, 2016; Kattiyapornpong et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015). Furthermore, it explains the interaction or exchange between individuals in a group to achieve common goals (Tsaur et al., 2018). Hence, a common theory has been applied in evaluating residents' attitudes toward tourism development (S. Chen et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015).

Although the SET has been used for intergroup and exchange between two groups, it has also examined how the residents perceive the benefits and costs of tourism impacts (Eslami et al., 2019; Lawson et al., 1998). Economically, if the benefits outweigh the price, a positive perception is indicated. Otherwise, the negative perception is supposed to be a consequence of the perceived cost of tourism impacts (Sharpley, 2014). So, the drive of this theory is to balance the benefits and costs to evaluate the resident's perception and predict their attitude towards ecotourism development at the destination (Nunkoo, 2016; Sharpley, 2014). Most scholars have confirmed the validity of (SET) to explain the relationship between residents' perception and their support of tourism development. If the residents perceive more benefits from tourism, they support tourism development. On the other hand, if residents perceive high costs, they will not support tourism development. So, there is a positive relationship between residents' perception of tourism impacts and their support of tourism development (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015). Collectively, based on the above-mentioned observations, we present below the hypothesized conceptual framework:

In Figure 1, we present the model of stakeholders' perception of tourism impacts on their intention to support investment in ecotourism development. Due to the (SET), if the residents perceive positive impacts of tourism, they will support tourism development in their destination, and the contrary if they perceive high costs of tourism impacts.

The conceptual framework from Figure 1 makes it easier for this paper to easily specify and define the concepts within the problem of the study. The main variables of this paper are the Saudi residents' perceptions of the tourism impact based on the economic, sociocultural, environmental, and health factors. According to the SET, this study was

carried out to determine the relationship between the perception and the behavior of the residents in supporting tourism development. Based on the study conducted by Tsaur et al., 2018, several papers have implied the social exchange theory to exhibit the behaviors of residents towards tourism development, which can be used to explain the interaction or exchange between a person in a group to achieve group goals. In his paper, he stated that the needs and expectations of all stakeholders must be considered to perform the ultimate exchange between groups.

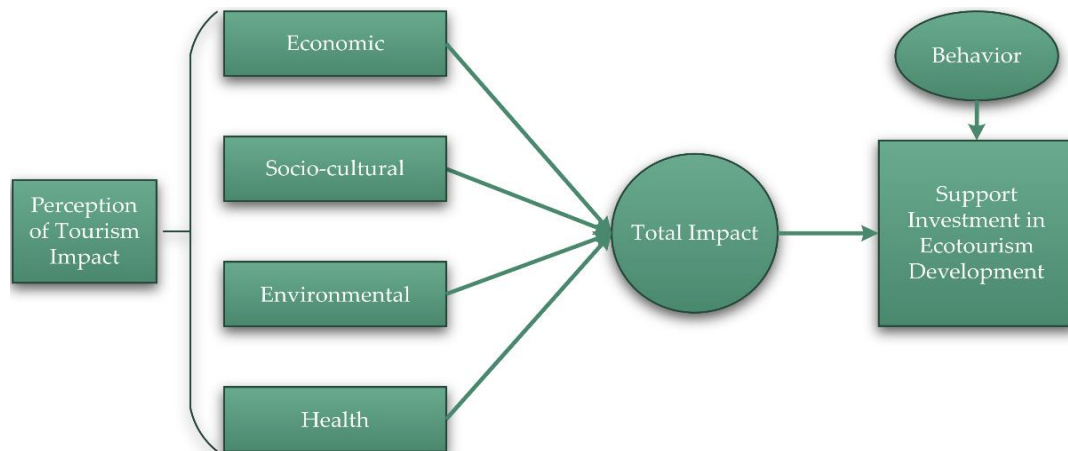


Figure 1. Model of Stakeholders' perception of tourism impacts and support towards investment in ecotourism development in KSA

### Hypotheses

A first set of hypotheses deals with the perception of different types of tourism impacts (the dimensions of tourism impact perception). There are four hypotheses as follow:

**H1.** Saudi residents have positive perception of economic impacts of investment in ecotourism.

**H2.** Saudi residents have positive perception of socio-cultural impacts of investment in ecotourism.

**H3.** Saudi residents have positive perception of environmental impacts of investment in ecotourism at major tourism destinations.

**H4.** Saudi residents have positive perception of health impacts of investment in ecotourism.

The second set of hypotheses refers to the relationship between the Saudi residents' perception of tourism impacts (economic, sociocultural, environmental, and health) and their attitude toward supporting tourism development. According to Social Exchange Theory (SET), the relationship between residents' perceptions and their support of tourism development should be positive. Hence, we articulate the following hypotheses to answer this question by considering the four dimensions of tourism impacts.

**H5.** There is a direct positive relationship between perceived economic impacts of tourism and residents' support of tourism development.

**H6.** There is positive relationship between perceived socio-cultural impacts of tourism and residents' support of tourism development.

**H7.** There is positive relationship between perceived environmental impacts of tourism and residents' support of tourism development.

**H8.** There is positive relationship between perceived health impacts of tourism and residents' support of tourism development.

Last hypothesis about the difference between stakeholders' perception in urban and rural cities towards tourism development is as following:

**H8.** There is a difference between urban and rural residents' perception of tourism development.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sampling and Data Collection

As in Olya and Galilean's (Olya and Gavilyan, 2016) recommendation to estimate the resident's support and perception toward tourism development and investments, we asked a local tourism authority in Saudi Arabia to introduce us to reach residents and target respondents from different parts of the big cities in Saudi Arabia. These cities are (Riyadh, Jeddah, Dhahran, Jubail, and Yanbu industrial area). Although the Holy City of Makkah and The Holy City of Madinah are among the biggest cities in Saudi Arabia, we don't include them in our study. The reason behind that, according to the local tourism authority that these cities mainly depend on religious tourism, and the residents' perception there are less likely to serve within the general scope of the research.

We then distributed the survey online Due to the restrictions of the Covid-19 virus by ensuring that the respondents would be collected in each borough in the selected cities to reflect its population size and demographics. According to Lee (Lee and Brahasrene, 2013), this step allowed for an accurate and high response rate. The way we distributed the survey was that the tourism authority called them personally by their phone numbers. The local tourism authority has ensured that the respondents are selected regarding their awareness of the social initiatives and tourism investments. After the potential respondents had been called, a sample 190 respondents was taken from all participants, N1 (rural)= 86 respondents, and N2

(urban) = 128 respondents from those selected cities. Sample characteristics included demographics of the respondents in terms of gender, nationality, region, qualification, age, monthly income, and job (Table 10).

### Measures and Analysis

We prepared a questionnaire with 25 items to address our study aims, precisely to capture the residents' perceptions of economic, sociocultural, environmental, and health factors; we also asked them about their perceptions of the service providers' initiatives toward eco-tourism development. The survey was structured to explore the Saudi residents' perceptions of tourism impacts from economic, sociocultural, environmental, and health aspects; the respondents were asked to evaluate the effects of ecotourism development based on a five-point Likert Scale (1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree). To reach our research objectives, i) calculate, quantify and measure the mean perceptions of residents in Saudi Arabia about ecotourism development concerning economic impacts, social and cultural impacts, and environmental and health impacts. As well as meaningful support of tourism development, encouragement of current tourism development, acceptance of additional tourism development, and participation in tourism promotion; ii) Examine the relationships between resident's perception of tourism impact in terms of economic, sociocultural, environmental, and health and support of tourism development; iii) Examine the significant and insignificant differences between the perception of the residents in urban and rural areas. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. As for statistical techniques, firstly, reliability (Cronbach's alpha) and validity tests were conducted. Based on the results, this study shows a high validity and reliability given the Cronbach Alpha in this study is between 0.6 and 0.8. Next, the results were written based on a descriptive statistical analysis of the stakeholders' average responses.

## RESULTS

### Reliability Analysis

Reliability is a measure of internal consistency that shows how closely related are a set of items in a group and the extent to which a measure will produce consistent results from the questions built in a survey study. Cronbach's alpha commonly assessed the reliability of this questionnaire. A Cronbach alpha of 0.70 or higher indicates that a perfect measurement scale used to measure a construct is reliable, while 0.6 -0.7 is considered acceptable (Ursachi et al., 2015).

Table 1. Shows Cronbach's Alpha values for each dimension in the questionnaire

No.	Dimension	N of Questions	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Tourism Economic Impacts	6	0.650
2	Socio-cultural Tourism Impacts	6	0.637
3	Environment Tourism Impacts	6	0.613
4	Health impacts	6	0.600
5	support tourism development	4	0.741

### Descriptive Statistics

There are one hundred ninety (190) respondents in this study wherein the majority are male, i.e., 107 or 56.6%, Saudi nationals reaching 182, 95.8% coming from major cities and having a frequency of 128. Also, 67.4%, most of who are bachelor's degree holders consisting of 94, and 49.7% ranging between the age bracket of 31-35 years with 42 responses, and 22.3% have a monthly income of 10001-15000 Saudi Rials (equivalent to 2500 – 4000 USD) and 28.5% in which most of them are non-tourist sec-tor in both public and private garnering a frequency of 121 or 65.8% (Table 10).

In this paper, the questionnaire was built based on positive and negative items to describe the four factors of tourism impacts that were adapted from previous studies (Andreck and Vogt, 2000; Couto et al., 2020; Frauman and Banks, 2011; Hundt, 1996; Johnson et al., 1994; Jurowski and Gursoy, 2004; Khizindar, 2012; Lawson et al., 1998; Liu, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2020; Nunkoo, 2016; Nunkoo and Gursoy, 2012; Styliadis et al., 2014; Thibaut and Kelley, 2017). At the same time, the four items measured the support of investment in ecotourism measurement as a dependent variable: (1- I support current ecotourism development in my community, 2- I support additional tourism development in my community, 3- I participate in tourism promotion of my society and 4. Overall, I am satisfied with the current ecotourism development) that was adopted from (Gursoy et al., 2009; Jurowski and Gursoy, 2004; J.W. Lee and Brahmasrene, 2013; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). Moreover, we considered the positive and the negative of the perception by mean range, meaning that we consider the perception as positive when it is from 3.5 to 5m and medium when it's from 2.25 to 3.5, and negative if its lower than 2. We argued that it was the same sequence of the survey based on a five-point Likert Scale (1-Strongly Disagree (negative perception) to 5-Strongly Agree (positive perception)).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of perception of economic impacts as a result of investment in ecotourism

Order	No	The Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Perception
2	1	Tourism creates more jobs opportunities for our community.	3.92	1.131	positive
4	2	Tourism improves infrastructure and other public services.	3.89	1.071	positive
1	3	Tourism benefits small businesses in my community.	3.99	1.034	positive
5	4	Tourism increases the price of goods and services.	3.49	1.053	Medium
3	5	Tourism increases the price of lands and housing.	3.90	.979	Medium
6	6	Tourism increases the cost of living.	3.33	1.074	Medium
Total			3.75	1.057	positive

From Table 2, the responses show that there are high economic impacts of the tourism sector ranging to a total mean value of 3.75, which is supported by responses through the following: Tourism benefits small businesses in my community (Mean Score = 3.99); Tourism creates more jobs opportunities for our community (Mean Score = 3.92); Tourism increases the price of lands and housing (Mean Score= 3.90); Tourism improves infrastructure and other public services (Mean Score = 3.89); Tourism increases the price of goods and services (Mean Score = 3.49), and Tourism increases the cost of living (Mean Score = 3.33). As can be seen in Table 2, the study showed that the economic impacts of tourism are perceived positively by Saudi residents for three components which are that tourism creates more job opportunities, tourism improves infrastructure and other public services, and tourism benefits small businesses in the community. Also, there are negative perceptions among Saudi residents in terms of two different components: tourism increases the price of goods and services and increases the price of lands and housing; meanwhile, the last component that tourism increases the cost of living is perceived as a medium. Yet, overall, the result for the perception of the economic impacts of the tourism sector among Saudi residents is positive.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of perception of socio-cultural impacts

Order	No.	The Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Perception
2	1	Tourism preserves the cultural and historical sites.	4.07	.960	Positive
1	2	Tourism promotes Saudi culture and identity.	4.09	1.001	Positive
3	3	Tourism provides the availability of recreational facilities.	3.63	1.104	Positive
6	4	Tourism disturbs Saudi social values, norms and tradition.	2.89	1.013	Medium
4	5	Tourism creates overcrowded of tourists in recreational, outdoors and hiking trails which disturbs local's privacy.	3.17	1.156	Medium
5	6	Tourism creates culture's conflict with tourists.	2.90	1.032	Medium
Total			3.46	1.044	Positive

Table 3 shows that the social and cultural impacts of the tourism sector are high, with a computed mean value of 3.46 that generates support with the following items: Tourism promotes Saudi culture and identity (Mean Score = 4.09); Tourism preserves the cultural and historical sites (Mean Score = 4.07); Tourism provides the availability of recreational facilities (Mean Score = 3.63); Tourism creates over crowdedness of tourists in recreational, outdoors and hiking trails which disturbs local's privacy (Mean Score = 3.17); Tourism make cultural conflict with tourists (Mean Score = 2.90); and Tourism concerns Saudi social values, norms, and tradition (Mean Score = 2.89). In Table 3, three items of socio-cultural impacts of tourism are perceived positively by Saudi residents: tourism preserves the cultural and historical sites, promotes Saudi cultures and identity, and provides recreational facilities availability. Meanwhile, the other three items are tourism disturbs Saudi social values, norms, and tradition, creating the crowdedness of tourists in recreational, outdoor, and hiking trails, which disturbs local privacy, and tourism creates cultural conflict with tourists is perceived in the medium range within the Saudi residents. Though Saudi society is much protective of its socio-cultural settings, it has always welcomed other cultures. Therefore, it is no surprise that the population views tourism favorably, as it facilitates social exchange and creates opportunities to learn about other people and cultures. So, based on this result, it can be said that, in general, the development of the perception of the social-cultural impacts of the tourism sector among Saudi residents is positive.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of Environmental impacts

Order	No.	The Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Perception
2	1	Tourism preserves the natural protection areas and geological sites.	3.44	1.110	Positive
1	2	Tourism improves community appearance.	3.62	1.105	Positive
3	3	Tourism development in our community promotes positive environmental ethics.	3.43	1.040	Positive
6	4	Tourism causes pollution (water, air, and noise).	2.93	1.064	Medium
4	5	Tourism has led to traffic and congestion.	3.37	1.141	Medium
5	6	The quality of the environment has deteriorated because of tourism.	3.04	1.166	Medium
Total			3.30	1.104	Medium

From Table 4, it can be seen that there are medium environmental impacts of the tourism sector, having a mean value of 3.30. Responses from the respondents supported this result through the following items: Tourism improves community appearance (Mean Score = 3.62); Tourism preserves the natural protection of areas and geological sites (Mean Score = 3.44); Tourism development in our community promotes positive environmental ethics (Mean Score = 3.43); Tourism has led to traffic and congestion (Mean Score = 3.37); The quality of the environment has deteriorated because of tourism (Mean Score = 3.04); and Tourism causes pollution (water, air, and noise) (Mean Score = 2.93).

This statement is by Malik et al., 2017 study, which revealed that a considerable number of respondents were skeptical about the tourism impacts on the natural environment, with 34% (Mean Score = 2.79) of the respondents stating that tourism activities damage the natural environment in the long run. The result shown in Table 4 reflected that generally, the environmental impacts of tourism are perceived medium, which can be considered both negative and positive by Saudi residents. The findings are positive perceptions for the first three components: tourism preserves the natural protection of areas and geological sites, tourism improves community appearance, and tourism development in the community promotes positive environmental ethics. Meanwhile, for the other three, the results are displayed as medium perceptions within the Saudi residents: tourism causes pollution (water, air, noise), leads to traffic and

congestion, and the quality of the environment has deteriorated because of tourism. The findings are justified by previous studies, which stated that environmental impacts such as traffic congestion, noise pollution, and competition between tourists and residents in recreational venues and spaces were the impacts that were observed in the community. Thus, overall, the result for the perception of environmental impacts of the tourism sector among the Saudi residents came out as medium level, and it is a clear indication to invest more in the development of ecotourism in KSA.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of health impacts

Order	No.	The Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Perception
3	1	Tourism improves local's health (increase of income leads to better wellbeing and health.	3.42	1.182	Positive
1	2	Tourism encourages locals to engage in sports activities with tourists (e.g., running marathons, adventure, hiking, biking, snorkelling and other sports.	3.78	1.014	Positive
2	3	Tourism complies the promotion of sanitary & hygiene procedures for tourists to protect residents during health risk (e.g., H1N1, Covid-19 pandemic).	3.53	0.930	Positive
5	4	Tourism stimulates the bad habits of food eating because of international restaurants and café which lead to malnutrition.	3.03	1.059	Medium
6	5	Tourism might bring back diseases already disappeared in my community.	3.02	1.159	Medium
4	6	Tourism can cause increases in diseases in my community (e.g., AIDS, STDs)	3.19	1.189	Medium
7	7	Tourism impacts the general level of health conditions (mortality, morbidity, reduction in life expectancy, etc.)	2.87	1.138	Medium
Total			3.26	1.096	Medium

The results in Table 5 show that that health impacts has medium effects in tourism industry garnering a computed mean value of 3.26 which is supported by the following items such as tourism encourages locals to engage in sports activities with tourists (e.g. running marathons, adventure, hiking, biking, snorkelling and others sports (Mean Score = 3.78); Tourism complies with the promotion of sanitary & hygiene procedures for tourists to protect residents during health risks (e.g. H1N1, Covid-19 pandemic ) (Mean Score = 3.53); Tourism improves local's health [increase of income leads to better wellbeing and health (Mean Score = 3.42)]; Tourism can causes increases in diseases in community ( e.g. AIDS, STDs) (Mean Score = 3.19); Tourism stimulates the bad habits of food eating because of international restaurants and café which lead to malnutrition (Mean Score = 3.03); Tourism might bring back diseases that have already disappeared from the community (Mean Score = 3.02); and Tourism impacts the general level of health conditions (mortality, morbidity, reduction in life expectancy, etc.) (Mean Score = 2.87).

The findings in Table 5 show that tourism's health impacts are generally perceived as medium level among Saudi residents. The components are tourism improves local health (an increase in income leads to better well-being and health); tourism encourages locals to engage in sports activities with tourists (running marathons, adventure, hiking, biking, snorkeling, and other sports), and tourism complies with the promotion of sanitary & hygiene procedures for tourists to protect residents during health risks (e.g., H1N1, Covid-19 pandemic) are stated to be of positive perception. Moreover, as COVID-19 is spreading globally, this will directly or indirectly affect the community, as stated by Uğur & Akbıyık (Uğur and Akbıyık, 2020). In contrast, the indirect effects can also arise from changes in behavior, for example, when consumers forego shopping or tourists avoid traveling to regions that appear risky to evade the risk of infection. During the corona crisis, worldwide travel traffic has come to a standstill, and many countries have prohibited foreigners from entering the country and closed their external borders. The restrictions include all other sectors related to the tourism industry, such as restaurants, domestic tourism, visits to cultural events, and trade fairs.

The other components which are stated as medium perceptions among the Saudi residents are tourism stimulates the bad habits of food eating because of international restaurants and café which lead to malnutrition, tourism might bring back diseases that have already disappeared in the community, tourism can cause an increase in diseases in the community (e.g., AIDS, STDs) and in contrast, the destinations they travel to, they often come into contact with pathogens, bacteria, parasites, viruses that are not or no longer to be found in their home countries; therefore, their immune system does not have an adequate defense against the specific diseases. According to Uğur and Akbıyık (Uğur and Akbıyık, 2020), common diseases associated with travel activities are differentiated according to the type of transmission options. These include pathogens that are transmitted through body fluids (e.g., HIV / AIDS, hepatitis C) and droplets (e.g., SARS, flu viruses, tuberculosis) or aerosols (e.g., anthrax, fungal spores) which simultaneously impact the general level of health conditions (mortality, morbidity, reduction in life expectancy, etc.). Overall, the perception of the health impact is medium among Saudi residents. Based on these findings, the economic, sociocultural, environmental, and health factors significantly affect Saudi residents' perceptions while residents and tourists use resources at the destination. However, the study has shown that Saudi residents perceived benefits from tourism from four factors (economic, Sociocultural, Environment, and health impacts). Saudi residents have perceived the cost of the economic effects, but they are still unaware of the adverse effects of other factors, such as sociocultural, environmental, and health issues. Therefore, the study shows that Saudi residents positively perceive tourism impacts and supports hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4. The results meet the essence of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) wherein, in the early stage of tourism development, residents are more welcome to embrace the destination's development.

Results shown in Table 6 indicate a high descriptive statistic regarding Saudi citizens' support of tourism development, garnering a computed mean value of 3.68. This result is supported by responses from the respondents with the following sub-variables: I believe tourism should be actively encouraged in my community (Mean Score = 4.05); I support additional

investment in ecotourism development in my community. (Mean Score = 4.00); I support current ecotourism development in my community (Mean Score = 3.78); overall, I'm satisfied with the current level of investment in ecotourism development in our community (Mean Score = 2.89). In general, Saudi residents do have a positive attitude towards tourism development. Only one component of the questionnaire came out as a medium: 'Overall, I'm satisfied with current investment in ecotourism development in our community, whereas the others are positive. This shows that Saudi residents in the study area are highly supportive of tourism development in their area.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of Saudi residents' support for tourism development

Order	No.	The Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Attitude
3	1	I support current ecotourism development in my community.	3.78	0.972	Positive
2	2	I support additional investment in ecotourism development in my community.	4.00	0.976	Positive
1	3	I believe ecotourism should be actively encouraged in my community.	4.05	0.999	Positive
4	4	Overall, I'm satisfied with current level of investment in ecotourism development in our community.	2.89	1.286	Medium
Total			3.68	1.058	Positive

Table 7. Relationship between perception of tourism impacts and support ecotourism development

Variables	Computed R-value	Quantitative Linear Relationship	Sig. (2 tailed)	Decision/Interpretation
Economic Impacts	0.320**	Low positive correlation	0.000	Accept Ha/ Significant
Social and Cultural Impacts	0.232***	Negligible positive correlation	0.001	Accept Ha/ Significant
Environmental Impacts	0.192**	Negligible positive correlation	0.008	Accept Ha/ Significant
Health Impacts	0.229**	Negligible positive correlation	0.002	Accept Ha/ Significant

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.001 Level (2-tailed)

Table 7 above shows that the economic impact of the tourism sector has a low positive correlation with Saudi's residents' support for tourism development, reaching a computed Pearson correlation value of 0.320\*\* that is statistically significant at 0.01 Level of significance of the two-tailed test. As such, the other tourism sectors are considered as a negligibly positive correlation with a Pearson correlation value of 0.320\*\*, 0.232\*\*\*, 0.192\*\*, and 0.229\*\*, respectively, with this test acclaims that there is a significant relationship in terms of economics, social and cultural, environmental and health impacts using 0.01 level of significance in a two-tailed test form.

Therefore, the study shows a weak positive relationship between perceived tourism impacts and support of tourism development. Hence, this study confirms the assumption of Social Exchange Theory (SET) from H5, H6, H7, and H8 that there is a direct positive relationship between residents' perception of tourism impacts and support of tourism development. By the result of table 8, it generated that there is a low positive correlation between the effects of the tourism sector on the local community and Saudi residents' support for tourism development having a computed Pearson correlation of 0.342, which stands as statistically at the 0.01 level of significance in two-tailed test form.

Table 8. Relationship between the effects of tourism impacts on their attitude towards support tourism development

		The effects of the tourism sector on the local community	
Saudi residents' support for tourism development	Pearson Correlation	.342**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	189	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 9. Differences between the perception of the Saudi residents in Urban and Rural areas based on support to invest in ecotourism development

VARIABLES			Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
			F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
										Lower	Upper
Q1	I support current tourism development in my community.	Equal variances assumed	1.626	.204	1.526	187	.129	.229	.150	-.067	.526
		Equal variances not assumed			1.467	109.677	.145	.229	.156	-.080	.539
Q2	I support additional tourism development in my community.	Equal variances assumed	4.791	.030	2.970	187	.003	.440	.148	.148	.732
		Equal variances not assumed			2.698	95.849	.008	.440	.163	.116	.764
Q3	I believe tourism should be actively encouraged in my community.	Equal variances assumed	4.537	.034	1.919	187	.057	.295	.154	-.008	.598
		Equal variances not assumed			1.749	96.643	.083	.295	.168	-.040	.629
Q4	Overall, I'm satisfied with current tourism development in our community.	Equal variances assumed	2.269	.134	1.459	187	.146	.291	.199	-.102	.684
		Equal variances not assumed			1.429	114.826	.156	.291	.203	-.112	.694



Through the use of Levene's test and t-statistics in table 9, it is overviewed that there is a significant difference between the variances of the mean responses of urban residents and residents of rural areas in Q2 (I support additional tourism development in my community) and Q3 (I believe tourism should be actively encouraged in my community).

In support of tourism development, having an F value (i.e., Sig.) of 0.030 and 0.034, respectively, is less than or equal to 0.05. This result is intended to project the computed t-values of 2.698 and 1.749 comparable with computed Sig(2-tailed) of 0.008 and 0.083, shown in equal variances that are not assumed. On the other hand, there is observed greater F value (i.e., Sig.) in Q1 (I support current tourism development in my community) and Q4 (Overall, I'm satisfied with recent tourism development in our community) to 0.05, which means that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of major cities' residents and residents of rural areas in Q1 and Q4 for the support tourism development having a computation of 0.204 and 0.134 respectively. By equal variance usage, it is assumed that the computed t- values are 1.526 and 1.459, having a Sig (2-tailed) of 0.129 and 0.146, respectively.

However, this study shows that there is no difference between those who live in urban cities and rural in terms of support for tourism development. However, the results confirmed that residents who live in rural areas are more accepting of additional tourism development in their local destinations than those who live in urban cities.

## DISCUSSION

The study investigated the effects of the significant impacts of tourism (economic, socio-cultural, environmental) and health issues, which have become more critical due to COVID-19 and its vast impact on the tourism industry and economics of any country or tourism destination. This study found that tourism impacts affect Saudi residents' perception of tourism development. However, other studies have confirmed that tourism impacts influence residents' opinions and perceptions of tourism development (Gursoy et al., 2018; Nunkoo, 2016; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2010; Peters et al., 2018; Sharpley, 2014; Stylidis et al., 2014; Williams and Lawson, 2001), whereas tourism impacts are the main predictors of residents' perceptions. As for the economic impacts, this study has found that Saudi residents in urban and rural areas have perceived negative perception of the economic effects.

They have noted that the price of land, goods, services, and cost of living have increased. According to (Malik et al., 2017), Saudi residents in AL Dhakhaliya had a positive perception of tourism impacts and perceived benefits from tourism development. However, this study found that the attitude of Saudi residents in Al Jabel Al Akhader, a part of the Al Dakhaliya region, is perceived as having negative economic impacts on tourism. (Gursoy et al., 2018) exhibited that due to the increase in tourism development and the number of tourists, the attitude of residents will change accordingly. However, Saudi residents in urban and rural areas have perceptive, positive opinions of economic impacts, which is similar to many previous studies, and they confirm that tourism has significant positive effects in different aspects economically (Fayissa et al., 2008; Gnanapala and Sandaruwani, 2016; Gursoy et al., 2018; Khayrulloevna, 2020; Lee C.C. and Chang, 2008; Lee J.W. and Brahmasrene, 2013; Pratama, 2020; Stynes, 1997).

With regards to socio-cultural impacts, this study found that Saudi residents have a positive perception of socio-cultural impacts, so tourism has a significant positive effect in promoting cultural and historical sites, providing recreational areas, and promoting Saudi identity and culture among tourists, which is consistent with previous studies (Aman et al., 2019; Mbaiwa, 2003; Piuchan et al., 2018; Zamani-Farahani and Musa, 2012). (Tsaour et al., 2018) have found that cultural conflicts lead to a negative attitude of residents even though they are working in the tourism industry.

However, this study has found that Saudi residents are still not aware of or have a neutral perception of the negative impacts of tourism, which means that tourism is still at the beginning level. The number of tourists is still low, and no mega events are held at the destinations. Therefore, Saudi residents have not yet experienced any negative impacts of socio-cultural aspects such as changes in Saudi social values, norms, and tradition and overcrowdedness of tourists in recreational, outdoor, and hiking trails, which may disturb locals' privacy and cause cultural conflict with tourists.

Regarding the environmental impacts, the ecological impacts of tourism are the main concern for the local community, and it directly influences residents' perceptions. Once there is more traffic, human activities at a tourism destination may raise some environmental issues that may affect the residents (Amuquandoh, 2010; Brida et al., 2011; Peters et al., 2018; Ren et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2008). However, Saudi residents perceive the benefits of tourism on the environment, where tourism has significant positive effects on the local community for both destinations.

On the other hand, Saudi residents have not yet experienced the negative impacts of tourism due to the early stage of tourism development, and there are no adverse effects on the natural environment. The perception of Saudi residents is supported by (Pramanik and Ingkadijaya, 2018; Zhao and Li, 2018). Regarding the health impact, the novelty of this study is that it has investigated a new critical factor in the tourism industry, especially during the Corona Virus (COVID-19), which has had substantial adverse effects on the tourism industry (Akbulaev and Aliyev, 2020). However, some studies have confirmed that sanitation and other health issues affect residents' perception of tourism impacts (Kim, 2002; Mensah and Enu-Kwesi, 2018; Sari and Nazli, 2020; Zhang et al., 2022).

In this study, Saudi residents positively perceive health impacts such as [tourism, raising awareness of the importance of joint health, and improving Saudi residents' health and well-being. adheres sanitary & hygiene procedures for tourists to protect residents during health risks (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic), encourages locals to engage in sports activities with tourists, and tourism impacts the general level of health (mortality, morbidity, reduction in life expectancy, etc.) On the contrary, negative health impacts are still not known among Saudi residents in terms of whether or not tourism stimulates the bad habits of food because of international restaurants and café which lead to malnutrition; health risks create anxiety and xenophobia from tourists of catching a disease in the community and can increase the

stress of life events. Therefore, Saudi residents have a neutral perception of the negative impacts on health in the destination. However, the mean of adverse effects is about 3.0-3.5, which is more for the negative perception of health impacts. Frent (Frent, 2016) confirmed that tourism might provide negative health impacts on the local community.

Next is the support of tourism development; the current study has found that Saudi residents support tourism development although they perceive the cost of economic impacts of tourism which is similar to the results of (Andereck and Vogt, 2000), who asserted that residents perceive adverse effects of tourism but still support tourism development. Furthermore, the essence of SET is that there is a positive relationship between residents' attitudes and their perceptions; however, we found no positive relationship in this case. SET shows a positive relationship between residents' perception and support of tourism development. However, this study generally confirmed that SET is still valid and there is a positive relationship in terms of support of tourism development when the respondents perceived benefits from tourism development in destination. The findings ensure and contradict some previous studies. For example, the previous studies confirmed that SET validates the relationship between the perception of tourism impacts and support of tourism development. However, some limitations of (the SET) theory have arisen to measure residents' perception that SET had considered the residents as homogenous in one group regardless of the heterogeneousness of individuals (J.W. Lee and Brahmasrene, 2013). Lawson et al. (Lawson et al., 1998) argued that (SET) has described the residents' support of tourism development while enduring the cost over time. Similarly, C. Chen and Raab (S.C. Chen and Raab, 2009) confirmed that individuals' behavioral responses towards tourists and tourism differ. Accordingly, SET reflects only the significant positive relationship between the benefits and cost of tourism impacts and residents' perceptions.

On the other hand, some results were contradictory to the (SET); although there is a negative perception among residents, they still support tourism (S.C. Chen and Raab, 2009). Andereck and Vogt, 2000 confirmed that residents perceived a negative impact and still supported tourism development. This study has slightly confirmed that even though residents perceive the cost of the economic effects, they still support tourism development.

Furthermore, the resident's perception has changed over time, and the variance of people cognitively and geographically should be considered (Andereck and Vogt, 2000). Despite the wide use of social exchange theory to predict the behavior of residents towards tourists, it is still insufficient (Ward and Berno, 2011).

Finally, the difference between rural and urban areas - there is no difference between Saudi residents who live in rural areas and urban areas regarding their perceptions. Both destinations have positive perceptions of tourism impacts, which means that tourism in both destinations is in its early stage, and residents welcome the improvement of infrastructure and projects to attract tourists to enhance their small businesses (J.W. Lee and Brahmasrene, 2013). Therefore, there is no significant difference between residents in urban and rural areas in their perception of tourism impacts. On the contrary, Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017 showed a significant difference in Malaysia, where the size of areas affected the perceptions, as the urban cities had more positive perceptions than the rural areas.

However, there is a difference between residents in rural and urban areas in accepting additional tourism development in destinations; residents in Al Jabel Al Akhader are willing to take more development in their community than those who live in urban cities, which is contrary to previous studies where the residents in rural areas were more concerned about any development due to the environmental issues (Almeida-García et al., 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Our study has investigated the investigated residents' perceptions of tourism's economic, sociocultural, environmental, and health impacts through the social exchange theory lens (SET). We contributed to the current literature by exploring residents' Saudi Arabian perceptions of tourism activities on their attitudes using the SET theory. Our findings help predict residents' attitudes toward the kingdom's tendency to invest in tourism projects. We found significant positive relationships between all the domains of perceived impacts and residents' support of development. Hence, in conclusion, all the hypotheses are accepted. Eventually, the residents are willing to take more development at the destination unless there are threats to the community's social, cultural, health, and environmental perspectives. Furthermore, we find a crucial result: the difference between those who live in urban and rural cities in terms of support for tourism development. We found that residents in Al Jabel Al Akhader are willing to take more development in their community than those who live in urban cities. Thus, we contribute to the current studies that investigated the residents' perception toward activities by ensuring that residents have perceptions toward destination activities from urban and rural valences.

Moreover, the findings also contribute toward a deeper understanding of the "exchange" process specified by the SET by considering the distinct effect of each perceived impact domain (economic, socio-cultural, and environmental) on residents' attitudes toward support of tourism development. This study may assist policymakers and planners of the tourism industry, including the government, to enhance residents' quality of life alongside a projection and preservation of what the Saudi residents value the most. For instance, the promotional messages designed to support tourism could be derived from the resident's perception of their quality of life and how and in what way they wanted to improve it. Empowering residents by providing information on the potential implications of tourism could facilitate residents' support by enhancing their trust in local authorities and leading to more effective and sustainable development plans. The government should consider the opinions of residents. It should maximize the benefits of developing tourism in the destination to mitigate any adverse impacts as much as possible by facilitating the residents and tourists.

This study does, however, help in setting the direction for future research in the tourism sector of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Regarding residents' perceptions, there is a need for more qualitative studies on the tourism sector. Also, covering other cities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will contribute to the research in this field.

### Limitations and Implications

The study was conducted in major tourist destinations of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (urban and rural areas), especially the cities of Riyadh, Jeddah, Dhahran, Jubail, and Yanbu industrial area, and collected more samples. Therefore, we recommend further studies to study other cities in KSA to have a holistic overview of the tourism industry in the country. Moreover, we recommend further studies use a different scale with different items to ensure and increase the reliability of the research ideas. Notably, the perception of residents doesn't maintain a real action from them. Therefore, further research should consider an action behavior (word of mouse, destination attachment, destination recommendation, etc.) along with perception to maintain positive tendencies from residents. Moreover, the current study debates use categorical variables (e.g., age, gender, etc.) to show the respondents profiles because categorical variables are more likely to attributed to nonlinearity assumptions (Nunkoo and Gursoy, 2012). Therefore, we recommend the further study to employ independent sample t-test and one way ANOVA to test the mean differences of such categorical variables through an interval or ratio scale.

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Table 10. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	107	56.6%
	Female	82	43.4%
Total		189	100.0%
Nationality	Saudi	182	95.8%
	non-Saudi	8	4.2%
Total		190	100.0%
Region	Urban	128	67.4%
	Rural	62	32.6%
Total		190	100.0%
Qualification	Secondary School and Lower	57	30.2%
	Diploma/Degree	94	49.7%
	Postgraduate	21	11.1%
	Other	17	9.0%
Total		189	100.0%
Age	20 year or less	20	10.6%
	21 - 25 year	19	10.1%
	26 - 30 year	37	19.7%
	31 - 35 year	42	22.3%
	36 - 40 year	33	17.6%
	41 - 45 year	29	15.4%
	46 - 50 year	7	3.7%
	more than 50 years	1	0.5%
Total		188	100.0%
Monthly income	less than 500 rial	31	16.7%
	501 -1000 rial	44	23.7%
	1001 - 1500 rial	53	28.5%
	1501 - 2000 rial	13	7.0%
	more than 2000 rial	8	4.3%
	Not Fixed income.	28	15.1%
Total		186	100.0%
Job	Non-tourist sector (public or private)	121	65.8%
	Tourism sector (public or private)	13	7.1%
	Job seeker	9	4.9%
	Unemployed	39	21.2%
	Retired	2	1.1%
Total		184	100.0%

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