

Applying Theory of Change to Embed Saudi Cultural Identity in Slow Fashion Production

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the Theory of Change (ToC) framework supports the systematic integration of Saudi cultural identity into slow-fashion production while enhancing sustainability and product longevity. Using a qualitative descriptive–analytical approach and methodological triangulation, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five Saudi sustainability-oriented fashion manufacturers, field observations of fashion exhibitions, and analysis of official documents from relevant institutions. The findings indicate that ToC offers a structured pathway for embedding cultural identity across production stages inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and long-term impacts. Integrating cultural identity influences material selection, design choices, production processes, and consumer engagement, contributing to durability, cultural authenticity, and sustainability. The study advances cultural sustainability literature by positioning ToC as strategic analytical tool and offers practical insights for designers, manufacturers, and policymakers aligned with Saudi Vision 2030.

Keywords: Theory of Change, cultural, identity, slow-fashion, sustainability, Saudi.

1.INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has long been recognized as one of the most influential global creative industries, shaping cultural expression, consumer behavior, and economic development. However, the rapid expansion of the industry has also generated significant environmental and social challenges, including excessive resource consumption, waste generation, and labor exploitation (Goworek et al., 2017). In response to these concerns, scholars and practitioners have increasingly advocated for alternative production models that promote sustainability within fashion systems.

Slow fashion has emerged as one of the most prominent approaches to sustainable fashion. Unlike fast fashion, which prioritizes rapid production cycles and low-cost garments, slow-fashion emphasizes quality, durability, ethical production, and responsible consumption (Clark, 2008). The slow-fashion movement encourages designers and manufacturers to create garments that possess long-term value and cultural meaning rather than being treated as disposable commodities.

Within this context, cultural identity has gained increasing attention as a factor that can enhance the sustainability of fashion products. Cultural identity refers to the set of values, traditions, symbols, and aesthetic expressions that characterize a specific cultural group or society (Hall, 2015). When integrated into fashion design, cultural identity can transform garments into meaningful cultural artifacts that reflect heritage, creativity, and collective memory.

Fashion scholars have emphasized that garments embedded with cultural meanings often generate stronger emotional connections between consumers and products. These emotional connections may encourage consumers to retain garments for longer periods, thereby extending product lifecycles and reducing fashion waste (McNeill et al., 2020). Consequently, the integration of cultural identity into fashion design can contribute to both cultural sustainability and environmental sustainability.

In Saudi Arabia, cultural identity represents a vital component of national heritage and creative expression. The Kingdom possesses a rich tradition of textile arts, decorative patterns, and regional clothing styles that reflect its diverse cultural landscape. Traditional garments such as the abaya and thobe embody cultural values and aesthetic traditions shaped by historical and social influences (Aldajani, 2021). These cultural elements provide valuable inspiration for contemporary fashion designers seeking to reinterpret heritage within modern design contexts.

The Saudi fashion industry has experienced rapid growth in recent years, particularly within the framework of Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the national economy and promote creative industries (Sood, 2024). Government initiatives have sought to support emerging designers, strengthen cultural production, and position Saudi fashion within global markets. As part of this transformation, cultural identity has become an important element in shaping the future of the Saudi fashion industry (Alblowi & Henninger, 2024).

Despite growing interest in culturally inspired fashion design, significant challenges remain in systematically integrating cultural identity into fashion production processes. Many designers draw inspiration from heritage motifs or traditional aesthetics; however, these practices are often informal and lack structured frameworks that guide the transformation of cultural resources into sustainable fashion products (Alblowi et al., 2022).

The Theory of Change (ToC) offers a potential framework for addressing this gap. Originally developed in the fields of development policy and program evaluation, the Theory of Change provides a structured approach for understanding how specific inputs and activities lead to desired outcomes and long-term impacts (Serrat, 2017). By mapping causal relationships between different stages of intervention, the framework enables researchers to analyse complex transformation processes.

Applying the Theory of Change framework to fashion production may provide valuable insights into how cultural identity can be systematically embedded within sustainable fashion systems. Through its structured stages—inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact—the framework can clarify how cultural resources influence design practices, production processes, and consumer behavior (Alsahhari & Mansour, 2024).

This study therefore aims to examine how the Theory of Change framework can support the integration of Saudi cultural identity into slow-fashion production. Specifically, the research explores the strategies adopted by Saudi fashion manufacturers to incorporate cultural elements within their design and production practices and analyses how these practices contribute to sustainability outcomes (Fadda & Shafie, 2020).

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the perspectives of employers and experts regarding the integration of Saudi cultural identity into the fashion industry using the Theory of Change (TOC) framework?

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Assess the importance of cultural identity in the determination of inputs (including materials, technologies and human resources) prior to the initiation of the design phase.
2. Examine the impact of the assimilation of cultural identity, into production processes on the quality of the final outputs.
3. Evaluate outputs related to cultural identity in terms of immediate results, such as sales and consumer satisfaction.
4. Explore the long-term impact of incorporating cultural identity on the sustainability of fashion use, monitor the challenges facing factories in integrating cultural identity.

4. METHODS

The study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical research design (Saunders et al, 2019). This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how cultural identity is incorporated into fashion production practices and how these practices relate to sustainability objectives (Creswell, 2021). Through the effective application of data triangulation for bolstered the credibility of the qualitative data by drawing from multiple, reliable data sources (Denzin, 1978).

Data were collected using methodological triangulation, combining three sources:

1. Semi-structured interviews with Saudi fashion manufacturers. (Table 1)

Table 1. Information about Employers and Factories Participating in the Interviews. (Researcher's Design)

Factor y Code	Year Establishe d	Factory Location	Job	Years of Experienc e	Type of Product s	Productio n System	Motivat ion for Adopting Strategy	Type of Sustainabilit y
MH*	2017	Hail Industrial City	General Manager	14 years	Men's Thobe	Hybrid System	Customers' desire to add personal touches	Economic Sustainability
MM*	2019	Riyadh, Second Industrial Area	General Manager	More than 15 years	Men's and Women' s Shoes	Semi-Automatic	Ability to manually add a heritage touch	Environment al Sustainability
MQ*	1968	Dammam, First Industrial Area	Productio n Manager	20 years	Women' s Abaya	Mass Production	Maintainin g quality	Social Sustainability
MJ*	2016	Khamis Mushait, Asir Region	General Manager	12 years	Men's Clothing	Semi-Automatic	Combining quality and cultural identity	Environment al Sustainability
MG*	2009	Thuwal, Western Coast	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	More than 20 years	Ready-to-Wear Clothing	Lean and Flexible Production	Balancing efficiency, quality, and flexibility	Environment al Economic and Social Sustainability

Note. MH (The Distinguished Thobe Company Factory for Men's Clothing), MM (Ana Khaleeji Company), MQ (Cleopatra Garment Factory), MJ (Modern Lak Men's Clothing Factory), MG (Namat Factory).

2. Field observations of fashion events and exhibitions. (Table 2)

Table 2. Information about event and exhibition locations. (Researcher's Design)

Event	Date	Location	Themes	Notes
Islamic Arts Biennale (2023 Edition)	January 14 2023	Jeddah	Culture, Heritage, Materials/Crafts	Though not a fashion festival, it gathers artisans and heritage techniques, displaying materials usable in design
Noor Riyadh Festival	30 November 2023	Riyadh	Culture, Materials, Sustainable Designs	Use of recycled materials and cultural symbols in artistic displays
Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale	February 20 2024	Diriyah	Culture, Sustainability, Environmental Awareness	Focuses on environmental awareness and cultural sustainability
Saudi Heritage Revival Competition	July 20 2024	Riyadh	Fashion, Culture, Sustainability	Competition theme links heritage with sustainable design; observed design outputs showing integration of heritage and sustainability
Saudi Fashion & Tex Expo (Saudi FashionTex) 2nd edition	August 29 2024	Riyadh International Convention & Exhibition Center	Fashion, Textiles, Material Sustainability	Trade fair featuring multiple exhibitors; supply chains and sustainable materials presented as designer inputs

Riyadh Fashion Week (2024 Edition)	October 21 2024	Riyadh	Fashion, Culture, Sustainability, Materials	Showcasing designs integrating cultural symbols and sustainable materials
Traditional Fashion Exhibition	November 24 2024	King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra), Dhahran	Fashion, Culture, Sustainability, Heritage/Materials	The exhibition showcased the history of traditional Saudi fashion, handicrafts, and natural materials
Saudi Fashion Awards 2025	May 22 2025	Riyadh	Fashion, Sustainability, Cultural Identity	Highlights fashion creators with focus on innovation, sustainability, and cultural identity
Riyadh Fashion Week 2025	October 16–21 2025	Riyadh	Fashion, Sustainability, Cultural Identity	Showcasing Saudi and international designers with emphasis on sustainability and cultural identity

3. Analysis of official documents related to fashion, culture, and sustainability. (Table 3)

Table 3. Information about authorities and organizations, and sources of official documents (Researcher's Design)

Entity / Commission	Document	Objective
Saudi Fashion Commission	Intellectual Property Guide and Designers' Rights Protection	Protect designers' creations, promote a culture of creativity, cover patents, industrial designs, and copyrights
	National Culture Strategy	Develop the fashion sector, organize activities, support designers and practitioners
Saudi Ministry of Culture	Authority Vision and Mission	Recognize the fashion industry as a pillar of local culture, support cultural and artistic events to enhance national identity
	Cultural Status Report 2020	Review the cultural situation, focus on crafts and handicrafts, enhance cultural identity
Islamic Development Bank	The Road to Sustainable Development Goals	Strategies to achieve SDGs, promote local production, and create job opportunities
International Labour Organization	Building a Future with Decent Work for All	Policies for decent work in the Kingdom, improve working conditions in the ready-made garment sector, enhance social and economic sustainability
UNESCO	Intangible Cultural Heritage in Saudi Arabia	Preserve Saudi cultural heritage such as the Najdi Ardha and Al-Qatt Al-Asiri art
	Heritage Sites in Saudi Arabia	Include sites like Al-Ahsa Oasis, Al-Faw, and Hima on the World Heritage List

Five manufacturers operating in different regions of Saudi Arabia participated in the interviews. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all respondents possessed professional experience in fashion manufacturing and were involved in sustainability-related practices. Field observations were conducted at several cultural and fashion events, including fashion exhibitions and heritage-related design showcases. In addition, official documents issued by the Saudi Fashion Commission, the Ministry of Culture, UNESCO, the Islamic Development Bank, and the International Labour Organization were analyzed to understand institutional perspectives on cultural sustainability. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding supported by MAXQDA software (Kuckartz, 1999). The analysis followed three main stages: open coding, thematic categorization, and interpretation. Codes were organized according to the five stages of the Theory of Change framework: inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact (Feinerer & Wild, 2007). This structure enabled the researchers to identify how cultural identity influences different phases of fashion production.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Current research emphasizes the fundamental necessity of embedding Saudi cultural identity into the realm of fashion. However, several difficulties impede the fluid incorporation of traditional, innovative aspects

(Crane, 2012). A principal concern pertains to the congruence of cultural heritage preservation with the standards of contemporary design. Conventional attire of Saudi Arabia is often regarded as antiquated or socially marginalized, a perception that has played a significant role in its gradual reduction in favor of contemporary fashion trends (Tawfiq & Paff, 2024).

Recent projects focused on merging traditional craftsmanship with modern aesthetics reveal the potential, challenges that arise from this intersection (Alotaibi & Starkey, 2020). Moreover, there exists an imperative demand for empirical investigations to validate theoretical constructs devised to align cultural heritage with modern fashion (Almatrudi et al., 2023). Current studies are predominantly theoretical, contributing to the necessity for practical investigations, that can guide designers in effectively merging cultural authenticity with contemporary appeal (Al-Mujahed, 2025).

The potential for cultural appropriation, authenticity dilution further complicates the integration of Saudi cultural elements into fashion, requiring careful ethical considerations, intellectual property protection to ensure respectful cultural exchange (Hong, 2024). Simultaneously, the digital era presents both opportunities and challenges for expressing cultural identity through fashion. While digital platforms can enhance fashion's cultural dimension, they risk disseminating cultural elements without adequate context or understanding (Wardaya et al., 2024).

Practical barriers further hinder the widespread adoption of culturally inspired fashion. Items incorporating traditional elements are often heavy and expensive, limiting their accessibility, appeal to broader consumer markets (Fida & Shafi'i, 2020). Additionally, despite growing interest in using machine embroidery for emphasizing Saudi heritage in fashion, the industry requires more diverse, creative designs that align with contemporary consumer preferences (Aldajani, 2021).

Fashion's evolving role within the Saudi Vision (2030) framework, underscores the need to establish standards and methodologies, that align cultural values with international fashion paradigms. Nevertheless, this area remains underexplored (Alruwaili, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates cultural, sustainability, industrial perspectives to create fashion that respects Saudi heritage while appealing to contemporary consumers (Alsiehem, 2025).

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 Cultural identity of Saudi consumer

People often associate the power of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with oil; however, historically, Saudi influence has been rooted primarily in its cultural strength as the center of the Islamic and Arab worlds (Gallarotti & Al-Filali, 2012).

In psychological studies, identity may highlight a significant need for continuity, an honest appreciation for consistency and a common desire to resist change (American Psychological Association, 2018). For a philosophical perspective, it pertains to the uniqueness of an individual and is additionally characterized as the cohesiveness of self (Bilgrami, 2006). Furthermore, identity may be comprehended as an affiliation with a collective that is linked to social status or a particular cultural framework (Hall, 2015). All definitions emphasize uniqueness, the characteristics that differentiate individuals or societies.

Culture signifies apex from consciousness, merging both the static and dynamic. In addition to actions and their implications. Tylor articulates culture as "that intricate entirety which encompasses knowledge, artistic expression, ethical standards, beliefs, legal frameworks, customs and all other competencies attained by individuals as constituents of society" (Tylor, 1871). Similarly, Quincy Wright views culture, as a complex system of knowledge, beliefs, values and traditions passed down through generations to organize social interaction, adaptation to environmental and political conditions (Benbelabbes, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, culture reflects diverse yet unified values and beliefs, with the state striving to preserve and promote these locally and globally (Aldujani, 2021).

Cultural identity encompasses linguistic, conceptual, historical and geographical characteristics. As well as customers and behaviors that shape the identity of individuals, groups and nations (Alruqb, 2009; Khudr, 2009). Within awareness, humans continuously seek discovery, where inspired ideas gradually become part of identity, national symbols (Almari, 2024). For example, in China, implements the protection of intangible cultural heritage to foster creative transformation, innovative development of traditional culture, although this heritage has not fully translated into fashion production (Xue et al., 2022).

6.2 Elements of Saudi cultural identity

Saudi cultural identity represents a rich visual and symbolic system shaped by historical traditions, environmental conditions, and social practices. These cultural elements are expressed through diverse artistic forms, including color palettes, calligraphic traditions, architectural patterns, and decorative motifs. Such aesthetic components not only reflect the historical and environmental context of Saudi society but also provide a valuable source of inspiration for contemporary creative industries, particularly fashion design. Understanding these cultural dimensions is therefore essential for designers seeking to integrate heritage elements into modern fashion production while maintaining cultural authenticity and sustainability.

1. The cultural identity of Saudi Arabia is conveyed through multiple artistic, aesthetic dimensions, featuring color schemes, forms, iconography and architectural customs that are reflected in everyday life, artistic creations and structural aesthetics (Alajaji, 2022).
2. Colors: reflect the natural and desert environment, with earthy tones widely used in art, architecture and vibrant colors, intricate embroidery featured in traditional garments, such as those from the Hijaz region, maintaining cultural identity in modern fashion (Houssin, 2015).
3. Arabic calligraphy: extends beyond writing to an art form that reflects the beauty of the Arabic language, reinforces heritage affiliation, aligning with Saudi Vision (2030) to preserve and enhance cultural heritage (Jammaz, 2022).
4. Architectural heritage: Traditional najdi architecture displays geometric patterns, floral motifs, reflecting human interaction with local resources (Alghamas & Mohammed, 2022; Alotaibi & Starkey, 2020; Aldajani, 2021).
5. Traditional patterns and decorations: serve as abundant sources of inspiration for fashion designers, facilitating the transformation of conventional motifs into innovative artistic expressions in fashion. Creative influence is obtained from folk arts, natural landscapes and historical design traditions (Lunde, 2018; Guan, 2016).

6.3 Effect of cultural identity in fashion sustainability

Cultural identity significantly contributes to the advancement of sustainable fashion practices on a global scale. In Brazil, it influences practices such as fashion recycling, the production of alternative leathers, challenging western dominance and highlighting local values (Valle-Noronha & Chun, 2021).

In Mexico, an emphasis on communal customs promotes a consumer inclination towards slow, artisanal manufacturing (Suk & Lee, 2013). In addition, in China, technological advancements, evolving social values help balance the protection of cultural heritage with marketing, enhancing consumer engagement in sustainable fashion (Lin, 2024).

In Russia, cultural identity affects long-term consumption of sustainable products, whereas collective values have a stronger influence in local market (Khan et al., 2024).

Therefore, in Saudi Arabia, the nexus of cultural identity and sustainability is manifest through heightened awareness, adoption of sustainable fashion methodologies. A significant emphasis on established traditions, environmentally sustainable choices reinforce the importance of embedding cultural values in sustainability efforts (Suk & Lee, 2013).

6.4 Slow fashion, sustainability and cultural identity

The synthesis of slow-fashion, green awareness and cultural safeguarding creates a thorough methodology for grappling with the environmental, societal predicaments brought on by fast fashion. While also honoring traditional cultures, slow-fashion prioritizes ecologically responsible production methodologies and promotes conscientious consumer practices (Macena et al., 2018; Piuco et al., 2022).

For instance, the use of traditional fabrics such as Gazenne, woven in Kemaliye, Turkey, demonstrates how cultural preservation can be integrated into sustainable design practices (Bayburtlu & Horasan, 2024). Slow fashion is consistent with slow production in its endorsement of ethical manufacturing practices, thoughtful consumption and appreciation for indigenous cultures (Enes, 2023). Models of collaborative consumption

markedly advance sustainability by lessening textile waste, encouraging communal participation (Sobreira et al., 2021).

6.5 Theory of change in fashion

The Theory of Change functions as a key framework, that charts the course for boosting production, incorporating inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and the total impact (Anderson, 2005). It can be adapted to integrate consumer cultural identity, enhancing personalized consumer experiences, influencing consumer behavior (Patsiaouras, 2022; Suo & Nasir, 2024).

The elements comprise essential substances, expert proficiency, educational materials, proficient labor force, technological advancements, intellectual assets. Cultural identity shapes selection of materials, techniques suitable for cultural symbols and elements, while supporting sustainable practices and innovation (Serrat, 2017; Hao, 2025; Radhakrishnan, 2020; Lin, 2024; Sbordone & Montagna, 2024; Iannilli & Spagnoli, 2024).

Activities encompass design and production, where integrating cultural symbols and patterns strengthens the emotional connection with consumers, fosters brand loyalty. This requires staff training, market research to understand subtle cultural differences (Meng et al., 2024; Moustafa, 2024; Rodríguez & Gago, 2024; Rudnicki, 2012; Kimmel, 2015; Niedderer et al., 2017).

Outputs represent the concrete products and services, that arise from various activities. The appreciation of cultural identity greatly facilitates product differentiation, encourages the creation of outstanding offerings for consumers (Emmanuel-Stephen, 2017; Ocak, 2024; Catulli et al., 2017).

Outcomes encompass immediate advantages, including increased sales, while confronting difficulties in safeguarding cultural components, without alteration in the digital age, thereby necessitating distinct marketing strategies (Wardaya et al., 2024; Lin, 2024; Chengbing, 2011).

Impact represents enduring transformations, fostering sustainable purchasing decisions, enhancing the durability of garments. Cultural identity infuses emotional and symbolic significance into fashion, with consumer insights employed to enhance products and ensure congruence with sustainability objectives (Ratzon, 2023; McNeill et al., 2020; McQueen et al., 2022; Dao & Martinez, 2024; Goworek et al., 2017; Rotimi et al., 2024).

7.DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that cultural identity plays a significant role in shaping sustainable fashion production systems. This result aligns with previous research highlighting the relationship between cultural heritage and sustainable design practices. Studies suggest that integrating cultural narratives into product design can enhance sustainability by strengthening the symbolic and emotional value of products (Brown & Vacca, 2022; Fletcher, 2010). In the context of fashion, cultural resources such as traditional motifs, indigenous materials, and historical aesthetics can function as key inputs that guide design and production processes while reinforcing authenticity and local identity.

Moreover, the integration of cultural identity enhances the emotional durability of fashion products. Emotional durability refers to the capacity of products to maintain their relevance and value for consumers over time, thereby reducing the likelihood of premature disposal (Chapman, 2015). As suggested by McNeill et al. (2020), garments that embody cultural meanings are more likely to be appreciated and preserved by consumers because they represent identity, memory, and belonging rather than purely functional commodities. This emotional attachment contributes to extending product lifecycles, which is one of the central objectives of slow-fashion systems.

The application of the Theory of Change (ToC) framework provides a structured perspective on how cultural identity moves through the production system—from inspiration and design to long-term sustainability outcomes. The framework allows researchers to map the logical pathway through which cultural inputs are transformed into activities, outputs, and broader societal impacts (Serrat, 2017). In this study, the ToC framework demonstrates how cultural resources are operationalized within fashion production, offering a systematic understanding of how heritage elements can be translated into contemporary design practices while maintaining sustainability principles.

The analysis addressed the research question: What understanding do employers and professionals hold regarding the integration of Saudi cultural identity in the fashion industry through the Theory of Change framework? The findings reveal a shared perception among industry participants that cultural identity

functions as both a creative resource and a strategic driver for sustainable fashion development. Similar conclusions have been reported in studies emphasizing the role of cultural heritage as a catalyst for

Axis	Initial	Subcode	main	Primary data from the sample
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innovation within creative industries (Pop & Avram, 2017; UNESCO, 2021).

The examination of the transitional phases in the sustainable fashion domain associated with cultural identity reveals a coherent and systematic process beginning with the inputs stage. At this stage, cultural and environmental resources such as local textiles, traditional embroidery, and regional design motifs serve as foundational sources of inspiration. These inputs are further supported by national strategies that encourage sustainable production and cultural preservation. Previous studies indicate that policy frameworks supporting cultural industries can significantly strengthen the integration of heritage within contemporary design systems (Throsby, 2018).

The activities stage is reflected in design and production practices that balance cultural aesthetics with sustainability requirements. Designers translate heritage elements into modern fashion pieces while adopting limited production methods that reduce environmental impact. These practices correspond with the principles of slow-fashion, which emphasize craftsmanship, responsible production, and product longevity (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010). Field observations conducted during fashion exhibitions and cultural events further confirmed that designers increasingly adopt these approaches when developing collections inspired by Saudi cultural heritage.

The outputs stage is represented by contemporary fashion products that visibly incorporate elements of cultural identity, such as traditional motifs, locally sourced materials, and culturally inspired color palettes. Such outputs illustrate how heritage can be transformed into tangible fashion products that maintain cultural authenticity while responding to modern design trends. Similar patterns have been observed in other cultural fashion industries, where traditional craftsmanship has been successfully integrated into contemporary sustainable fashion markets (Gwilt, 2014).

At the outcomes stage, the findings indicate a growing awareness among designers, manufacturers, and consumers regarding the importance of cultural identity and sustainability in fashion production. This increased awareness is accompanied by the emergence of national initiatives and creative programs that promote cultural sustainability within the fashion sector. Research suggests that consumer awareness plays a critical role in encouraging responsible fashion consumption and supporting sustainable design movements (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Finally, the impact stage demonstrates that the integration of cultural identity within slow-fashion production has evolved beyond individual artistic initiatives into a broader institutional and cultural trend. The increasing emphasis on cultural sustainability within the Saudi fashion sector contributes to strengthening the country's global position within creative industries. Furthermore, these developments align closely with the strategic objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to support cultural industries, preserve national identity, and promote sustainable economic diversification.

Overall, the pathway of change identified in this study follows a clear and interconnected logic that begins with cultural and environmental inputs and progresses through structured production activities toward long-term strategic impacts. By embedding cultural identity within sustainable fashion systems, the Saudi fashion industry can simultaneously promote environmental responsibility, cultural preservation, and creative innovation. These findings therefore highlight the potential of culturally grounded slow-fashion models to contribute to broader sustainability transformations within the global fashion industry. (Table 4)

Table 4. The initial codes for employers' responses in the fashion sector. (Researcher's Design)

	symbol		symbol	
First axis	inputs	Cultural aspect Economic aspect Sustainability aspect	Alteration in inputs	• Raw of materials conform to consumer identity • Increase investment in cultural raw materials • The goal is to expand, the reach while maintaining authenticity
Second axis	activities	Quality aspect Sustainability aspect Cultural aspect	Alteration in activities	• Showing models to customers before launch helps test, their compatibility with cultural identity • Periodic training for workers to understand local culture and consumer trends. • Collaborate with clients to revive old designs with modern touches
Third axis	outputs	Cultural aspect Quality aspect Sustainability aspect	Alteration in outputs	• Product success in reflecting culture • Aligning standards with consumer culture • Sustainability of cultural identity in fashion
Fourth axis	outcomes	Sustainability aspect Quality aspect Economic aspect Cultural aspect	Alteration in outcomes	• High flexibility and demand responsiveness • Identify improvement opportunities for international markets • Challenges in integrating consumer expectations • Reduce forecast gap and improve fit
Five axis	impact	Sustainability aspect Economic aspect Quality aspect	Alteration in impact	• Extend product life by incorporating cultural identity • Promote sustainability, increase customer loyalty through product warranty and maintenance • Customer survey

8.CONCLUSION

The research found indicate, that the impact of integrating cultural identity into the fashion industry extends beyond the product itself to include improving sustainability, generating economic benefits, enhancing the quality of the consumer experience. The incorporation of cultural identity for the realm of fashion is further exemplified by the impact of worldwide cultural phenomena, which have significantly influenced Saudi fashion trends, consumer behavior, thereby illustrating dynamic interplay between local and global cultural influences (Abdullah, 2023).

A crucial element of this integration pertains to the thorough examination of the influence of cultural identity on the selection of inputs, which includes materials, technologies and human resources, preceding the design phase, thereby guaranteeing that foundational decisions are in accordance with local cultural values. In addition, the amalgamation of cultural identity within manufacturing practices is imperative for ascertaining the quality of the outcomes, since traditional patterns, motifs and techniques substantially contribute to the originality and craftsmanship of the products.

The output phase, the assessment of results relevant to cultural identity through immediate indicators, such as sales performance and consumer satisfaction, emphasizes market's direct responsiveness for designs that are profoundly entrenched in cultural context. As found in the longer term, exploring the impact of incorporating cultural identity on the sustainability of fashion use, alongside monitoring challenges faced by factories, demonstrates how culturally informed strategies support durable, conscious and socially responsible consumption.

Consumer interaction is further enhanced through evolving dynamics of brand, consumer relationships in Saudi Arabia, where brand loyalty was increasingly linked to sustainable consumption behaviors (Abu-Bakar & Almutairi, 2024).

The strategic coherence of these dimensions manifests a robust dedication to the establishment of a culturally significant, internationally competitive fashion sector, thereby facilitating the overarching economic and social transformation objectives delineated in Vision (2030) (Aljuaid et al., 2024). Moreover, this integration reflects the maturity of the industrial sector in adopting a developmental vision, that emphasizes the empowerment of national industries with a distinct cultural character.

This study demonstrates that integrating Saudi cultural identity into slow-fashion production can contribute significantly to the development of sustainable fashion systems. Cultural heritage provides designers with valuable creative resources that enhance the symbolic and emotional value of garments.

By applying the Theory of Change framework, the study offers a structured model for understanding how cultural inputs influence fashion production and sustainability outcomes. (Table 5)

Table 5. Applying the concurrent triangulation method to interviews, field observations, and official documents. (Researcher's Design)

Axis	Axis Content	Interview Data	Field Observations	Official Documents	Agreement	Conclusion
Inputs	Core resources enabling change (materials, training, cultural knowledge)	Emphasis on indigenous materials and heritage symbols	Use of organic cotton with sourcing details displayed	Saudi Fashion Commission documents stress sustainability under Saudi 100 Brands	Strong agreement on sustainable materials	Sustainability is embedded, but supplychain transparency needs improvement
Activities	Sustainabilitybased design practices	Integration of cultural values in design and production	Heritage motifs blended with modern techniques	Jury identified "Contemporary Heritage" as key criterion	Clear alignment across sources	Effective realization of cultural integration within the theory of change
Outputs	Tangible results (sustainable cultural products)	Products clearly reflect Saudi identity	Fusion of traditional patterns and modern forms showcased	Visual documentation confirms outputs	Full consistency	Outputs successfully express cultural identity
Outcomes	Short-term effects (awareness, orientation)	Heightened awareness of identitysustainability link	High visitor engagement at heritage booths	Media coverage (Arab News, Saudi Gazette) shows strong interest	Broad consensus	Positive local and global reception of sustainable Saudi fashion
Impact	Long-term societal and policy influence	Global recognition of Saudi fashion identity	Increased international participation by designers	2024 report notes 40% rise in global representation	Agreement on overall impact	Growing consolidation of Saudi cultural identity in global fashion

9. Research Contributions

This study contributes to the literature in three main ways:

1. introduces the Theory of Change as an analytical framework for examining cultural identity integration within fashion production systems.
2. provides empirical insights from the Saudi fashion industry regarding strategies used to embed cultural heritage within slow fashion practices.

3. proposes a conceptual model linking cultural identity, slow fashion production, and sustainability outcomes.

10. Policy Implications

Policymakers should support initiatives that encourage designers to incorporate cultural heritage into contemporary fashion collections. Educational programs should also promote cultural sustainability within fashion design curricula.

11. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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