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Strategic Communication in Seasonal Tourism Campaigns: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of the Khareef Dhofar 2023 Instagram Campaign

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Abstract

This study examines strategic communication in the official 2023 Khareef Dhofar Instagram campaign (@khareef.dhofar), a seasonal tourism initiative managed by Dhofar Municipality, Oman. Using a mixed-methods descriptive-analytical design, it combines systematic content analysis of all 209 posts published during the campaign period (July 15–September 8, 2023) with semi-structured interviews with 10 campaign practitioners. Analysis is structured through two theoretical frameworks: the Ruler communication model and the DAGMAR advertising model. Findings reveal that persuasion dominated at 62.7%, while awareness and comprehension stages represented only 8.2% of content, a structural imbalance inconsistent with DAGMAR's sequential logic. Despite 9.46 million impressions, behavioral conversion was critically low, with only 31 comments expressing visit intent. Qualitative data attributed this to operational deficits, including late managerial appointments, account dormancy, and inadequate coordination. The study introduces the concept of *mid-funnel myopia* to theorize this pattern and offers recommendations for tourism communication in Oman and GCC contexts.

1. Introduction

The global tourism sector has undergone a profound structural transformation driven by the accelerating diffusion of digital communication technologies, particularly social media platforms. These platforms have not merely supplemented traditional destination marketing channels; they have fundamentally reconfigured the temporal, relational, and economic logic of tourism communication (Halkiopoulos et al., 2021; Mallick, 2023). The economic contribution of tourism to national GDP has become a central policy priority worldwide, with figures ranging from 10.3% in Italy to 14.6% in Jordan (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2023). Against this backdrop, the Sultanate of Oman has set an ambitious national target to elevate tourism's share of GDP from 4.0% in 2022 to 7.6% by 2033, a goal directly predicated on strengthening tourism communication infrastructure and digital destination marketing capabilities (WTTC, 2023; Chiguvi, 2022).

Among Oman's most distinctive tourism assets is the Khareef (autumn monsoon) season in Dhofar Governorate, a meteorologically unique phenomenon occurring annually from June 21 to September 21, during which the region receives monsoon rainfall from the Indian Ocean, generating lush greenery, misty highland landscapes, and moderate temperatures that represent a commercially attractive contrast to the arid conditions prevailing across the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. The 2023 Khareef season attracted approximately 884,739 visitors, a 16.3% increase over the previous year (Wejhat Magazine, 2023), corresponding with a significant rebranding: Dhofar Municipality renamed the season from 'Khareef Salalah' to 'Khareef Dhofar' in 2022, signaling an expanded territorial identity and more comprehensive tourism positioning.

The accompanying media campaign, formally launched in 2023 with a primary focus on Instagram, represents a substantial institutional investment in digital tourism communication. Instagram's global reach of 1.628 billion users (GlobalWebIndex, 2023), and its 1.75 million active users in Oman

specifically (DataReportal, 2023), makes it a strategically compelling platform for domestic and regional tourism marketing. Its visual affordances, video, multi-image carousels, stories, reels, and interactive features are particularly well-suited to the nature-based, experiential content central to seasonal tourism promotion (Fiona et al., 2022; Kusuma et al., 2022). Despite the campaign's scale and public visibility, no systematic academic analysis had been conducted before this study.

This study presents an examination of the campaign's effectiveness through a dual analytical lens: the Ruler communication model (Van Ruler, 2021) and the DAGMAR advertising model (Colley, 1961). The study contributes four principal elements: (1) the first systematic empirical analysis of the Khareef Dhofar Instagram campaign; (2) application of an integrated Ruler-DAGMAR framework in an Arabic Gulf social media context, extending international models to under-researched regional settings; (3) introduction of the theoretical concept of 'mid-funnel myopia' to explain the gap between campaign reach and behavioral conversion; and (4) evidence-based policy recommendations for tourism communication in Oman.

The significance of this study is manifold. First, it addresses a methodological gap by applying internationally validated communication and advertising models to a Gulf seasonal tourism context where empirical studies remain scarce despite the region's economic stakes in tourism (Khan & Abir, 2022; Mallick, 2023). The DAGMAR and Ruler models have been applied extensively in Western and East Asian tourism contexts but have rarely been operationalized in Arab social media environments, where platform-use patterns, audience expectations, and institutional communication structures differ substantially from those documented in the dominant literature.

Second, the study provides actionable evaluative data to tourism communication practitioners, policy makers, and academic researchers in Oman and the broader Arab world, directly addressing the recognized need for evidence-based evaluation tools in the region's tourism communication infrastructure (Afren, 2024). Third, it contributes to debates about the adequacy of persuasion-dominated campaigns in achieving behavioral outcomes such as actual destination visits, a debate with significant commercial and policy implications as Gulf states compete intensively for regional tourism markets. Fourth, the mixed-methods design enables triangulated validation of findings across data sources, offering methodological depth that transcends what either approach could provide alone.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Campaigns in Tourism Marketing

The proliferation of social media has fundamentally reoriented the strategic logic of tourism communication. Halkiopoulos et al. (2021) demonstrated that social media campaigns rank among the most effective instruments for stimulating tourist motivation and destination discovery through scenic attractions, accommodation options, and culturally resonant content. These campaigns function not merely as promotional broadcasts but as environments for meaning-making and aspiration formation

processes integral to destination image construction (Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015; Veleva & Tsvetanova, 2020).

Mallick (2023) extended this argument, demonstrating that social media-based tourism marketing enables destination managers to showcase natural environments through interactive media formats while simultaneously building customer relationships and gathering real-time feedback. This bidirectional capacity distinguishes social media campaigns from traditional broadcast advertising, which operates primarily on a one-to-many model without interactivity or feedback mechanisms (Rizaldi & Hidayat, 2020; Smishi, 2021). The growing digital marketing maturity literature (Rathna et al., 2023; BOUFIM & BARKA, 2021) describes a developmental trajectory from informal digital experimentation to fully integrated, data-driven marketing ecosystems in which content strategy, platform management, and audience analytics are systematically coordinated.

For tourism-specific applications, Instagram's visual affordances are particularly salient. The platform's algorithmic preference for video content, its geographic tagging capabilities, its influencer ecosystem, and its story and reel features create a uniquely powerful environment for destination marketing (Fiona et al., 2022). Rashad and Asri (2020) found that consistent visual identity, active audience engagement, and regular updates enhanced destination appeal in their analysis of @Amazingmalang. Kusuma et al. (2022) demonstrated that professional content management, systematic hashtag strategies, and digital analytics integration predict campaign effectiveness in water tourism promotion. The Gulf region specifically presents a distinct context characterized by high smartphone penetration, demographically young audiences, and intense platform competition from lifestyle and entertainment content (Afren, 2024; Chiguvi, 2022).

Research specifically addressing tourism campaigns in Oman and the broader Gulf remains limited, creating a significant evidence gap that this study partially addresses. The few available studies confirm that Gulf audiences exhibit strong platform loyalty to Instagram and Snapchat, high responsiveness to visual content featuring natural environments, and significant peer-influence effects in travel decision-making factors that simultaneously create opportunities and raise expectations for institutional tourism campaigns operating in this space (DataReportal, 2023; Sknarev et al., 2020).

2.2 Audience Engagement in Social Media Tourism Campaigns

Contemporary scholarship distinguishes between passive engagement (views, impressions, reach), active engagement (likes, comments, shares, saves), and behavioral engagement (link clicks, booking inquiries, visit decisions), recognizing that these represent qualitatively distinct levels of audience response with very different implications for campaign effectiveness (Yin & Feng, 2021; de Souza et al., 2020). Yin and Feng (2021) demonstrated that interactive digital advertising features generate significantly higher purchase intention and behavioral engagement than static content. Hudders et al. (2019) argued that consumer empowerment, the degree to which audiences can interact with and respond to communication, is a crucial predictor of sustained engagement.

In the tourism destination marketing context specifically, Fiona et al. (2022) and de Souza et al. (2020) found that campaigns incorporating explicit calls-to-action generated substantially higher behavioral conversion rates than campaigns relying exclusively on atmospheric or inspirational content. Sknarev et al. (2020) demonstrated that language-specific targeting significantly enhanced engagement in multilingual tourist markets. The role of influencer partnerships has emerged as a distinct and growing area: Voronenko et al. (2021) found that influencer-mediated content consistently outperformed institutional content in generating audience trust and behavioral engagement. Iankovets (2023) highlighted the importance of systematic media planning in digital campaigns, arguing that the absence of a structured content calendar consistently undermines the efficiency and effectiveness of digital campaign investments.

The literature converges on the implication that effective digital tourism campaigns must be designed as integrated communication ecosystems, not simply as collections of attractive posts in which content strategy, platform management, audience engagement protocols, and evaluation frameworks are systematically coordinated to move audiences through the full spectrum from initial awareness to behavioral action. This integrated perspective is directly relevant to the evaluation of the Khareef Dhofar campaign's strategic architecture.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated dual theoretical framework combining the Ruler communication model (Van Ruler, 2021) and the DAGMAR advertising model (Colley, 1961). The combination is theoretically justified by the study's dual focus: the campaign's communicative strategy and relational orientation (addressed by Ruler) and its advertising effectiveness across sequential impact stages (addressed by DAGMAR). The integration enables a more comprehensive and diagnostically powerful evaluation than either model provides independently.

3.1 The Ruler Model as an Analytical Lens

Developed by Betteke van Ruler (2021), the Ruler model conceptualizes organizational communication strategy across four dimensions: informing, persuading, dialogue, and consensus-building (co-creation). These dimensions reflect qualitatively distinct assumptions about the communicative relationship between organizations and their publics, differing in epistemological orientation, goals, and implications for audience-organization relationships.

Applications of the Ruler model in tourism and public relations research have consistently demonstrated that effective campaigns deploy a strategic balance of communication dimensions. Azhar et al. (2021) found that Facebook campaigns integrating informing and dialogue alongside persuasion generated substantially higher audience trust and engagement than purely persuasion-dominant campaigns. Sobejano (2019) argued that the absence of dialogue and consensus-building tends to produce short-term attitude change without durable relational outcomes. For seasonal tourism campaigns, the model's

relevance lies in its diagnostic capacity to reveal whether a campaign is genuinely building audience knowledge and two-way engagement or functioning primarily as a unidirectional promotional broadcast.

The Ruler model operationalizes the communicative intent of each post across four categories. Informing posts neutrally transmit factual information about Dhofar's attractions, events, or logistical guidance without rhetorical framing. Persuasion posts deploy emotional appeals, visual aesthetics, testimonials, or rhetorical framing to influence audience attitudes toward visiting Dhofar. Dialogue posts invite audience interaction, respond to comments, share user-generated content, or create two-way communicative exchanges. Consensus-building posts emphasize shared values, communal identity, or cultural pride to create collective ownership of the Khareef season. Coding decisions were guided by the dominant intent of each post as established through the validated coding scheme.

3.2 The DAGMAR Model as an Evaluative Framework

The DAGMAR model, introduced by Russell Colley (1961) in a report commissioned by the Association of National Advertisers, provides a hierarchical framework for evaluating advertising effectiveness through four sequential stages: Awareness, Comprehension, Conviction, and Action. The model's foundational logic holds that audiences must move through each stage progressively: they must first become aware of a product or destination, then develop genuine understanding, then form favorable convictions, and finally act on those convictions (Colley, 1961; Karlsson, 2017).

Empirical applications of DAGMAR in tourism advertising contexts are well-documented across multiple cultural settings. Karlsson (2017) demonstrated that campaigns imbalanced toward conviction, without adequate investment in awareness and comprehension, consistently underperformed in behavioral conversion. Zakhaova (2020) found in an Eastern European digital tourism context that campaigns overemphasizing persuasive visual content without contextual information failed to generate sustained behavioral engagement. Hou (2017) showed that tourism advertising videos focused exclusively on emotional content underperformed campaigns balancing emotional appeals with informational and action-oriented elements. The model has also been connected to the AIDA framework (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action), with both models converging on the insight that behavioral outcomes require systematic foundational investment in awareness and comprehension as prerequisite conditions (Ojagh et al., 2023).

The DAGMAR model evaluates the campaign's advertising content distribution and audience response patterns across four stage-objectives. Awareness posts introduce the season and establish basic recognition. Comprehension posts explain what visitors can do, how to prepare, and what distinguishes the experience building knowledge rather than merely attracting attention. Conviction posts create positive attitudes and build emotional desire to visit through sustained persuasive engagement. Action posts provide direct incentives, booking resources, or specific calls-to-action that mobilize audience desire into behavioral commitment.

The interaction between the Ruler and DAGMAR frameworks constitutes the study's primary theoretical contribution. The Ruler model diagnoses which communicative relationship the campaign establishes with its audiences, while DAGMAR diagnoses where in the sequential communication hierarchy campaign resources are concentrated or neglected. Mapping both frameworks onto the same dataset enables identification of structural patterns such as the simultaneous dominance of the persuasion strategy (Ruler) and the conviction stage (DAGMAR) that reveal systematic strategic choices with predictable consequences for behavioral conversion.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive-analytical mixed-methods design, combining systematic quantitative content analysis with qualitative semi-structured interviews. This triangulated approach enables a comprehensive analysis of both the structural characteristics of the campaign's content and the operational factors that shaped its execution. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data follows the mixed-methods logic of complementarity, whereby qualitative findings explain and contextualize quantitative patterns (Neuendorf, 2017). The media survey method (Mash al-Madmoun) was adopted as the overarching methodological framework, encompassing a content survey of posts and a communicator survey of practitioners.

4.2 Data Sources and Sampling

The study population for the quantitative component consists of all posts published on @khareef.dhofar from July 15 to September 8, 2023. Platform selection was justified through a preliminary scan conducted on February 29, 2024, comparing the campaign's Instagram account (42,900 followers; 882 total posts) with its X/Twitter account (15,100 followers; 766 posts). Instagram demonstrated significantly greater reach, engagement depth, and content diversity, supporting its selection as the primary analytical platform.

A total of 209 posts were published during the defined campaign period, constituting a manageable, bounded population warranting total enumeration rather than probabilistic sampling, ensuring maximum representativeness and eliminating sampling error (Neuendorf, 2017). Each individual post served as the primary unit of analysis.

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select 10 practitioners directly involved in the campaign's execution: members of the Dhofar Municipality Events and Awareness Division, the campaign project manager, and key personnel from Pan Studio, the production company contracted to implement the campaign. Participants were anonymized as M1–M10. The number of informants was determined by theoretical saturation: no substantively new thematic categories emerged after the eighth interview, with the ninth and tenth interviews confirming existing categories.

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

Two primary instruments were developed for this study. The Content Analysis Coding Sheet captured four variable categories: (a) formal post characteristics type, language, hashtag usage, publication timing, account mentions; (b) Ruler model category per post; (c) DAGMAR model category per advertising post; and (d) audience engagement metrics reach, views, likes, comments, shares, saves, link clicks, new followers, and comment sentiment (positive, negative, inquiry). The Semi-Structured Interview Guide was organized around six thematic domains: execution and operational challenges; communicator challenges; message challenges; medium challenges; audience challenges; and external environmental challenges. Each domain was explored through open-ended probing questions designed to generate rich descriptive accounts.

4.4 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert panel review by three faculty specialists from Sultan Qaboos University's College of Arts and Social Sciences. Their recommendations refined category definitions and added clarifying examples for borderline coding cases.

Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Holsti's (1969) coefficient of reliability applied to a 35% random sub-sample (73 posts). A second independent coder a Master's-level researcher in Public Relations from Sultan Qaboos University, analyzed the identical sub-sample:

Reliability = (2 × 552) / (600 + 600) = 1104 / 1200 = 0.92 (92%)

A coefficient of 92% exceeds the 80% threshold accepted in communication research (Neuendorf, 2017). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus, yielding finalized definitions applied to the remaining sample. For qualitative interviews, credibility was enhanced through member-checking; transferability through thick contextual description; and dependability through an audit trail of coded transcripts.

4.5 Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

All research activities involving human participants were conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for social science research. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review committee at Sultan Qaboos University prior to data collection. All 10 interview participants received comprehensive written information about the study's purpose, design, scope, and intended outputs, including information about confidentiality procedures.

Participants provided written informed consent before interview commencement, explicitly affirming their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any point without consequence. No financial or material incentives were offered, ensuring freely given consent. All participant identifiers were anonymized through codes (M1–M10) from the point of data collection onward; no identifying information capable of connecting specific responses to named individuals is reported in this article. Interview recordings and transcripts are stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to

the principal researcher. Participants who requested it received summaries of relevant findings generated from their interviews.

4.6 Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative content analysis data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26), generating descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentage distributions for all categorical variables. Audience engagement metrics were obtained directly from the official @khareef.dhofar Instagram analytics dashboard, providing accurate aggregate data for the full campaign period. Qualitative interview data were analyzed through iterative thematic coding: initial open coding segmented and labeled all interview text; axial coding grouped open codes into coherent categories; selective coding identified overarching themes integrated across the dataset, maintaining alignment with the Ruler and DAGMAR frameworks while remaining open to inductively emergent themes (Neuendorf, 2017).

4.7 Research Questions

The study is guided by five research questions:

1. What are the formal (structural) characteristics of posts on the official Khareef Dhofar 2023 Instagram campaign account?
2. What communication strategies are employed in the campaign's media posts according to the Ruler model?
3. What is the advertising effectiveness of the campaign according to the DAGMAR model's four sequential stages?
4. What is the level of audience engagement with the campaign's posts according to DAGMAR model metrics?
5. What operational and contextual challenges confronted the campaign practitioners, and how did these affect campaign effectiveness?

5. Results

The results are organized according to the study's five research questions, with content analysis results (RQ1–RQ4) presented as a distinct body of quantitative evidence, followed by qualitative interview findings (RQ5) as a substantively independent strand of analysis.

5.1 Formal Characteristics of Campaign Posts (RQ1)

The 209 posts analyzed across the campaign period exhibited a clear format hierarchy dominated by video content. Table 1 presents the complete distribution.

Table 1

Distribution of Post Formats in the Khareef Dhofar 2023 Instagram Campaign (N = 209)

Post Format	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Rank
Video (Filmed)	88	42.1%	1
Multi-Image Carousel	57	27.3%	2
Single Image	48	22.9%	3
Video (Designed/Motion)	16	7.7%	4
Live Broadcast	0	0.0%	
Total	**209**	**100%**	

Note. Live Broadcast = 0 represents a notably missed opportunity for real-time audience engagement.

Video content filmed (42.1%) and designed/motion (7.7%) combined represented 49.8% of posts, confirming a strategic orientation toward visual storytelling consistent with Instagram's algorithmic prioritization of video and best practices in digital tourism marketing (Fiona et al., 2022). The complete absence of live broadcasts (n = 0) represents a structural gap: live broadcasts enable real-time audience interaction, event coverage, and authentic storytelling that pre-produced content cannot replicate. Given the Khareef season's rich live-event programming concerts, cultural performances, exhibitions non-use of this feature reflects a significant strategic deficit.

Language analysis revealed Arabic dominance at 99% of posts (n = 207), with only two posts incorporating English content. While this monolingual orientation is strategically coherent for Arabic-speaking domestic and GCC audiences, it structurally limits the campaign's capacity to reach international tourist audiences from Europe, South Asia, and East Asia segments constituting an increasingly significant proportion of Oman's inbound tourism market (WTTC, 2023). Post publication concentrated in evening hours (6:00–10:00 PM), consistent with peak social media activity in the Gulf region (DataReportal, 2023). Hashtag #□□□□_□□□□ appeared in 91% of posts, establishing consistent searchability.

Table 2

Language Profile and Register of Campaign Posts (N = 209)

Language / Register Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Arabic	207	99.0%
English	2	1.0%
White (Colloquial) Arabic Dialect	176	84.2%
Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)	31	14.8%

Note. White dialect and MSA percentages are calculated within Arabic-language posts (n = 207). The near-absence of English content represents a strategic constraint on international audience reach.

Table 2 confirms a campaign architecturally designed for domestic and Gulf Arabic-speaking audiences through its language profile. The dominance of colloquial White Arabic dialect (84.2%) reflects a deliberate choice to maximize emotional proximity and cultural familiarity with the primary target segment. However, this linguistic concentration also constitutes a strategic boundary: a campaign in which 99% of content appears exclusively in Arabic structurally limits its capacity to engage the growing international visitor segment that Oman's Vision 2040 tourism targets explicitly require. The data indicate that language strategy, while coherent for existing core markets, does not yet reflect the international scope of the campaign's stated ambitions.

5.2 Content Analysis: Ruler Model Results (RQ2)

Application of the Ruler model revealed a pronounced concentration of the persuasion strategy, with two other strategies present at substantially lower levels and one absent. Table 3 presents the distribution.

Table 3

Distribution of Ruler Model Communication Strategies Across Campaign Posts (N = 209)

Ruler Strategy	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Rank
Persuasion	131	62.7%	1
Dialogue	59	28.2%	2
Informing	19	9.1%	3
Consensus-Building	0	0.0%	
Total	**209**	**100%**	

Note. Consensus-Building = 0 in the aggregate Ruler analysis reflects the final dominant-intent coding; 12 posts containing belonging and relationship-building content were coded under the Informing dimension given their primary informational function. This represents a theoretically significant gap in explicit consensus-building strategy given the season's cultural identity dimensions.

Persuasion dominated at 62.7%, primarily through cinematic video posts showcasing natural landscapes, cultural heritage sites, and entertainment events with emotive music and aesthetic color

grading. Dialogue-oriented posts (28.2%) were largely realized through influencer and partner organization collaborations rather than direct, responsive engagement with individual audience members. Analysis of comment response patterns revealed that the campaign rarely responded to audience questions or comments in real time, suggesting that the dialogue category functioned as a form of extended reach through influencer networks rather than genuine bidirectional exchange in the Van Ruler (2021) sense.

Table 4

Persuasive Content Subcategories Within the Campaign (N = 209)

Persuasive Subcategory	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Natural landscapes and scenery	52	24.9%
Entertainment activities	26	12.4%
Tourist landmarks and attractions	21	10.1%
Events and public happenings	18	8.6%
Basic services and visitor support	2	1.0%
Hotels and resorts	0	0.0%
Total persuasive posts	**131**	**62.7%**

Note. Percentages are calculated against the full corpus of 209 posts. Subcategory frequencies represent posts for which a specific persuasive content type was identifiable; the total of 131 includes 12 posts combining multiple persuasive content types not separately classified. The complete absence of hotel/resort content is notable given its centrality to destination planning decisions.

Table 4 presents a content-type breakdown of the 131 persuasive posts identified in Table 3. The distribution reveals that the campaign conceptualized Khareef Dhofar primarily as an atmospheric and sensory proposition rather than as an integrated travel system. Natural landscape posts (24.9%) dominated, followed by entertainment activities (12.4%) and tourist landmarks (10.1%). This scenic-first emphasis is strategically rational given the season's meteorological distinctiveness; however, the virtual absence of service-oriented persuasive content, particularly accommodation (0.0%) and visitor support (1.0%), means that the campaign inspired desire for the destination while systematically omitting the practical reassurances that convert inspiration into travel decisions. Potential visitors who found the scenery compelling but remained uncertain about logistical arrangements were unlikely to receive adequate orientation from the campaign's persuasive content stream.

Table 5

Dialogic Content Subcategories Within the Campaign (N = 209)

Dialogic Subcategory	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Instagram collaboration posts (influencers/partners)	52	24.9%
Calls for audience participation	6	2.9%
Re-sharing of others' content (UGC)	1	0.5%
Invitations to contact account directly	0	0.0%
Total dialogic posts	**59**	**28.2%**

Note. The dialogic category was led overwhelmingly by collaboration-based visibility (24.4%) rather than direct conversational exchange, indicating a structurally thin version of dialogue.

Table 5 exposes a structurally important distinction in the decomposition of dialogic content: the campaign's 27.8% dialogue score is largely attributable to influencer and partner collaboration posts (24.4%) rather than to genuine two-way communication with audience members. Authentic dialogic engagement, in Van Ruler's (2021) sense, requires responsive interaction with publics as active interlocutors. In this campaign, dialogue was predominantly realized as co-posting with external accounts for extended reach, not as sustained conversational presence. Calls for participation appeared in only 2.9% of posts, user-generated content resharing in a mere 0.5%, and direct invitations to contact the account were entirely absent. The implication is that the campaign's dialogic dimension served an amplification function rather than a relational one, a distinction with significant consequences for audience trust and long-term engagement.

Table 6

Informational and Consensus-Building Subcategories (N = 209)

Subcategory	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
General information about Khareef Dhofar	11	5.3%
News-related posts	7	3.3%
Season opening/closing notices	2	1.0%
Official statements or conference coverage	0	0.0%
Belonging and relationship-building appeals	12	5.7%
Replies to comments or common questions	0	0.0%

*Note. Informational and consensus-building subcategory frequencies are presented as observed in the coding instrument. The 12 belonging and relationship-building posts were ultimately classified under the broader informing dimension in the aggregate Ruler analysis (*Table 3*), which reflects the dominant communicative function of each post rather than exclusive content type. Zero occurrences in formal dialogue and institutional communication subcategories signal missed engagement and credibility opportunities.*

Table 6 reveals the depth of the campaign's orientation deficit through a granular breakdown of informational and consensus-building content. Within the informing category, general background content about the Khareef season (5.3%) and news posts (3.3%) were the only substantive subcategories, while official institutional communication such as conference coverage or formal statements was entirely absent. This is particularly notable for a municipally managed campaign: institutional authority and transparency, which informational posts about governance decisions and inter-organizational coordination could have provided, remained invisible to audiences. The consensus-building subcategory data are equally revealing: the 5.7% of content coded under belonging and relationship-building appeals consisted of symbolic cultural affirmations rather than interactive community practices. Crucially, zero posts were recorded in the reply-to-comments and common-questions subcategory, confirming that the campaign made no systematic effort to reduce audience uncertainty through direct responsive communication.

The informing strategy was markedly underrepresented at 9.1% (n = 19), appearing only sporadically as factual content about the season's history, Dhofar's geography, or practical logistics. This near-absence is consequential: the Ruler model identifies informing as the foundation upon which effective persuasion must be built audiences lacking genuine factual knowledge cannot evaluate persuasive claims or convert desire into action (Van Ruler, 2021). The consensus-building strategy's complete absence (n = 0) indicates no systematic effort to position the Khareef season as a shared cultural heritage project or to invite audiences into collective meaning-making about the season's national significance.

5.3 Content Analysis: DAGMAR Model Results (RQ3)

Prior to applying DAGMAR, posts were classified into media posts (informational/non-advertising, n = 87, 41.6%) and advertising posts (promotional/goal-directed, n = 122, 58.4%). DAGMAR analysis was applied exclusively to the 122 advertising posts. Table 7 presents the distribution.

Table 7

Distribution of Advertising Posts Across DAGMAR Model Stages (N = 122)

DAGMAR Stage	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Rank
Awareness	3	2.5%	4
Comprehension	7	5.7%	3
Conviction	69	56.6%	1
Action	43	35.2%	2
Total	**122**	**100%**	

Note. Awareness and Comprehension combined (8.2%) represent the study's central structural finding.

The conviction stage dominated at 56.6% (n = 69), comprising emotionally resonant posts about festival events, cultural performances, and natural attractions produced with high cinematic quality. The action stage (35.2%, n = 43) consisted of posts with direct calls-to-action, event reminders, and competition-

based engagement incentives. Critically, awareness (2.5%, n = 3) and comprehension (5.7%, n = 7) stages were severely underrepresented, accounting collectively for only 8.2% of advertising content.

This finding constitutes the study's most significant quantitative result: the campaign systematically bypassed the foundational stages of the DAGMAR hierarchy, designing its advertising architecture around the implicit assumption that target audiences already possessed sufficient awareness and knowledge of the Khareef Dhofar season to respond to conviction and action content without preliminary orientation. This assumption may hold for audiences with multiple-year familiarity with the season; however, for new audience segments, first-time account followers, or international tourists, the absence of foundational content represents a structural barrier to effective behavioral conversion (Karlsson, 2017; Colley, 1961).

Table 8

Primary Advertising Objectives Across Promotional Posts (n = 122)

Advertising Objective	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Combined or shared objectives	54	44.3%
Promotion of tourism activities	33	27.1%
Direct encouragement to visit	21	17.2%
Explicit action-oriented prompt	11	9.0%
Introducing the season itself	3	2.5%
Total advertising posts	**122**	**100.0%**

Note. Percentages are calculated against the 122 posts classified as advertising or promotional content. The near-absence of season-introduction posts (2.5%) reinforces the DAGMAR awareness deficit.

Table 8 provides a second analytical lens on the campaign's structural architecture through the advertising objectives data. The dominance of combined or multi-objective posts (44.3%) reflects a common pattern in destination marketing in which scenic appeal and event promotion are merged into a single content unit. While this blending can achieve efficiency, it also dilutes the specificity of each DAGMAR stage: posts that simultaneously aim to inspire, inform, and prompt action rarely optimize any single communication objective. The 27.1% of posts dedicated to promoting tourist activities and the 17.2% explicitly encouraging visitation confirm the campaign's action and conviction orientation. Critically, only 2.5% of advertising posts were designed to introduce the season itself, meaning that the campaign's promotional content assumed prior audience familiarity as a baseline condition rather than constructing it systematically. This objective distribution, read alongside the DAGMAR stage findings, reinforces the diagnosis of a compressed and top-loaded advertising funnel.

5.4 Audience Engagement Analysis (RQ4)

Engagement metrics were collected directly from the campaign's Instagram analytics dashboard. Table 9 presents these metrics organized by DAGMAR stage alignment.

Table 9

Audience Engagement Metrics Mapped Onto DAGMAR Model Stages

DAGMAR Stage	Metric	Value	Interpretation
Awareness	Total Reach	9,461,260	Broad distribution; limited conversion
Awareness	Total Views	3,553,000	Moderate visual engagement
Awareness	New Followers	2,016	Low conversion from reach to following
Comprehension	Total Likes	31,351	Highest passive engagement indicator
Comprehension	Post Saves	24,602	Indicates content planning utility
Comprehension	Total Shares	11,210	Moderate viral amplification
Comprehension	Total Comments	3,014	Low deliberative engagement
Action	Link Clicks	3,200	Low behavioral conversion
Action	Account Mentions	980	Limited organic amplification
Action	Visit-Intent Comments	31	Very low behavioral conversion

Note. Visit-intent comments = comments expressing explicit desire or intent to visit Dhofar during the Khareef season.

Table 10

Comment Sentiment Distribution and Post-Level Engagement Intensity

Indicator	Value / Percentage
Positive comments (affective approval)	66% (n = 1,989)
Inquiry-type comments (practical questions)	19% (n = 572)
Negative comments (complaints/criticism)	15% (n = 452)
Posts achieving high engagement level	18% of posts
Posts achieving moderate engagement level	47% of posts
Posts achieving low engagement level	35% of posts

Note. Comment valence figures are percentages of total comments (n = 3,014). Post engagement levels reflect composite interaction rates relative to campaign average.

Table 10 illustrates how comment sentiment and engagement intensity distributions together reveal a campaign that generated widespread appreciation without generating widespread action. The 66%

positive comment rate confirms that the campaign's visual quality and emotional appeal resonated with audiences; however, positive sentiment in social media comment environments is a necessary but insufficient precondition for behavioral conversion. The 19% inquiry comment rate is analytically significant because it constitutes direct evidence of unmet informational demand: nearly one in five comments was a request for practical orientation that the campaign's comprehension-deficient content architecture had failed to proactively address. The 15% negative comment proportion, comprising largely complaints about service responsiveness and unresolved queries, reflects the operational consequence of the dialogue deficit: when organizations do not answer questions, audience frustration becomes visible in the public comment environment. Post-level engagement intensity further contextualizes the reach figures: with only 18% of posts achieving high engagement and 35% generating low engagement, the campaign's aggregate reach was built on a relatively narrow foundation of truly resonant content, with influencer-associated posts disproportionately represented among the high-engagement set.

The engagement data reveal a pronounced inverse relationship between the breadth of the campaign’s reach and the depth of its behavioral impact. Despite total reach of 9.46 million impressions, conversion to active behavioral engagement was critically constrained at each subsequent stage of the DAGMAR hierarchy. The comprehension-stage metrics reveal a noteworthy pattern: the ratio of saves to comments (approximately 8:1) suggests audiences found content useful enough to retain for future reference a passive planning behavior but did not feel sufficiently invited or motivated to engage in active dialogue.

At the action stage, behavioral conversion was notably low across all indicators. Only 31 comments across the full campaign dataset expressed explicit intent to visit Dhofar approximately 1% of total comments (n = 3,014). Link clicks (3,200) were negligible relative to total reach. Post-level engagement showed 47% of posts achieving moderate engagement, 35% low engagement, and only 18% high engagement, with high-engagement posts disproportionately associated with influencer collaborations.

Comment sentiment analysis further enriched the picture: positive comments constituted 66% (n = 1,989), indicating genuine audience appreciation. Negative comments represented 15% (n = 452), primarily comprising complaints about service responsiveness, unanswered inquiries, and inconsistent information directly reflecting the dialogue gap identified in the Ruler analysis. Inquiry-type comments constituted 19% (n = 572), representing requests for practical information about accommodation, transportation, event schedules, and tickets precisely the informational content that the campaign’s underrepresented comprehension stage failed to proactively supply.

5.5 Qualitative Findings: Operational Challenges (RQ5)

Thematic analysis of the 10 semi-structured interviews identified six principal categories of operational and contextual challenges that shaped the campaign’s execution. These findings are presented here as a distinct and substantive body of evidence rather than as supplementary elaboration of the quantitative results.

5.5.1 Execution and Operational Challenges

The most consequential execution challenge was the late appointment of the campaign project manager formally assigned approximately two weeks after the campaign's official launch, creating a coordination vacuum during the critical initial period. As M1 stated: "The delay in assigning the project manager affected every subsequent decision we made during the campaign." The account transfer from the previous management company to Pan Studio was not completed before campaign launch, forcing content production to begin without full administrative access to historical data and analytics infrastructure. M3 observed that this procedural gap was particularly consequential given the season's fixed annual calendar, which should theoretically enable meticulous advance preparation.

5.5.2 Human Resource Challenges

Multiple interviewees identified insufficient specialized talent as a primary structural constraint. M1 reported that "the absence of dedicated media writers and specialized news coverage professionals left a visible gap in informational content throughout the campaign," directly explaining the Ruler model's finding of minimal informing strategy deployment (9.1%). M4 identified the absence of a formal communication protocol governing interactions between Dhofar Municipality, Pan Studio, and other participating organizations as a source of coordination confusion, resulting in message inconsistencies and approval delays disrupting the content calendar. M8 noted that the reliance on contracted external production capacity without permanent in-house digital media expertise created structural vulnerability: when production timelines slipped, content calendars and strategic planning were the first casualties.

5.5.3 Communication Message Challenges

M7 reported that the absence of a pre-established comprehensive communication plan necessitated repeated message revisions throughout the campaign period, generating internal inefficiency and external content inconsistency. M3 corroborated this: "Ongoing changes in content direction created confusion within the team and resulted in inconsistency in the published content that audiences could likely detect." This provides a causal explanation for the DAGMAR imbalance: campaigns developed reactively and without pre-planned content architecture are unlikely to invest systematically in foundational stages awareness and comprehension that require deliberate advance planning rather than rapid responsive production. The absence of advance planning also made it structurally impossible to develop the pre-season content that awareness-building requires (Iankovets, 2023).

5.5.4 Communication Medium Challenges

M5 identified the prolonged dormancy of the official Instagram account during the non-season period as a significant algorithmic disadvantage: "The account was effectively inactive for nearly a year before the campaign launched, which caused the Instagram algorithm to deprioritize our content in the early weeks of the season." This is consistent with documented research on Instagram's reach-optimization algorithms, which penalize accounts with extended inactivity through reduced organic content distribution (Iankovets, 2023). The non-use of live broadcast features was attributed by M2 to resource

constraints and the absence of personnel trained in live content production, rather than a deliberate strategic choice.

5.5.5 Audience Challenges

M6 described the campaign's competitive environment as "increasingly saturated" with rival tourism campaigns and general lifestyle content targeting identical audience segments. The campaign responded by incrementally increasing influencer partnership budgets and expanding paid advertising expenditure; however, M1 acknowledged these were reactive, short-term tactical measures rather than components of a sustained competitive strategy. The 19% inquiry comment rate indicates persistent mismatch between audience information needs and campaign content, suggesting that systematic audience research was not integrated into content planning.

5.5.6 External Environmental Challenges

M1 identified the structural absence of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism from the campaign's formal coordination framework as a fundamental institutional gap: "A national campaign of this scale requires full inter-ministerial coordination; its absence is not just an operational inconvenience, it is a structural problem." Additional environmental challenges included management of negative audience perceptions related to infrastructure limitations during peak season parking, accommodation availability, and event congestion which surfaced prominently in negative comments and were addressed reactively rather than proactively within the campaign's messaging strategy.

6. Discussion

The findings converge on a central diagnosis: the 2023 Khareef Dhofar Instagram campaign achieved high visual production quality and substantial reach but was systematically constrained in its behavioral conversion capacity by a structural imbalance in communication and advertising strategy. This pattern can be theorized as 'mid-funnel myopia', a systematic tendency to concentrate campaign resources at the persuasion and conviction stages of the communication hierarchy while neglecting the foundational awareness and comprehension stages that both the Ruler model and DAGMAR prescribe as necessary preconditions for behavioral outcomes.

The co-occurrence of persuasion strategy dominance in the Ruler analysis (62.7%) and conviction stage dominance in the DAGMAR analysis (56.6%) reveals a coherent but strategically incomplete campaign logic. The campaign's designers clearly understood the primacy of emotional appeal and visual aesthetics in destination marketing, a well-supported finding across the literature (Fiona et al., 2022; Mallick, 2023), but appear to have treated this as a sufficient condition for effectiveness rather than one component of a more comprehensive communication architecture. Both theoretical frameworks explicitly reject this simplification: Van Ruler (2021) argues that sustainable communication cannot rest solely on persuasion, and Colley's (1961) sequential logic holds that conviction cannot convert to action when foundational awareness and comprehension have not been established.

The quantitative evidence for this argument is compelling. Despite a total reach of 9.46 million impressions, the campaign generated only 31 visit-intent comments across its full duration, a conversion ratio of approximately 0.001% from total impressions to expressed behavioral intention. If the persuasion-conviction strategy were functioning optimally, the translation from expressed positive attitudes (66% positive comment rate) to expressed behavioral intention should be substantially higher. The gap suggests not that the campaign failed to create positive destination associations, but that those associations were not effectively translated into behavioral motivation, precisely the failure pattern that the DAGMAR model predicts when foundational stages are bypassed.

This finding is consistent with and extends prior research. Zakhaova (2020) demonstrated that persuasion-dominant digital tourism advertising campaigns typically generate aesthetic appreciation without commensurate behavioral motivation when they lack information content enabling audiences to act on positive associations. Karlsson (2017) showed that advertising campaigns biased toward conviction stages without adequate awareness and comprehension investment consistently underperform in behavioral conversion. Hou (2017) found that tourism advertising videos focused exclusively on emotional content underperformed balanced campaigns. The Khareef Dhofar case provides empirical confirmation of these patterns in an Arabic Gulf social media context that the existing literature has not previously examined, enhancing cross-cultural generalizability.

The dialogue deficit identified in the Ruler analysis is particularly significant when examined alongside engagement data. The high proportion of unanswered inquiry comments (19% of total comments) and negative comments attributable to service responsiveness failures (15%) indicates that the campaign's 'dialogue' category functioned primarily as influencer-mediated extended reach rather than genuine two-way audience engagement. A campaign deploying dialogue only instrumentally may generate the metrics of dialogue without its relational benefits a distinction that matters for understanding why broadly positive audience sentiment (66% positive comments) failed to translate into sustained behavioral engagement.

The subcategory-level findings from the Ruler analysis deepen this interpretation in important ways. The persuasive content breakdown (Table 4) reveals that natural landscape imagery dominated persuasive output (24.9%), while service-oriented persuasive content was nearly absent, with hotel and accommodation posts recording zero occurrences. This distribution is consequential: tourists do not make travel decisions based on scenic appeal alone; they require confidence about accommodation, transport, and practical logistics. The informational deficit documented at the category level is therefore compounded at the subcategory level, where the specific types of content most consequential for travel decision-making are precisely those most absent from the campaign. Similarly, the dialogic subcategory data (Table 5) confirm that 24.9 percentage points of the campaign's 28.2% dialogue score derived from influencer collaboration posts, leaving only 3.3% attributable to authentic audience-facing interaction. This structural thinness of genuine dialogue explains why the campaign's positive affective environment did not translate into higher levels of audience trust and behavioral readiness.

The qualitative findings reveal the operational mechanisms through which structural imbalance was produced. The late project manager appointment, account dormancy, absence of a communication plan, insufficient specialized human resources, and weak inter-institutional coordination collectively constitute what can be termed a systemic preparedness deficit, a pattern of operational unreadiness that made strategic comprehensiveness structurally impossible during the campaign period. Critically, these are not random operational failures; they reflect the absence of institutionalized pre-campaign planning processes that should be straightforward to develop, given the season's fixed annual calendar. Their recurrence suggests inadequate institutional learning from previous campaign cycles.

The comparison between high-engagement posts (18% of total, disproportionately associated with influencer collaborations) and low-engagement posts (35%) reveals a structural dependency on external content amplification that is both commercially expensive and strategically fragile. If organic institutional content consistently generates low engagement while influencer-mediated content generates high engagement, the campaign's effectiveness is contingent on a commercially variable external factor. A more durable strategy would invest in developing organic content quality and community management practices that reduce this dependency across future campaign cycles.

The advertising objectives distribution (Table 8) adds further diagnostic precision to the mid-funnel myopia thesis. The dominance of combined-objectives posts (44.3%), which simultaneously pursue scenic persuasion and event promotion, reflects a production logic that prioritizes visual efficiency over strategic sequencing. When nearly half of all advertising content pursues multiple undifferentiated objectives, the campaign loses its capacity to guide audiences along a deliberate awareness-to-action progression. The near-absence of posts dedicated solely to introducing the season (2.5%) means that the campaign began its advertising cycle without the foundational DAGMAR stage that all subsequent persuasion presupposes: basic recognition and initial orientation. The comment sentiment and engagement intensity data (Table 10) complement this picture: positive sentiment was broad but shallow, with 35% of posts generating low engagement, suggesting that the campaign's reach was built on a narrow peak of high-performing content rather than a consistently resonant content architecture across the full campaign period.

The complete absence of the consensus-building strategy warrants particular attention. The Khareef season possesses evident social and cultural capital as a shared national heritage event celebrated across generational boundaries in Oman. A communication strategy that deliberately engages audiences in collective meaning-making, positioning the season as shared cultural heritage rather than merely a commercial tourism product, could generate the kind of intrinsically motivated engagement that neither persuasion nor information provision alone achieves. This represents not merely a missed tactical opportunity but a conceptual limitation in the campaign's understanding of its audience relationship.

The granular subcategory data introduced in this study's extended analysis add further diagnostic resolution to the campaign's structural pattern. Within the persuasive category, the near-total concentration on natural landscapes (24.9%), entertainment (12.4%), and landmarks (10.1%), alongside

the complete absence of accommodation content, reveals a campaign that positioned the destination as a spectacle while leaving the logistical infrastructure of the visit essentially uncommunicated. This is not merely a gap in content balance; it is a gap in the communication model of the tourist decision-making process. Travel decisions, particularly for first-time or undecided visitors, require confidence about practical arrangements as well as enthusiasm for the destination itself. The persuasive subcategory distribution confirms that the campaign addressed enthusiasm comprehensively while neglecting confidence-building.

The advertising objectives data (Table 8) reinforce this interpretation through a different analytical register. The dominance of multi-objective posts (44.3%) indicates that the campaign frequently attempted to achieve awareness, persuasion, and action simultaneously within single content units, a strategy that distributes communicative energy across competing goals rather than optimizing sequentially. The 2.5% of posts devoted exclusively to introducing the season confirms that the campaign did not invest in the patient, foundational work that DAGMAR's awareness stage requires. Combined with the comment sentiment data (Table 10), which demonstrate that 19% of audience comments expressed unmet practical information needs, the conclusion is consistent across all analytical layers: the campaign's content strategy was misaligned with the informational journey that a substantial proportion of its audience was actually undertaking. Future iterations of the Khareef Dhofar campaign would benefit substantially from content calendars that treat each DAGMAR stage as a distinct strategic phase, with dedicated budgets, timelines, and content specifications ensuring that no stage is systematically neglected in favor of the visually more compelling conviction and action content.

7. Implications

7.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes three primary theoretical contributions. First, it provides empirical validation of the integrated Ruler-DAGMAR analytical framework in a non-Western, Arabic Gulf social media tourism context. The framework’s demonstrated capacity to simultaneously capture communicative strategy and advertising effectiveness offers a more comprehensive and diagnostically precise evaluation instrument than either model provides independently, particularly for identifying the stages and strategy dimensions where campaign investment is concentrated or neglected.

Second, the concept of ‘mid-funnel myopia’ warrants elaboration as a theoretically grounded construct with broad applicability in digital tourism communication research. Future research should examine whether this pattern characterizes seasonal tourism campaigns specifically (which may assume prior audience knowledge), Gulf-region campaign design practices more generally, or institutional campaigns managed by governmental bodies with limited digital marketing expertise. Longitudinal examination across multiple Khareef campaign cycles would be particularly valuable for establishing whether this represents a structural tendency or a correctable deviation.

Third, the study contributes to theoretical debates about the relationship between reach and behavioral conversion in digital destination marketing. The finding that 9.46 million impressions generated only 31 visit-intent comments challenges simplistic assumptions about the linear relationship between campaign scale and behavioral impact, suggesting that the structural logic of the content hierarchy mediates this relationship in consequential and theoretically significant ways.

7.2 Practical Implications

For tourism communication practitioners, the findings identify several actionable priorities. Campaign content planning should be structured around the DAGMAR hierarchy's sequential logic, with deliberate investment in awareness and comprehension content during the pre-season period (at least six to eight weeks before formal launch) before transitioning to conviction and action content during peak season. This temporal structuring addresses the foundational deficit identified in this study while respecting inherent time constraints.

Instagram's interactive features live broadcasts, question stickers, polls, interactive quizzes about Dhofar's geography and culture, and link-in-bio-optimization, remain systematically underutilized. Deliberate activation would strengthen alignment with the Ruler model's dialogue dimension, reduce dependence on influencer networks for reach amplification, and create organic engagement opportunities generating higher-quality interactions than passive video consumption. The high proportion of inquiry comments (19%) indicates persistent, unmet demand for practical information that proactive comprehension-stage content could systematically address.

8. Recommendations

The findings of this study yield several interconnected recommendations to strengthen the strategic and operational foundations of tourism media campaigns in Oman. First and foremost, there is a pressing need to develop a national unified guidebook for evaluating tourism media campaigns, to be led by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. Such a guidebook should incorporate standardized frameworks, including Ruler and DAGMAR, to ensure systematic, evidence-based campaign assessment across all official tourism platforms. Closely related to this is the necessity of establishing mandatory inter-institutional coordination protocols between all governmental bodies involved in tourism campaigns, ensuring unified messaging, shared timelines, and clearly delineated roles and responsibilities before campaign launch, with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism assuming a central coordinating role.

With respect to temporal planning, campaign preparation should commence at least six months before the season opens, encompassing pre-season awareness and comprehension content calendars, message architectures, platform strategies, and account activation procedures to address the algorithmic dormancy effects that undermine early campaign visibility. To support this level of planning, it is equally essential to build dedicated, cross-trained campaign teams comprising specialized professionals in media writing, digital content production, data analytics, and audience engagement

management, thereby reducing the structural dependence on reactive contracted solutions that have characterized previous campaign cycles.

At the level of content strategy, campaigns should be deliberately designed to cover all four DAGMAR stages, ensuring that foundational awareness and comprehension content is systematically developed and published during the pre-season period before transitioning to conviction and action-oriented content as the season approaches. Complementing this, investment in AI-powered digital tools including predictive audience segmentation, automated engagement monitoring, and chatbot-based visitor inquiry management is recommended to enhance campaign responsiveness and targeting precision, and to reduce the dialogue deficit identified in this study.

Furthermore, the development of dedicated English-language content tracks for international tourist markets is strongly advised, supported by specialized social media management with language-specific audience targeting capabilities, in order to address the structural limitation posed by the campaign's current monolingual orientation. Finally, official social media accounts should maintain year-round activity to prevent algorithmic dormancy penalties, leveraging off-season content to sustain audience interest, disseminate heritage and cultural material, and systematically collect user-generated content from visitors of previous seasons.

9. Conclusion

This study has presented a comprehensive mixed-methods analysis of the 2023 Khareef Dhofar Instagram campaign, applying an integrated Ruler-DAGMAR analytical framework to all 209 campaign posts and supplementing quantitative findings with thematic analysis of 10 practitioner interviews. The central finding is that the campaign achieved substantial reach and positive audience sentiment but was structurally constrained in behavioral conversion capacity by systematic imbalance in its communication and advertising strategy an overconcentration on persuasion and conviction at the expense of foundational awareness and comprehension stages prescribed by the DAGMAR model.

The campaign’s considerable visual quality, consistent branding, systematic hashtag strategy, and growing institutional presence on Instagram represent genuine and durable strengths that future iterations should preserve and build upon. The challenge is not to abandon what the campaign does well but to extend the depth and comprehensiveness of its strategic approach addressing the identified deficits in informational content, genuine dialogue, foundational advertising investment, and year-round platform activation.

The extended quantitative analysis introduced in this study through the language profile table (Table 2), the Ruler model subcategory tables (Tables 4, 5, and 6), the advertising objectives table (Table 8), and the comment sentiment and engagement intensity table (Table 10) substantially deepens this diagnosis. These additional data layers document, at the level of specific content subcategories, how the campaign's strategic imbalance was realized in practice. The dominance of natural landscape and entertainment content within the persuasive frame, the virtual absence of service and accommodation

content, the thinness of authentic dialogic exchange relative to collaboration-based reach, the informational category's failure to provide institutional communication and direct audience response, and the 19% inquiry comment rate all converge on a single finding: the campaign spoke primarily to audiences who already knew what to desire, while leaving inadequately addressed the audiences who needed to understand how to act. Integrating these subcategory-level findings with the broader Ruler-DAGMAR framework provides a more complete and actionable blueprint for campaign redesign than aggregate category distributions alone could supply. Future research examining the Khareef Dhofar campaign across multiple cycles should track whether these subcategory-level deficits are corrected as the institution develops greater digital marketing maturity and more robust pre-campaign planning infrastructure.

The operational challenges documented through qualitative analysis, late managerial appointment, account dormancy, absence of a pre-planned communication architecture, insufficient specialized human resources, and weak inter-institutional coordination point to systemic preparedness deficits requiring institutional-level remediation rather than campaign-level adjustments alone. These are structural outcomes of institutional processes that have not yet been aligned with the demands of professional, evidence-based digital tourism communication.

The granular evidence from the subcategory-level tables further substantiates these conclusions. The language profile data (Table 2) confirm that the campaign’s 99% Arabic-language orientation, while coherent for domestic audiences, structurally excludes international visitor segments central to Oman’s Vision 2040 tourism expansion targets. The persuasive subcategory distribution (Table 4) demonstrates that the campaign promoted atmospheric desirability without adequately scaffolding practical travel readiness, evidenced by the complete absence of accommodation-related content. The dialogic subcategory breakdown (Table 5) reveals that the campaign’s apparent dialogue score masked an almost entirely collaboration-based amplification strategy with minimal authentic audience interaction. The advertising objectives data (Table 8) confirm that the campaign’s content architecture was not sequenced around the DAGMAR hierarchy but compressed into a middle-stage promotional logic that assumed prior awareness and comprehension. Taken together, these subcategory-level findings provide a more granular and operationally actionable account of the campaign’s structural profile than aggregate category-level data alone can supply, and they constitute diagnostic inputs that should directly inform the planning and evaluation of future Khareef campaign cycles.

The study makes three principal contributions: (1) it provides a validated integrated analytical framework for evaluating tourism communication campaigns in Arabic-language social media contexts, extending internationally developed models to an under-researched regional setting; (2) it introduces the concept of ‘mid-funnel myopia’ as a theoretically grounded diagnostic for the gap between digital campaign reach and behavioral conversion; and (3) it generates empirically grounded, actionable policy and practice recommendations for improving tourism communication infrastructure in Oman within the strategic context of Vision 2040.

Declarations

Author Contribution

"These authors contributed equally to this work and share first authorship."

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