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## Sustainable Marketing Strategies and Cultural Participation: A Case Study of Heenat Salma Farm, Qatar

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### ABSTRACT

Sustainable marketing has emerged as a central force in shaping brand identity, ethical positioning, and consumer engagement for contemporary organizations. With the rise of environmentally conscious markets and value-based consumption patterns, enterprises are increasingly adopting narrative-driven marketing models that integrate ecological and cultural dimensions. This research analyzes how Heenat Salma Farm, Qatar's leading regenerative eco-farm and cultural hub, leverages sustainability and heritage-based experiential marketing to enhance visitor participation and brand identity. Drawing upon qualitative analysis of organizational documents, observational data, and stakeholder interactions, the study examines how the farm embeds sustainability into its brand communication, event strategies, and educational outreach. Findings indicate that Heenat Salma Farm's experiential and participatory marketing model fosters authenticity, strengthens cultural appreciation, and reinforces trust among eco-conscious consumers. However, limited digital optimization and inconsistent global outreach restrict its scalability. The study presents a conceptual model linking sustainability, cultural identity, and experiential value, and concludes with managerial recommendations for strengthening marketing analytics, global positioning, and impact storytelling.

**Keywords:** Sustainable marketing, experiential branding, cultural marketing, regenerative agriculture, Heenat Salma Farm, eco-tourism, consumer engagement

### Introduction

Sustainable business practices have transitioned from peripheral corporate initiatives to core strategic imperatives in contemporary markets. As organizations face heightened consumer expectations, environmental accountability, and post-industrial cultural shifts, marketing has evolved toward narrative-driven, value-centric communication (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Modern consumers increasingly choose brands based not only on functional utility but on alignment with personal ethics, cultural authenticity, environmental stewardship, and community contribution (Deloitte, 2022).

This transformation is particularly visible in sectors where experience, community engagement, and identity formation are central, such as tourism, hospitality, agriculture, and cultural enterprises. In such spaces, sustainable marketing becomes a platform that merges environmental responsibility with social belonging, enabling brands to cultivate emotional value and long-term loyalty.

Heenat Salma Farm, located in Al Shahaniya, Qatar, represents a unique embodiment of this integration. Established under the Caravane Earth Foundation, the farm blends regenerative agriculture, preservation of traditional Qatari crafts, and experiential tourism to create a culturally rooted sustainability ecosystem. Through workshops, marketplaces, storytelling events, educational programs, and community collaborations, the organization positions sustainability as a lived experience rather than a promotional tool.

This paper examines how Heenat Salma Farm's marketing strategies operationalize sustainability and cultural heritage to shape brand equity and enhance visitor participation. Using qualitative data from on-ground observations during a month-long internship, organizational documentation, and comparative benchmarking, the research assesses how sustainable marketing can serve as both strategic differentiation and societal value creation.

### RESEARCH GAP

Existing literature on sustainable marketing highlights its role in environmental communication, consumer trust, and corporate social responsibility (Peattie & Crane, 2005; Belz & Peattie, 2012). Similarly, cultural marketing scholarship recognizes heritage and storytelling as powerful tools for identity formation and emotional engagement (Holt, 2004).

However, three research gaps remain evident:

1. **Limited empirical work on how sustainability and cultural participation function together as a unified marketing system in commercial settings.** Most studies analyze environmental and cultural branding separately.

2. **Sparse research in the Middle Eastern and Gulf context**, where sustainability is increasingly embedded in tourism and cultural policy frameworks.
3. **A lack of experiential, community-based analysis from real operational settings**, especially in heritage-driven eco-enterprises.

This research contributes to closing these gaps by:

- Providing an in-depth case study of a live eco-cultural enterprise
- Demonstrating how sustainability, heritage, and experiential value intersect in practice
- Offering a conceptual model linking sustainability-driven marketing to cultural participation

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Sustainable Marketing

Sustainable marketing expands the traditional marketing mix by emphasizing long-term ecological and social value alongside economic performance. Peattie and Crane (2005) argue that sustainability-oriented marketing concerns itself not only with consumer satisfaction but with ensuring that commercial activities do not jeopardize natural resources or future social well-being. Belz and Peattie (2012) defined this approach as one positioning the firm within a “triple bottom line” framework, people, planet, and profit, requiring transparency, ethical responsibility, and cultural awareness.

More recent studies reaffirm that sustainability communication has become central to consumer perception, particularly among younger market segments. A 2022 global survey by Deloitte found that 60% of consumers prefer brands communicating environmental responsibility, while 57% show loyalty toward organizations demonstrating cultural and social integrity. Such alignment between brand action and values is increasingly necessary for credibility in digital markets.

### Experiential and Cultural Marketing

Cultural marketing recognizes that consumption reflects identity-making rather than purely economic decision-making. Holt (2004) emphasizes that brands with cultural depth become symbolic resources that consumers incorporate into personal narratives. Integration of heritage, tradition, and social meaning enhances emotional resonance, especially in tourism and product categories linked with memory and place.

Experiential marketing complements this by transforming the consumer role from observer to participant. Immersive engagements such as workshops, farm visits, or heritage performances enable brands to communicate values experientially (Schmitt, 2019). For sustainability-driven organizations, this participatory approach can effectively demonstrate ecological and cultural principles rather than merely describing them.

### Integrating Sustainability and Culture

Only in the past decade has scholarship begun analyzing sustainability and culture together as a unified marketing construct. Lim, Ting, and Khoo (2019) find that culturally embedded sustainability initiatives produce more loyal and emotionally invested consumers than generic green marketing claims. In the Gulf region, enterprises such as heritage museums, eco-tourism centers, and craft development initiatives increasingly blend environmental ethics with social identity reinforcement (Al-Ali, 2020).

This research builds on the idea that when sustainability is understood culturally, not just operationally, it has greater power to influence behavior, community ownership, and brand identity. Heenat Salma Farm’s model provides a real-world environment to examine this convergence.

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## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is positioned at the intersection of three theoretical pillars:

### 1. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL)

Elkington’s (1997) TBL model provides the primary backbone for sustainable enterprises and argues that business performance should be evaluated through:

- **People:** Social benefit
- **Planet:** Ecological impact
- **Profit:** Financial viability

Heenat Salma Farm operationalizes TBL by integrating community education, regenerative agriculture, and sustainable business development.

### 2. Experiential Value Theory

Schmitt (2019) proposes that experiences generate value through sensory, emotional, and cognitive engagement. At Heenat Salma Farm, workshops, markets, and cultural activities create direct participant involvement, turning marketing into lived experience rather than messaging.

### 3. Cultural Branding Theory

Holt's (2004) cultural branding framework suggests that brands succeed when they reinforce community identity and shared symbolic meaning. The farm's revival of Bedouin crafts and local knowledge situates the brand as a cultural authority rather than a commercial venue.

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## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, suitable for analyzing processes, experiences, and contextual dynamics in real organizational settings. The research design is both:

- **Descriptive:** Documenting existing marketing practices
- **Exploratory:** Understanding how sustainability and culture interact as strategic tools

### Data Sources

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources.

#### Primary Data

- On-site observation at Heenat Salma Farm over a one-month period
- Participation in marketing and cultural event planning
- Informal interviews with management, artisans, farm staff, and visitors
- Field notes from internal meetings and sustainability briefings

#### Secondary Data

- Website materials, brochures, and digital media content
- Public sustainability reports from Caravane Earth Foundation
- Academic studies, journal articles, and case comparisons

### Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed, selecting individuals involved directly in marketing, sustainability operations, and cultural programming. The sample included:

- 15 organizational staff members
- Artisans and workshop leaders
- Visitors during events
- Marketing administrators

### Data Analysis

Three analytical techniques were applied:

1. **Thematic analysis**, identifying recurring patterns relating to sustainability, heritage, and experience.
2. **Content analysis** of promotional materials and social media for message consistency.
3. **Comparative benchmarking** against international eco-tourism and sustainable farm models.

Validity was strengthened through triangulation across:

- Observations
- Interviews
- Archival documents

The qualitative depth allows deeper insights into how sustainability is operationalized academically, culturally, and commercially.

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## FINDINGS

### 1. Brand Identity Rooted in Sustainability

Field observations indicate that sustainability is not positioned as a marketing slogan but as the foundation of organizational identity. Visitors consistently described Heenat Salma Farm as:

- “Authentic,”
- “Environmentally responsible,”
- “Educational,”

reflecting alignment between brand promise and lived experience.

### 2. Cultural Engagement as a Differentiator

Cultural immersion is a major driver of participation. Interview responses showed:

- 70% of visitors reported attending for cultural workshops (pottery, weaving, dyeing).
- Local visitors valued heritage preservation.
- International visitors perceived the events as “gateway experiences” into Qatari culture.

The organization successfully uses culture not only as décor but as the core of its experiential value proposition.

### 3. Experience Over Messaging

The farm adopts “show, don’t tell” as a marketing approach. Most value transmission happens:

- During events,
- Through direct workshops,
- Through organic interactions with artisans and educators.

This experiential approach builds deeper emotional connection than promotional advertising alone.

### 4. Limited Digital Optimization

While social media presence is strong:

- Search visibility is low
- Minimal SEO work is evident
- Event announcements are inconsistently scheduled

This restricts international reach and reduces participation potential during off-season periods.

### 5. Absence of Impact-Based Sustainability Communication

The farm practices sustainability extensively but communicates it narratively rather than numerically. Absence of:

- Carbon savings
- Waste reduction metrics
- Water efficiency figures
- Community impact dashboards

limits the potential to strengthen credibility with analytical or policy-driven audiences.

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## DISCUSSION

### Experiential Marketing as Sustainability Transmission

The farm demonstrates that sustainability is most persuasive when experienced rather than explained. Supporting earlier findings (Schmitt, 2019), visitors do not learn sustainability through brochures but:

- Vegetable harvesting

- Natural dyeing
- Composting
- Workshops on regeneration

This is consistent with constructivist educational theory and demonstrates marketing as learning.

### **Cultural Brand Depth Reinforces Trust**

Cultural authenticity plays an important role:

- Architecture reflects traditional Qatari vernacular
- Staff attire and décor follow regional aesthetics
- Events are grounded in real craft traditions

This aligns with Holt's (2004) cultural branding theory by providing consumers with symbolic frameworks for identity alignment.

### **Sustainability and Culture as Mutually Reinforcing**

The farm's marketing demonstrates a model where:

- Sustainability gives culture contemporary relevance
- Culture gives sustainability local meaning

This is particularly significant in the GCC context, where modernization sometimes risks erasing heritage. The farm provides a counter-narrative: modernization through memory, not instead of it.

### **Challenges to Scale**

Authenticity-based experiential models face inherent tension when scaling:

- Larger visitor volumes can dilute intimacy
- More commercial expansion may conflict with craft-based identity

This mirrors the challenge observed in comparable eco-tourism ventures (Friðheimar, Navdanya, Sustainable City UAE), suggesting the need for controlled growth.

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## **PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

### **Sustainability–Culture–Experience (SCE) Marketing Framework**

The research proposes a three-dimensional model explaining how enterprises like Heenat Salma Farm build market value:

1. **Sustainability**
  - Environmental integrity
  - Regenerative systems
  - Ethical sourcing
2. **Culture**
  - Heritage revival
  - Craft skills
  - Identity reinforcement
3. **Experience**
  - Hands-on participation
  - Consumer immersion
  - Memory formation

**SCE Model Hypothesis:**

When sustainability and culture are transmitted experientially rather than promotionally, consumer engagement becomes personal, emotional, and more durable.

This model can be used by future eco-enterprises as a strategic design framework.

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## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

### 1. Invest in Digital Visibility

Strengthen:

- SEO optimization
- Event calendars
- Google Maps placement
- Eco-tourism platform partnerships
- Influencer collaboration

This will internationalize visibility beyond walk-in and word-of-mouth audiences.

### 2. Develop Quantified Sustainability Reporting

Monthly or annual reporting could include:

- Food miles reduced
- Organic waste composted
- Water saved
- Visitor participation metrics

Such data enhances transparency and institutional partnership credibility.

### 3. Introduce Membership and Loyalty Ecosystems

Suggested loyalty tiers:

- Annual member passes
- Workshop access
- Farm-to-table benefits
- Community festival invitations

This creates recurring participation rather than one-time visits.

### 4. Strengthen Institutional Collaborations

Possible partnerships:

- Universities
- Doha cultural foundation networks
- International regenerative farming initiatives
- UNESCO-aligned heritage bodies

Such alliances can bring global legitimacy and academic visibility.

### 5. Build a Year-Round Marketing Calendar

A structured, pre-announced programming calendar:

- Reduces visitor fluctuations
- Increases campaign planning efficiency
- Supports stronger annual storytelling

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## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Heenat Salma Farm offers a distinctive case of a marketing model where sustainability and cultural preservation operate not as communication themes but as lived experiences. Rather than relying on persuasive advertising, the farm engages visitors through participation, immersion, and education, resulting in strong emotional association and brand loyalty.

The confluence of:

- Regenerative environmental practice
- Cultural heritage revival
- Experiential learning

creates a holistic service ecosystem aligned with Elkington's Triple Bottom Line. The model generates value for society, environment, and enterprise simultaneously.

However, the research identifies improvement areas that are critical for long-term scalability:

- Strengthening digital outreach
- Building visibility beyond local audiences
- Communicating measurable sustainability metrics
- Establishing structured marketing systems

If addressed, Heenat Salma Farm is well positioned to become a globally recognized benchmark for eco-cultural enterprise marketing in the Middle East and beyond.

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