



كلية الأمير
محمد بن سلمان
للإدارة وريادة الأعمال

Prince Mohammed
Bin Salman College
Business & Entrepreneurship

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CASE STUDY

DAR TASHKEEL: TRANSFORMING SAUDI AUTHORING LANDSCAPE

This case study is part of a project focusing on Investing in Culture, which is a collaboration of MBSC Case Centre and the Ministry of Culture. The case was developed by Dr Larissa von Alberti-Alhtaybat, Associate Professor of Accounting and Vice Dean at the Prince Mohammed Bin Salman College of Business & Entrepreneurship. It is intended to be used as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management or administrative situation.

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DAR TASHKEEL: TRANSFORMING SAUDI AUTHORING LANDSCAPE

Abstract

Dar Tashkeel is a content creation platform – including authoring, translation and publishing, with more than 18 categories including literature, science, management, marketing, economics, politics, psychology and philosophy. and in multiple languages. It supports and nurtures local young writing talents that share their literary works, and uphold writing in the Arabic language. The three founders and partners are also copy-writers and authors, and have great passion for literature, and therefore, want to support new Saudi writing talents.

Case Study

Maajeb Alshammari and his two partners established Dar Tashkeel Publishing and Distribution Company (“**Dar Tashkeel**”) in 2016 to publish Saudi Arabian literature in Arabic. The Company, a publishing platform that promotes and nurtures young Saudi authors' writing talents and skills, was founded with equal equity investments, and the three partners manage the business.

Dar Tashkeel’s Business Model

Dar Tashkeel is an innovative literary platform and a Saudi publishing house. It provides multilingual authoring, translating, and publishing services across more than 18 categories, including literature, science, management, marketing, economics, politics, psychology, and philosophy. Authors can share their work on the platform and choose to promote it through Dar Tashkeel. Moreover, Dar Tashkeel highlights literature and stories about local and regional history and language development. For instance, "Our History is a Story," published in collaboration with the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives (“**Darah**”) as part of the series “Tales from Saudi Arabia,” features authentic Saudi tales.¹

Dar Tashkeel is making a valuable contribution to the literature and publishing landscape in Saudi Arabia by hosting an annual competition. Aspiring authors submit their work for consideration, and the entries are judged based on quality. From the pool of submissions, Dar Tashkeel selects twelve

¹ Arab News: Darah signs publishing house deals to globalize Saudi literature.

promising young writers to support and mentor. In addition to acting as the author's agent,² Dar Tashkeel provides winners access to resources, travel opportunities to international book fairs, financial support, and educational courses. This support is especially beneficial given the need for more available agents in the industry in Saudi Arabia.

Dar Tashkeel values transparency and fairness for the nascent Saudi authors, copywriters, and graphic designers it partners with. Its team shares a passion for literature and a desire to support new Saudi writing talents. Maajeb Alshammari, General Manager, indicates that the contracts offered to these new talents are transparent and clearly outline how the money earned from book sales will be spent.³ There are no specific genre requirements for the authors, as the only current requirement is to write and publish in Arabic.

Dar Tashkeel was established to fill a market gap and promote culture through yearly competitions. According to Maajeb Alshammari, the Company recognizes a disconnection between publishers and audiences and believes that cultural preservation and celebration are essential, even while ensuring financial sustainability.⁴ However, managing a literature-focused publishing company in the Arabic-speaking region can be difficult due to low readership rates, requiring authors and publishers to rely more on international book fairs to increase their readership.⁵

The Ministry of Culture has created the Literary, Publication, and Translation Commission, which emphasizes the significance of Arabic literature in Saudi Arabia, the Middle East, and North Africa (MENA) region. This initiative has made a noticeable impact by introducing new programs that highlight the significance of literature as a vital component of culture.

The management of Dar Tashkeel is handled by three partners who determine the yearly budget. They usually reinvest their profits to keep the business growing organically and are willing to cover any financial gaps. While seeking external funds is not a priority for now, it is still an option if the partners agree and if it aligns with their strategic goal to expand into the global market.

Dar Tashkeel: Prospects

Dar Tashkeel is dedicated to developing local talent and supporting cultural and literary programs in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture by investing in Saudi Arabia's literary sector and nurturing writer talents. It is crucial to help current and upcoming writers hone their abilities and skills to become future best-selling talents. Dar Tashkeel not only supports talented Saudi authors but also

² **Conversation with the co-founder.**

³ **Conversation with the co-founder.**

⁴ **Conversation with the co-founder.**

⁵ **Arab News: Arabic publishers face struggle [sic] to balance books.**

offers a program to transfer the expertise of professionals and leading international authors. For instance, Professor Christopher Phelps,⁶ the well-renowned US historian, is represented by Dar Tashkeel, which has obtained the rights to publish and produce ten of his books, now available in Arabic and English.

The literary and publishing market in Saudi Arabia is still in its cradle. Although there are active authors, they have yet to gain international recognition, awards, or accolades. Literature and printing have been significant for several years, but the cultural sector now focuses on highlighting the Arabic language, its use in literature, and culture in general.⁷ Recent national plans aim to introduce the Arabic language at an international level to make Arabic culture accessible to all. Translated literary works are a crucial first step in achieving this goal.

Dar Tashkeel's strength lies in its access to the local talent pool, providing a chance for talented authors in Saudi Arabia and the MENA region to go international. The reading community and top-selling authors in these regions are yet to be developed, given that the Arab World publishes around 6,500 new titles, compared to the USA's 100,000 new titles per year, which is the world's largest book market.⁸ The USA, China, Germany, and the UK are the largest markets, controlling 67% of global book sales.⁹ Therefore, reaching the global market could be a thrilling opportunity for the future. In this regard, audiobooks are a new development in the publishing market, with 8,000 audiobooks released in 2022.¹⁰ Dar Tashkeel could leverage this trend by creating bilingual books, allowing non-Arabic speakers to enjoy stories and familiarize themselves with Arabic. As Dar Tashkeel currently represents international authors and distributes their books in Saudi Arabia in English and Arabic, a similar development could occur with Saudi authors in other countries.

⁶ Christopher Phelps (born 1965) is an American political and intellectual historian of the twentieth century. His research and writing subjects include philosophical pragmatism, class and labor in social thought, the American Left, and race and sexuality in American history.

⁷ Saudi Press Agency: Ministry of Culture to Launch Second Edition of Scripts and Calligraphy Exhibition.

⁸ The New Publishing Standard: UNESCO says Arabs read for just 6 minutes a year. So why will more than 4 million Arabs be heading for MENA book fairs next week?

⁹ Wordsrated – Global Book Sale Statistics 2023.

¹⁰ Arab News: How e-books and audiobooks are expanding options for consuming Arabic literature.