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REVIEW ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***Representing STARA competence and proactive behaviour in digital narratives of sustainable tourism leadership: An SDG-framed literary analysis of characterisation and agency**Abdelrahman A. A. Abdelghani^{1*}, Bassam Samir Al-Romeedy², Mahmoud Elsayed Emam² & Hebatallah A. M. Ahmed¹¹Applied College, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia²Tourism Studies Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, University of Sadat City, Egypt*Correspondence: am.zamil@psau.edu.sa**ABSTRACT**

Digital tourism communication makes technological capability part of the moral story that destinations tell about sustainable development. Yet managerial research often reads such communication as evidence of organisational attributes rather than as crafted narrative. This article examines how digital texts characterise tourism leaders as competent in smart technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics, and algorithms, termed STARA, and as proactive agents of ecological change. Its bounded case corpus comprises eight English-language webpages published or available between 2021 and 2026 by Red Sea Global and five technology partners. The texts concern smart-destination planning, renewable-energy management, marine robotics, digital twins, artificial intelligence, connected visitor services, and electric mobility in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea destinations. Literary close reading, supported by a coding matrix, analyses voice, focalisation, characterisation, plot, temporality, setting, metaphor, modality, and distributed agency. The findings show that STARA competence is narrated through epistemic vision: leaders see systems whole, anticipate risks, translate data into decisions, and assemble partnerships. Proactivity appears as a recurring challenge-intervention-future-resolution plot. Environmental data make reefs, energy systems, and visitor journeys legible, but this focalisation also privileges what technology can measure. Corporate leaders, scientists, and platforms receive strong agency, whereas workers, residents, tourists, and nonhuman life seldom speak. The Sustainable Development Goals supply an implicit ethical horizon, Goals 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 17, although expansionary tourism plots can strain ecological claims. The proposed Narrated STARA Leadership Framework treats credibility as dependent on the relation among technological competence, proactive agency, ecological responsibility, stakeholder representation, SDG alignment, and evidential specificity.

KEYWORDS: digital narrative, STARA competence, sustainable tourism leadership, characterisation; agency, Sustainable Development Goals, Red Sea Global

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Introduction

Tourism organisations do more online than describe destinations. They arrange places, technologies, institutions, and possible futures into stories that make development intelligible and desirable. A smart energy dashboard becomes evidence of foresight; an underwater mapping system becomes an instrument of care; a partnership announcement becomes an episode in collective transformation. Such texts invite literary analysis because they organise events through narrators, characters, settings, conflicts, temporal sequences, and resolutions. Their subject is managerial, but their persuasive force is narrative. Reading them only as reports of organisational action risks confusing representation with performance and obscures how technological competence acquires ethical meaning.

Literary studies offers a corrective to accounts of innovation. It asks how form produces value: who receives interiority, which moments turn the plot, how the future is made to feel inevitable, and what remains outside the narrated world. Applied to corporate tourism media, these questions expose the work through which infrastructure acquires personality and development becomes a story of stewardship rather than a contested allocation of land, resources, risk, and authority.

This distinction matters as smart technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics, and algorithms enter tourism planning and service. Brougham and Haar (2018) condensed these domains into the acronym STARA when studying expectations about work. Tourism scholarship has since examined automation, smart destinations, service robots, and AI-assisted personalisation (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Gretzel et al., 2015; Gursoy et al., 2019; Tussyadiah, 2020). In this article, STARA competence means the knowledge, critical awareness, ethical judgement, and practical capacity needed to understand and use these technologies responsibly. That definition exceeds technical proficiency. It includes knowing what data omit, who bears technological risks, when automated recommendations require scrutiny, and how innovation relates to environmental limits.

No webpage can establish that a leader actually possesses those qualities. Corporate communication can attribute competence, stage confidence, or display evidence, but it cannot substitute for independent evaluation. The object of analysis is therefore narrated STARA leadership: the textual construction of leaders and organisations as technologically capable, future-oriented, environmentally responsible, and ready to initiate change. Actual competence, narratively attributed competence, organisational self-representation, promotional rhetoric, and observable textual evidence remain analytically separate. This separation permits a critical reading without presuming that promotion is false or that aspiration is achievement.

The case is eight public narratives concerning Red Sea Global's tourism developments in Saudi Arabia. Produced by the developer and its technology partners, the texts span smart-destination strategy, renewable power, marine mapping, environmental modelling, AI-enabled data use, personalised visitor systems, and electric mobility. They form a coherent serial narrative in which an emergent destination is repeatedly cast as both technological experiment and ecological responsibility. The setting is especially consequential: reefs, islands, desert, energy infrastructure, and planned resorts are made to share one developmental plot. The corpus is narrow enough for close reading and varied enough to compare executive blogs, press releases, case studies, and a corporate homepage.

The study asks four questions. How are tourism leaders characterised as possessing STARA competence? Which narrative, rhetorical, and linguistic strategies construct them as proactive agents of sustainable transformation? How do voice, focalisation, metaphor, temporality, and plot connect technological leadership with environmental and social responsibility? Finally, how are relevant Sustainable Development Goals incorporated into innovation narratives, and what tensions emerge? These questions move literary inquiry into a field often governed by managerial constructs while retaining tourism's institutional and ecological specificity.

The argument is that digital tourism narratives manufacture a recognisable leadership character by joining technological vision to moral purpose. Their preferred protagonist sees from above, anticipates disruption, coordinates expert partners, and converts information into timely intervention. This figure is persuasive because infrastructure appears as character evidence and sustainability as narrative legitimacy. Yet the same structure narrows agency: communities are frequently beneficiaries, employees are functional enablers, tourists are data-bearing recipients, and ecosystems are objects rendered knowable through sensors and models. The article contributes a Narrated STARA Leadership Framework for examining both the coherence and the omissions of such stories.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Narrative theory offers a vocabulary for analysing how digital tourism texts distribute knowledge and action. Genette's (1980) account of voice, order, duration, and focalisation distinguishes who speaks from who perceives. Bal (2017) likewise treats characters, events, time, and place as effects of narrative organisation rather than transparent copies of reality. Herman (2009) adds that narratives build storyworlds in which readers infer agents, intentions, causal relations, and possible futures. These ideas remain useful online, although webpages combine prose with headings, quotations, images, metrics, hyperlinks, and navigational choices. Page (2018) shows that online narratives are shaped by platform affordances and networked circulation, while Ryan (2004) demonstrates that narrative travels across media without losing its dependence on sequencing and experiential worlds. Corporate webpages are therefore hybrid artefacts: part report, part advertisement, part future scenario, and part institutional self-portrait.

Tourism communication is particularly hospitable to narrative because a destination must be imagined before it can be visited. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) show how mediated representations provide access to places and organise anticipated experience. Chronis (2012) describes tourists as participants in story construction, and Woodside et al. (2008) explain how narrative links brands with identities and emotions. Escalas (2004) similarly finds that narrative processing can connect consumers to brands. More recent work treats stories as important design resources within tourism systems (Moscardo, 2020).

Leadership scholarship strengthens this literary account by treating leadership as communicatively constructed. Boje's (1991) study of a storytelling organisation presents institutional reality as multiple, contested accounts rather than a settled corporate tale. Fairhurst and Grant (2010) argue that leadership emerges through discourse and social interpretation. Shamir and Eilam (2005) show how life stories support claims to authentic leadership, although the present corpus more often substitutes organisational biography for personal life history. Strategy milestones, technical choices, and partnerships become episodes in a collective career. Leadership is consequently read here as a role produced through narrative relations: a leader becomes visible because a text attributes knowledge, initiative, judgement, and responsibility to a person or corporate actor.

STARA complicates that role. Smart-tourism research defines destinations as information-intensive ecosystems in which data, devices, platforms, organisations, and visitors interact (Gretzel et al., 2015). Personalisation can connect dispersed services around a visitor's needs (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015), while AI can perform mechanical, analytical, intuitive, or empathetic service tasks with different human implications (Huang & Rust, 2018). Service robots shift frontline encounters and require organisations to redesign roles rather than merely install machines (Wirtz et al., 2018). Consumer acceptance also depends on context and perceived usefulness, not technological novelty alone (Gursoy et al., 2019). Tussyadiah (2020) accordingly calls for tourism automation research attentive to design, adoption, consequences, and governance.

The literary question is how these capacities become character traits. A dashboard that supplies real-time visibility can signify vigilance. A digital twin that simulates alternatives can signify prudence. AI agents that answer questions can signify accessibility or control. Narration anthropomorphises platforms when systems "see," "learn," or "advise," while leaders gain authority through association with machine-scale perception. Ethical research warns against equating data processing with neutral judgement. Algorithms embed values and may produce opacity, bias, or diffused responsibility (Mittelstadt et al., 2016). Global AI guidelines converge around transparency, justice, responsibility, privacy, and non-maleficence, but operational detail varies (Jobin et al., 2019). Floridi et al. (2018) therefore connect beneficial AI to explicable and accountable governance. In narrative terms, ethical competence is tested by whether a story acknowledges these limits and identifies responsible agents.

Proactive behaviour supplies the temporal grammar of narrated leadership. Organisational research defines proactivity as self-initiated, future-focused action intended to change circumstances (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). Parker et al. (2006) connect it to role breadth, efficacy, and flexible orientation, while Grant and Ashford (2008) emphasise anticipation, planning, and impact. These are empirical constructs when measured in workplaces. Here they function as interpretive categories for textual attribution. Future tense, anticipatory verbs, roadmaps, pilots, simulations, and claims of early intervention can characterise an actor as proactive, but they do not prove behavioural disposition. Research on greenwashing shows why selective claims and evidential gaps require careful attention (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

Sustainability gives that plot moral stakes. Sustainable tourism has long carried unresolved tensions between economic growth, ecological protection, and social justice (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Sharpley, 2000). Buckley (2012) notes the gap between extensive research and limited aggregate environmental improvement. Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) asks whether policy sustains tourism as an industry or sustains social and ecological systems. Hall (2019) similarly argues that managerial approaches can domesticate sustainability by leaving growth assumptions intact. Climate, water, mobility, and biodiversity are not peripheral themes: tourism depends on carbon-intensive travel and scarce resources (Gössling et al., 2012, 2020). Community collaboration and empowerment therefore require more than their inclusion as beneficiaries (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Scheyvens, 1999).

The Sustainable Development Goals provide a widely legible intertext for these competing aims. Tourism is explicitly associated with decent work, sustainable consumption, and marine resources, but its effects cross many goals. Boluk et al. (2019) caution that SDG language can legitimise business-as-usual unless power and trade-offs are examined. Ecocriticism adds a further challenge. Heise (2008) asks how narrative scales local attachment to planetary systems; Nixon (2011) examines environmental harm that unfolds slowly and resists dramatic representation; Garrard (2012) tracks the cultural frames through which nature becomes meaningful. Climate futures depend on imagination as well as information (Hulme, 2011; Yusoff & Gabrys, 2011). A digital model can render slow ecological processes narratable, yet it can also imply that every risk is calculable.

These literatures support four analytical propositions. First, narrated STARA competence is characterisation through epistemic and ethical signs, not proof of capability. Second, proactive leadership is plotted through anticipation, intervention, and projected resolution. Third, digital infrastructures act as quasi-characters because texts attribute perception, memory, prediction, or advice to them. Fourth, SDG credibility depends on the distribution of voice and consequence: a story is less persuasive when it celebrates innovation while marginalising labour, community authority, privacy, or environmental limits. The framework joins literary form to tourism governance without reducing either field to the other.

Corpus and Methodology

The corpus comprises eight English-language webpages about The Red Sea and AMAALA tourism developments. All were publicly accessible on 11 September 2026 and were issued by Red Sea Global, ABB, Globant, DHI, or Snowflake. The period begins in December 2021, when renewable-energy infrastructure is narrated as a future condition of opening, and ends with undated pages current at the access date that describe operational data systems. This range captures a movement from strategic prospectus to implementation and retrospective case story. Texts were included when they contained sustained reference to tourism development, one or more STARA domains, environmental or social sustainability, and identifiable institutional action. Product pages without destination context, image-only campaigns, duplicate syndications, and reports inaccessible without registration were excluded.

The table documents the corpus before interpretation. Approximate lengths refer to the relevant article or homepage body after navigation, legal notices, and repeated corporate descriptions were omitted. Two undated case pages are marked “n.d.” rather than assigned dates from search-engine estimates. This conservative choice preserves verifiability. The corpus is not offered as representative of Saudi tourism communication as a whole. It is an embedded case of a corporate narrative network: the focal developer speaks directly in three texts, while suppliers and consultants retell the destination through their own genres and commercial interests.

The unit of analysis was the complete page-specific narrative rather than every reusable element carried by the host website. Navigation menus, recommended links, boilerplate biographies repeated across pages, and later news modules were not coded. Quotations were treated as embedded voices within the producing organisation’s editorial frame, not as independent interviews. Named systems and reported quantities were recorded as textual evidence, while claims such as “leading,” “regenerative,” or “world-class” were coded as evaluation unless the page supplied a criterion. This distinction prevented promotional intensity from being mistaken for demonstrated performance.

SDG interpretation followed a claim-to-goal procedure. A goal entered the analysis only when a text named it or described a relevant practice, actor, or consequence. Innovation infrastructure supported Goal 9; renewable power and mobility supported Goals 12 and 13; marine protection supported Goal 14; skills,

local manufacture, and employment connected to Goal 8; destination planning related to Goal 11; and formal collaboration related to Goal 17. Coding also recorded counterevidence, including absent indicators, deferred outcomes, unnamed stakeholders, and tensions between expansion and ecological limits. The procedure treated the goals as questions posed to the narrative, rather than labels conferred on it. This made interpretive disagreement visible instead of hiding it within sustainability coding.

The method is qualitative literary-discursive analysis. Each text was read repeatedly and entered into a coding matrix covering narrator, focaliser, named and collective characters, action verbs, technologies, conflict, setting, temporal markers, evaluation, modality, stakeholder roles, and sustainability claims. A second pass mapped plot functions: initial condition, problem, intervention, helper, anticipated consequence, and residual tension. A third pass compared how genres distributed authority. Executive testimony personalises knowledge; press releases alternate corporate narration with attributed quotation; case studies impose challenge-solution-results causality; the homepage supplies recurring motifs and a destination storyworld.

Close reading remained primary. A searchable local text file supported retrieval of recurring terms, but no frequency, collocation, or sentiment result is reported because such counts would add little to this small, genre-diverse corpus. Interpretation focused on wording, sequence, viewpoint, and omission. The analysis also used negative cases: privacy appears explicitly in the Snowflake story, for example, whereas labour displacement and algorithmic bias remain largely absent. Public corporate texts raise no private-data issue, but ethical caution is required because the analysis evaluates representation, not the intentions of quoted individuals or the verified environmental performance of organisations.

Corpus of Digital Tourism Narratives

Text title	Organisation	Date	Genre	URL	Accessed	Approx. length	Reason for inclusion	STARA and sustainability themes
ABB powers Red Sea tourism project with smart energy technology	ABB	8 Dec 2021	Press release	Open page	11 Sep 2026	720 words	Links destination leadership to renewable power and data-led energy management	Smart dashboards, analytics, automation, renewable energy, carbon reduction
From Smart Cities to Smart Destinations How RSG is Leading the Way	Red Sea Global	24 Jul 2022	Executive blog	Open page	11 Sep 2026	980 words	Explicitly characterises a named strategist and explains a smart-destination roadmap	Smart services, strategy, personalisation, partnerships, environmental improvement
Red Sea Global and VAARST collaborate for advanced marine ecosystem mapping	Red Sea Global	14 Dec 2023	Corporate news release	Open page	11 Sep 2026	560 words	Connects marine robotics and 3D imaging with anticipatory conservation	Robotics, intelligent data collection, species classification, coral monitoring
Globant partners with Red Sea Global to reinvent sustainable luxury tourism experiences in Saudi Arabia	Globant	12 Feb 2025	Partnership release	Open page	11 Sep 2026	650 words	Frames AI-led personalisation as destination transformation	AI, IoT, data analytics, visitor journey, sustainability, global scaling
Sustainable Tourism and Emobility at The Red Sea and AMAALA Destinations	ABB	11 Feb 2025	Press release	Open page	11 Sep 2026	610 words	Attributes proactive environmental leadership through electric-mobility infrastructure	Charging systems, smart mobility, local manufacture, emissions reduction, partnership
Integrating regenerative tourism and conservation in the Red Sea	DHI	n.d.	Project case study	Open page	11 Sep 2026	690 words	Uses a challenge-solution-results structure around a marine digital twin	Simulation, predictive modelling, impact assessment, ecosystems, SDG 14
Red Sea Global Combines Luxury Travel with Sustainable Development Using Agentic AI	Snowflake	n.d.	Customer case story	Open page	11 Sep 2026	1,280 words	Makes AI, governance, privacy, and distributed data access central to leadership identity	Agentic AI, LLMs, algorithms, data governance, sensors, personalisation, sustainability

Text title	Organisation	Date	Genre	URL	Accessed	Approx. length	Reason for inclusion	STARA and sustainability themes
Regenerative Tourism	Red Sea Global	n.d.	Corporate homepage narrative	Open page	11 Sep 2026	540 words	Supplies the paratextual moral frame within which partner stories become legible	Regeneration, research, conservation, communities, long-term value, partnerships

Narrating STARA Competence through Leadership Characterisation

The corpus characterises STARA competence first as an ability to see connected systems. Red Sea Global’s executive blog gives Ben Bilz a biographical paratext that names his strategic role, engineering education, consulting experience, and responsibility for procurement (Red Sea Global, 2022). These credentials function like an economical character sketch: expertise precedes and authorises the first-person plural account that follows. The blog’s heading “Technology with Purpose” then converts technical capacity into motive. Smartness is said to require a holistic vision, prioritisation, impact validation, and an execution roadmap. The competent leader is neither coder nor machine operator. He is a focalising intelligence who can comprehend islands, utilities, mobility, security, healthcare, and environmental systems as one design problem.

That panoramic focalisation recurs across the partner narratives. ABB’s energy release promises “total visibility” through a dashboard that joins asset and energy management (ABB, 2021). Snowflake’s case story turns fragmented data architecture into the conflict and a comprehensive view into the desired resolution; the “bird’s-eye view” allows anticipation of customer needs while sensors monitor irrigation and electricity (Snowflake, n.d.). DHI’s digital twin similarly creates a dynamic representation of lagoon conditions through which alternative development scenarios can be explored before construction (DHI, n.d.). Each text attaches leadership authority to an elevated or synthetic perspective. To lead is to overcome partial sight.

The metaphor is powerful but politically selective. A bird’s-eye or twin perspective appears comprehensive because it gathers many signals, yet its completeness depends on what sensors record, models represent, and organisations choose to ask. Mittelstadt et al. (2016) warn that algorithmic systems distribute value judgements across data, design, and use. The corpus rarely dwells on that chain. It makes epistemic integration a character virtue while backgrounding the labour of data collection, calibration, maintenance, and interpretation. Scientists and data engineers appear, but mostly as competent helpers within an organisational viewpoint. Communities do not define what counts as relevant knowledge.

Competence is also characterised as translation between data and action. ABB’s 2021 narrative moves from real-time operational data to informed decisions, optimisation, corrective action, and lower operating costs. The sequence makes analytics narratively consequential. DHI’s models identify sedimentation risk and lead to mitigation advice; the marine twin becomes a rehearsal space in which potential harm is encountered before it occurs. The VAARST release gives similar agency to SubSLAM, 4K sensors, and remotely operated vehicles, which map coral habitats and compare present with past imagery (Red Sea Global, 2023). Here STARA competence is ecological literacy mediated by robotics. Leaders demonstrate care by commissioning technologies that perceive slow or submerged change.

The marine texts complicate the usual heroic leader. The reef is the threatened figure around which action is organised; technology is the helper; RSG and its partners are guardians who interpret evidence. Yet the environment remains focalised from the developer’s perspective. Coral is quantified, identified, preserved, and made available to future visitors. Its narrative value lies partly in its relationship to tourism. Ecocritical accounts of slow violence caution that cumulative damage may resist the bounded resolution of project stories (Nixon, 2011). The digital twin makes environmental duration visible, but the case-study genre also gives complex ecological uncertainty a confident solution phase.

The Snowflake narrative supplies the corpus’s fullest portrait of ethical and practical STARA competence. Named executives explain the attempt to build a local language model, the hardware constraint

that prevented deployment, the choice of cloud infrastructure, and the governance requirements governing data use (Snowflake, n.d.). Failure becomes character evidence because the account shows revision rather than effortless mastery. Privacy and regulatory compliance appear as design criteria, and AI agents expand access to analysis for departments without dedicated analysts. This is more credible than generic futurity because it identifies constraints, organisational scale, and a sequence of decisions.

Even here, narrative personification demands scrutiny. AI agents answer, suggest, align, and write, while the “automated data concierge” borrows hospitality’s service identity. Such language grants the platform initiative and social familiarity. Huang and Rust’s (2018) distinction among forms of service intelligence helps clarify what the metaphor compresses: automated querying and pattern suggestion do not amount to ethical judgement. The text attributes accuracy and continuous availability to agents but says less about error review, bias, energy demand, or escalation. Ethical STARA competence is thus partly represented through governance vocabulary and partly assumed through technological fluency.

Across the corpus, leaders occupy several character types. The strategist assembles a holistic roadmap; the technocrat secures visibility and control; the guardian anticipates ecological harm; the collaborator recruits specialised partners; and the entrepreneur seeks scalable global standards. These types overlap within corporate personification. The organisation is repeatedly described as learning, leading, piloting, expanding, and protecting. Such verbs convert institutional action into a coherent personality, even though decisions arise across teams, contracts, regulators, and suppliers. Fairhurst and Grant’s (2010) discursive approach explains why this matters: leadership coherence is an effect of communication, not merely a prior fact expressed by it within this promotional case corpus.

Proactive Behaviour Narrative Agency and Sustainable Transformation

Proactivity in the corpus is not a measured disposition. It is a plot position created by verbs, temporal markers, and causal arrangement. The typical sequence begins with a threatened or inadequate present, introduces a planned technological intervention, and projects a safer, more efficient future. In DHI’s case study, limited historical data and a sensitive lagoon create the conflict; modelling and the digital twin provide the intervention; improved planning and ecological protection become the result. The headings “Challenge,” “Solution,” and “Results” make causality appear complete. This compact plot turns anticipation into leadership evidence because action occurs before harm is realised.

The executive blog uses a developmental quest. Cities face congestion and environmental pressure; smart societies offer hope; RSG learns from established cities; leaders validate initiatives, sequence execution waves, and gather partners (Red Sea Global, 2022). Retrospective narration gives uncertainty the order of a completed learning process. Rhetorical questions briefly stage openness, but the corporate “we” answers them. The narrative therefore characterises proactivity as disciplined borrowing rather than solitary invention. Its heroism is moderated by an ecosystem of partners, although the focal organisation remains the agent that learns and distributes lessons.

Pilots and simulations perform a similar temporal function. The VAARST release describes piloting as a response to coral bleaching and invasive species, while comparative imagery links past, present, and future ecological states (Red Sea Global, 2023). DHI’s virtual scenarios place possible futures inside present decision-making. Grant and Ashford (2008) treat anticipation and intended impact as central to proactivity; these texts narrate both through technologies that make “before” actionable. Environmental risk becomes a conflict that leadership can meet early, rather than a disaster that forces reaction.

Future tense, however, can defer verification. ABB’s 2021 release projects renewable operation and digital optimisation towards 2030, joining infrastructure already commissioned to outcomes not yet fully observable. The 2025 mobility release revises this temporal pattern by combining completed charging installations with a promised tenfold expansion (ABB, 2025). This mixture of accomplished and prospective action strengthens the plot, but it also allows present evidence to support larger future claims. Literary attention to order and duration prevents projected resolution from being mistaken for completed sustainability.

Agency is distributed, though not equally. Partnerships are grammatical subjects: ABB supplies systems, DHI develops models, Globant designs a connected experience, VAARST provides mapping technology, and Snowflake supports data work. RSG selects, integrates, and scales. Technology itself receives quasi-agency

through active verbs: models identify risks, sensors monitor resources, agents suggest trends, and platforms enable parity. Workers appear mainly as teams whose burdens are reduced. Tourists receive personalised services or move through charging networks. Local communities appear as eventual beneficiaries, while regulators enter as requirements. The leader's proactivity therefore depends on a supporting cast whose perspectives rarely govern the narrative.

The connected-visitor release shifts conflict from ecological vulnerability to friction in the tourism journey. AI, the Internet of Things, and analytics promise real-time personalisation and a seamless experience (Globant, 2025). "Visitor at the centre" sounds participatory, but focalisation remains institutional: the visitor is known through preferences and interactions rather than direct speech. Personalisation converts the tourist into both beneficiary and data source. Gursoy et al. (2019) show that acceptance of AI services cannot be assumed from technical capacity, yet the release's future plot leaves little room for refusal, uneven access, or unwanted surveillance.

Environmental transformation is most convincing when narrative agency follows an explicit chain from evidence to decision to mitigation. DHI's sediment models and ABB's energy monitoring offer such chains. It is less convincing when partnership itself serves as the climax. Announcements often treat signing, selecting, or launching as proof of change, although implementation and outcome remain future chapters. This is legitimate aspirational storytelling if its modality stays visible. It becomes misleading only when intention and performance collapse into the same temporal register.

The corpus repeatedly casts sustainable transformation as serial rather than singular. Each text also supplies an episode: vision, power, mapping, modelling, personalisation, mobility, or organisational AI. Seriality can represent the genuine interdependence of destination systems, but it can also make expansion feel like continuous moral progress. A critical reading asks whether each new technological episode addresses an environmental limit or simply renews the protagonist's identity as an agent of change.

Sustainable Tourism Narratives through the SDG Lens

The SDGs operate as an implicit vocabulary rather than a checklist (United Nations, 2015). DHI alone names SDG 14 directly, linking marine modelling to the conservation and sustainable use of oceans. Elsewhere, phrases such as renewable power, local content, community impact, responsible development, innovation, and partnership echo Goals 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 17.

SDG 9 receives the clearest narrative investment. Digital platforms, sensors, charging networks, remotely operated vehicles, AI agents, and integrated energy systems turn infrastructure into visible proof of innovation. The texts treat such infrastructure as both setting and action. Dashboards, twins, and marketplaces are spaces through which leaders perceive and coordinate. Gretzel et al. (2015) describe smart tourism as an ecosystem, but the corpus often gives the integrator privileged agency. Innovation becomes responsible when it supports environmental decisions; it remains ambiguous when personalisation or scale is presented as inherently sustainable.

Goals 12 and 13 enter through energy, consumption, and mobility. ABB's 2021 release connects real-time monitoring to renewable power, efficiency, and corrective action, while the 2025 release links electric vehicles with destination transport. These are concrete narrative objects rather than ornamental values. Yet the stories delimit carbon responsibility at the destination. They do not narrate international aviation, construction emissions, embodied materials, or the demand created by luxury expansion. Gössling et al. (2020) show that tourism's climate problem extends across mobility systems, and Hall (2019) warns that managerial sustainability can preserve growth as an unquestioned ending. A charging network may reduce local vehicle emissions without resolving the carbon intensity of reaching the destination.

SDG 14 reorganises the setting ethically. In the marine stories, the lagoon is not scenery but a vulnerable system with currents, sediment, species, and temporal change. Robotic mapping and digital modelling allow coral reefs to enter the plot as more than picturesque paratext. Heise's (2008) account of eco-cosmopolitan scale helps explain the movement: local habitats are translated into datasets, models, and global conservation language. This translation can support careful planning, but it also places ecological legibility within proprietary technical systems. Nonhuman life is represented richly as an object of knowledge and weakly as an independent claimant.

SDG 17 is the social plot. Almost every intervention takes the form of partnership. The repeated partner figure counters the myth of the isolated visionary and acknowledges that smart destinations require specialised knowledge. DHI also mentions environmental stakeholders, and VAARST's story names university collaboration. However, partnership is largely corporate and technical. Community organisations, local fishers, independent conservation groups, and workers' representatives are not visible co-narrators. Jamal and Getz (1995) distinguish collaboration from simple coordination, while Scheyvens (1999) connects sustainable tourism to empowerment. By those standards, partnership breadth cannot be inferred from the frequency of collaborative language.

SDG 8 appears through local manufacture, employment, skills, and economic diversification, but decent work receives less textual attention than growth. ABB's mobility release mentions local production of charging equipment. The RSG homepage places opportunities for people beside environmental value, and corporate descriptions refer to economic contribution. Yet workers rarely possess interiority, speech, or conflict. Automation is narrated as relieving burden and extending analytical access, not as changing job quality or bargaining power. Brougham and Haar (2018) show that STARA evokes employee uncertainty as well as opportunity. That tension is mostly absent from these tourism stories.

SDG 11 is adapted from city to destination. The 2022 blog transfers smart-city lessons to an extensive landscape of islands, desert, infrastructure, and resorts. This spatial imagination treats the destination as a planned society whose mobility, utilities, health, and public spaces can be integrated from inception. The text's "stakeholders" remain unspecified, so the reader cannot see who participates in defining liveability.

The central contradiction is between regenerative rhetoric and expansionary plot. New resorts, increased visitor capacity, personalised demand, and global replication are narrated alongside ecosystem enhancement. These aims may coexist under stringent limits, but the webpages provide insufficient life-cycle evidence to establish that balance. Boluk et al. (2019) argue that SDGs require attention to power and trade-offs, while Buckley (2012) distinguishes project claims from sector-wide outcomes. The corpus often acknowledges balance as a challenge, then resolves it through technological integration. Literary analysis keeps the contradiction open: a satisfying resolution is a formal achievement, not environmental proof.

Discussion

The analysis shows that digital tourism communication produces leadership models through literary form. It does not simply attach sustainability adjectives to executives. Characterisation emerges from a system of credentials, verbs, viewpoints, helpers, obstacles, and temporal promises. The preferred leader is a systems reader. Whether embodied by a named strategist, quoted executive, or personified organisation, this character perceives connections across data, infrastructure, visitors, and ecosystems. STARA competence becomes legible as the capacity to widen focalisation and move from perception to intervention.

This finding extends leadership narrative scholarship. Shamir and Eilam (2005) locate authenticity in the leader's life story; the corpus instead builds an institutional life story from projects. A failed local language-model deployment, a switch to cloud architecture, an underwater pilot, and an expanding charging network function as episodes of learning and maturation. Boje's (1991) emphasis on multiple organisational stories also identifies what the polished serial account suppresses. Partner voices differ, but they converge on RSG as a coherent protagonist (Red Sea Global, n.d.). Contradictory experiences from residents, employees, or critics do not enter the corpus.

The findings also refine the idea of smart tourism. Research often defines smartness structurally through connectivity, data, and service integration (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Gretzel et al., 2015). The narratives add a moral character dimension. Technology is "with purpose" when it supports conservation, renewable energy, accessibility to insight, or regulated data use. Purpose transforms technical fluency into leadership virtue. Yet ethical adequacy cannot be derived from the narrator's declaration. Jobin et al. (2019) and Floridi et al. (2018) make accountability, fairness, privacy, and explicability integral to responsible AI. Among the corpus texts, the Snowflake story approaches these concerns through governance and privacy, while most partner releases rely on positive purpose as a sufficient warrant.

The proposed Narrated STARA Leadership Framework formalises seven interacting dimensions. Narrative characterisation identifies the attributes, roles, and archetypes assigned to leaders. Technological competence

examines what leaders and organisations are shown knowing, choosing, integrating, and questioning. Proactive agency tracks anticipation, initiative, pilots, roadmaps, and interventions across narrative time. Ethical and ecological responsibility asks which risks, limits, and duties shape action. Stakeholder representation maps who speaks, decides, works, benefits, or disappears. SDG alignment tests whether relevant goals are connected to concrete practices and acknowledged trade-offs. Narrative credibility evaluates evidential specificity, modality, temporal status, and the distance between aspiration and demonstrated outcome.

These dimensions are relational. Characterisation gains credibility when competence is supported by situated choices rather than generic superlatives. Proactive agency gains ethical value when intervention responds to a defined ecological or social problem. SDG alignment weakens when stakeholder representation is thin or a projected outcome is narrated as present achievement. Conversely, a text may remain promotional yet offer credible evidence by naming constraints, decision sequences, governance obligations, and measurable objects. The framework is an interpretive model, not a scale, index, or statistically validated instrument.

Agency within the framework is distributed among human and nonhuman actors. Algorithms, dashboards, digital twins, sensors, and robots are quasi-characters because narration grants them perception, memory, comparison, or recommendation. This attribution can clarify what an infrastructure does, but it may erase the people who define objectives and act on outputs. Wirtz et al. (2018) and Tussyadiah (2020) both suggest that automation rearranges service work rather than simply replacing or augmenting it. Literary analysis detects that rearrangement at the level of grammar: platforms “enable” and “identify,” leaders “choose” and “lead,” while employees are “supported” and communities “benefit.” Voice and syntax expose a hierarchy of agency that a technology inventory would miss.

Focalisation is the framework’s critical hinge. The destination is repeatedly seen through integrated organisational systems. Such vision promises coordination across environmental and visitor data, but it turns legibility into authority. Page’s (2018) work on online narrative reminds us that the webpage itself controls access through selection, hierarchy, and paratext. Headings, metrics, executive quotations, and product names steer attention towards intervention and away from uncertainty. Images of reefs and resorts further align ecological beauty with luxury value, although the present study analyses their textual framing rather than performing visual semiotics.

The SDGs intensify this issue of perspective. Goals can connect one destination to planetary concerns, much as Yusoff and Gabrys (2011) describe imagination as central to climate knowledge. They can also smooth conflict by arranging diverse aims within a shared future. The corpus’s dominant possible future contains more tourism, stronger infrastructure, richer personalisation, and healthier ecosystems. That composite future is narratively coherent but empirically demanding. Sharpley’s (2000) theoretical divide between tourism development and sustainability remains unresolved when ecological limits are not specified. Higgins-Desbiolles’s (2018) question persists: is the regenerative story designed to sustain ecological relations, or to sustain tourism’s legitimacy? Accountability therefore depends on keeping that composite future corrigible.

Implications and Limitations

For literary scholars, the study demonstrates that corporate tourism webpages deserve analysis as serial, multimodal narrative systems whose genres shape character, causality, and possible futures. For tourism researchers, the framework offers a way to study leadership claims without converting promotional texts into proxy measures of competence or behaviour. Destination organisations can use the framework as an editorial test: identify who speaks, separate completed outcomes from ambitions, explain how algorithms are governed, and show how communities and workers participate in decisions. Concrete trade-offs produce more credible sustainability narratives than unqualified harmony.

The case has strict limits. Eight English-language texts centred on one Saudi developer cannot establish patterns across destinations, languages, ownership models, or national contexts. The partner-heavy corpus favours organisational self-representation and contains no community-authored counter-narrative. Webpages may change after the access date, and approximate lengths exclude repeated site furniture. The study does not verify environmental performance, interview leaders, measure employee proactivity, audit algorithms, or assess visitor response. Close reading is interpretive; the coding matrix supports consistency but does not eliminate scholarly judgement. Visual design and video were excluded except where textual paratext shaped interpretation.

Practitioners should archive dated versions and link claims to evidence. A future-oriented page can state which outcomes are targets, which are modelled projections, and which have been verified. Algorithmic systems warrant explanations of data sources, human oversight, appeal routes, privacy safeguards, and energy costs. These details do not weaken narrative force; they give readers reasons to trust the leader the story constructs. Future research should compare corporate stories with sustainability reports, planning records, employee accounts, community media, and independent ecological data. Longitudinal archives could test whether future-tense promises become documented outcomes. Comparative work might also examine how Arabic and English versions distribute agency differently. Such designs would preserve narrative analysis while bringing competing focalisations into view.

Conclusion

Digital narratives of Red Sea tourism represent STARA competence by making systems vision, anticipatory judgement, integration, and partnership into leadership traits. Their plots move from fragmented data, ecological vulnerability, or service friction towards technologically mediated resolution. Smart infrastructure thus becomes character evidence, while regeneration and the SDGs provide moral direction. The most persuasive texts support aspiration with named constraints, decision sequences, and observable interventions. Others rely more heavily on futurity, scale, and exemplary language.

Literary analysis reveals the cost of this coherence. Corporate narrators and technologies dominate agency; workers, communities, tourists, and nonhuman life are more often interpreted than heard. Models make slow environmental change visible, yet they also privilege measurable realities and can close conflict prematurely. The Narrated STARA Leadership Framework keeps seven dimensions together: characterisation, competence, proactive agency, ecological ethics, stakeholder representation, SDG alignment, and credibility. It treats leadership discourse as evidence of how an organisation wishes technological responsibility to be understood, not proof that responsibility has been achieved. Sustainable tourism leadership becomes narratively credible when digital foresight remains accountable to plural voices, verifiable outcomes, and ecological limits capable of changing the destination's story. That standard keeps imagination answerable to the places and lives it proposes to transform.

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