

Saudi Soft Power

Legends

شركة ليجنڈز للعلاقات العامة والاتصال
Legends PR & Communication Company

December 2024

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Overview

The Legends PR & Communication Company's report examines Saudi Arabia's growing influence through an international communications lens, highlighting the Kingdom's "soft power" strategy centred on sports, star athletes, and major tournaments. This initiative, spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman since the unveiling of Vision 2030, has rapidly transformed Saudi Arabia's global image.

Once pigeonholed by Western media and search engines as a land of camels, tents, and oil, Saudi Arabia has deftly leveraged sports to present a more vibrant, competitive, and passion-driven narrative. This shift in perception among international communities and governments is the fruit of savvy public relations strategies that have successfully showcased the Kingdom's true, bright, and honourable face.

The report traces the roots of Saudi sports diplomacy to 1977 when the national airline sponsored the Williams Formula 1 team. This was followed by Brazilian football legend Rivelino's groundbreaking move to Al-Hilal in 1978. Fast forward to today, and the Saudi Pro League boasts 180 international stars, while the Kingdom celebrates its successful bid to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

This remarkable journey from desert stereotypes to global sports powerhouse exemplifies the report's key finding: change in Saudi Arabia is occurring at a breathtaking pace, reshaping perceptions and redefining the Kingdom's place on the world stage.



“Work Team”



Milestones in Building Saudi Arabia's soft power through sports

Strategy for supporting sports clubs

It included five key initiatives



digital transformation



direct support



governance



fan attendance



diverse sports

Distribution of support

1.033 billion riyals

Direct support for clubs

503 million riyals

for the diverse sports initiative

128 million riyals

for the fan engagement initiative





Investment and privatisation of sports clubs

The project encompasses two main paths: investment by major corporations and developmental entities in sports clubs in exchange for transferring club ownership to them, as well as offering several sports clubs for privatisation starting from the last quarter of 2023.



Oil titan Aramco takes the reins of Al-Qadsiah FC



Diriyah Development Authority takes over Diriyah Club



Royal Commission for Al-Ula gains control of Al-Ula Club



NEOM company acquires Al-Suqour Club



Transfer of 75% ownership of Al-Ittihad, Al-Ahli, Al-Nassr, and Al-Hilal clubs to the Public Investment Fund

The national strategy for gaming and esports: A vision of global leadership

A holistic investment aimed at transforming the gaming and esports sector, driven by the passion of players, with an economic contribution projected to reach 50 billion SAR by 2030. Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as the world’s premier destination for esports by hosting some of the largest international events.





Promoting Vision 2030 through sports

The Roshn League has entered the global top 10 football leagues by market value

with a total valuation of \$1.28 billion. Efforts are underway to boost the Saudi Pro League's annual revenues

from

450 million SAR

over

1.8 billion SAR

The Kingdom has hosted a series of world class - sporting events, including:

01

The Saudi Arabian Grand Prix STC Formula 1 in Jeddah four times.

02

Six editions of the ABB FIA Formula E Championship in Diriyah.

03

Five editions of the Spanish and Italian Super Cups, with another confirmed for 2025.

04

Three rounds of the Saudi Tour cycling event in Al-Ula.

05

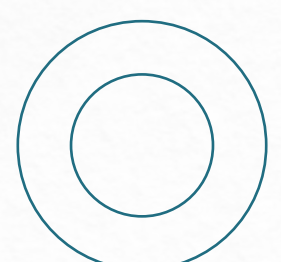
Consecutive editions of the Riyadh International Marathon (2022–2024).

06

The Extreme E Series 2022, part of the global electric SUV competition, hosted for the third time.

07

- Four consecutive editions of the Super Globe Handball Club World Championship.



Sports investment for 2030

6.5 billion SAR

Contribution of the sports sector to the GDP.

17

investment companies created for clubs and sports federations.

1.3 billion USD

Expected revenue from the sports sector by 2024.

8.75 billion SAR

PIF sponsorship for several football clubs.

Strategic agreements signed by Jeddah Central Development Co. and Qiddiya Investment Co. (both PIF subsidiaries) with four Saudi football clubs, valued at 8 billion SAR.

1.398 billion SAR

PIF's acquisition of 80% of Newcastle United.

100 million SAR

annually for 20 years each for Al-Ittihad and Al-Ahli (Jeddah Central).

100 million SAR

annually for 20 years each for Al-Hilal and Al-Nassr (Qiddiya).

%95.5

stake in LIV Golf Investments, organising major golf events

%65

share of PIF in Sela Sports



Gaming and esports

Building a global hub

142 billion SAR: Investment to position Saudi Arabia as a hub for esports by 2030

50 billion SAR

Acquisition and development of a gaming publisher by Savvy Games Group.

70 billion SAR

Acquisitions of minority stakes in gaming companies.

20 billion SAR

Acquisitions of major gaming companies.

2 billion SAR

Investments in gaming and esports startups.

Launch of “SURJ”, an investment company supporting sports in Saudi Arabia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Its objectives include:

Hosting global sporting events

Investing in commercial rights for tournaments

Acquiring ownership rights for new sports events

The Saudi investment fund has become the largest external investor in Nintendo

Establishment of 250 local gaming and esports companies

Creation of 39,000 jobs in the gaming and esports sector

Acquisition of Scopely for **\$4.9 billion**, adding hits like Monopoly GO, Star Trek Fleet Command, and Marvel Strike Force to its portfolio.

سارج
للاستثمار الرياضي



Global ranking of Al-Hilal and Al-Nassr

(Most searched sports teams on Google in 2023)



Inter Miami



Los Angeles Lakers



Al-Nassr (KSA)



Manchester City



Miami Heat



Texas Rangers



Al-Hilal (KSA)



Borussia Dortmund





What does the world search about Saudi Arabia?

(The largest economies in the world)



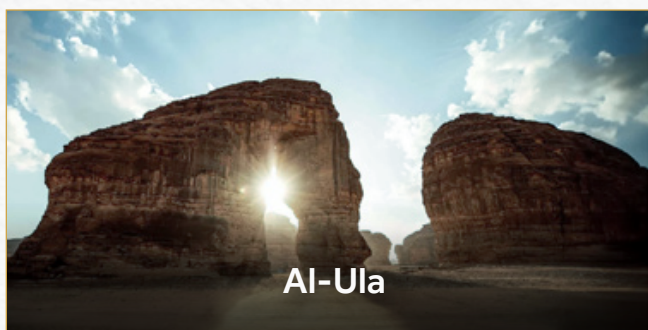
USA

Key topics and search queries on Google over the past 12 months

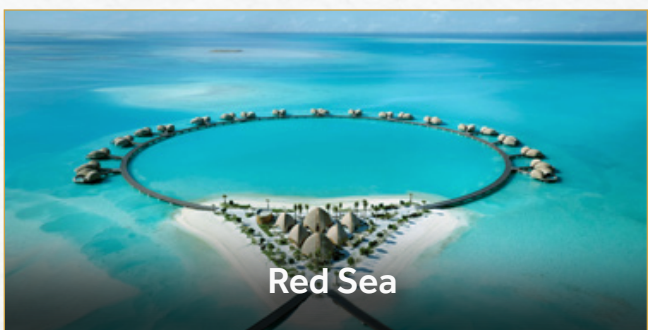
Search
Queries



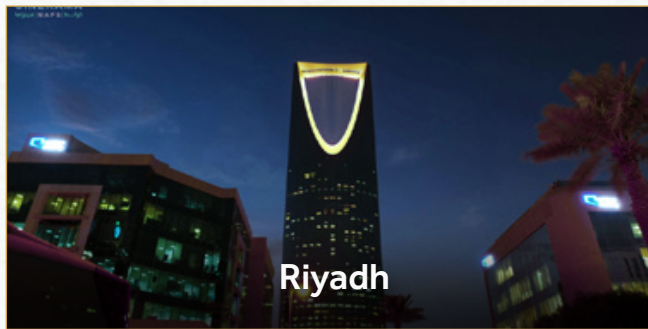
Turki Al-Sheikh



Al-Ula



Red Sea



Riyadh



Hajj

Cities

- District of Columbia
- Virginia
- New York
- Georgia
- New Jersey



UK

Key topics and search queries on Google over the past 12 months

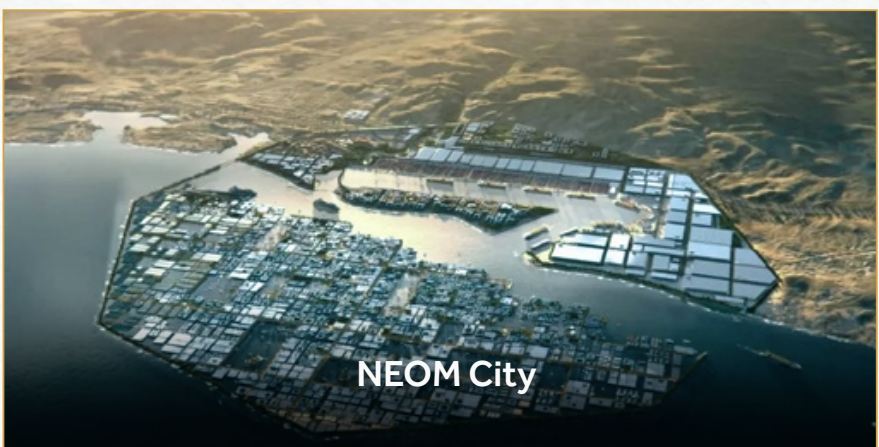
Search
Queries



Saudi Snooker Masters Championship in Riyadh



Fire Ring bout between Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk at Kingdom Arena



NEOM City



Red Sea

Countries



England



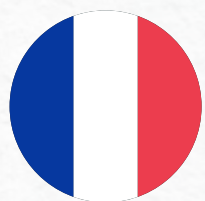
Scotland



Wales




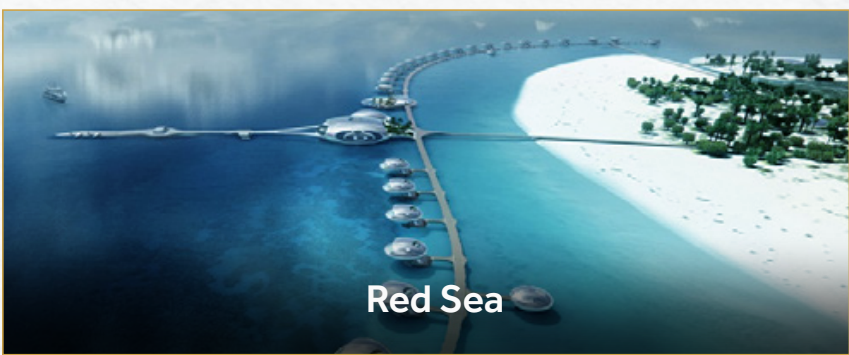
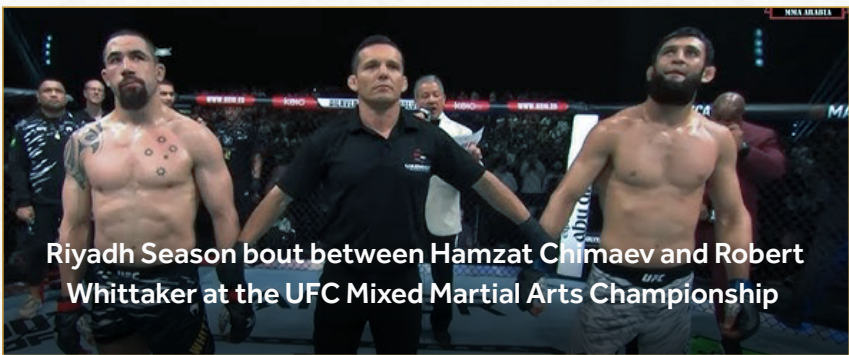
Northern Ireland



France

Key topics and search queries on Google over the past 12 months

 Search Queries




 Cities

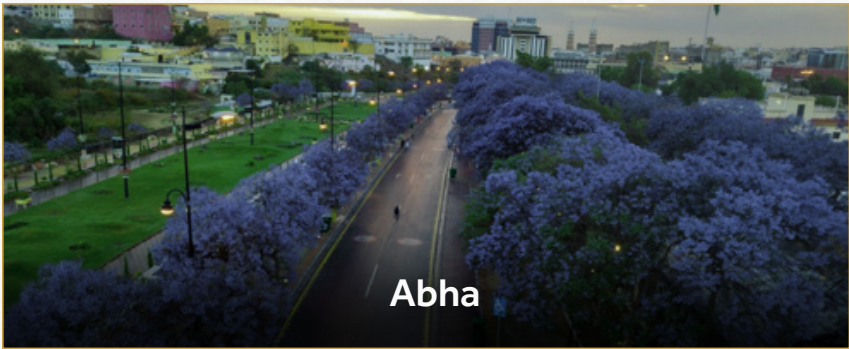
- Picardy
- Île-de-France (Paris)
- Alsace
- Nord-Pas-de-Calais



China

Key topics and search queries on Google over the past 12 months

 Search Queries




 Cities

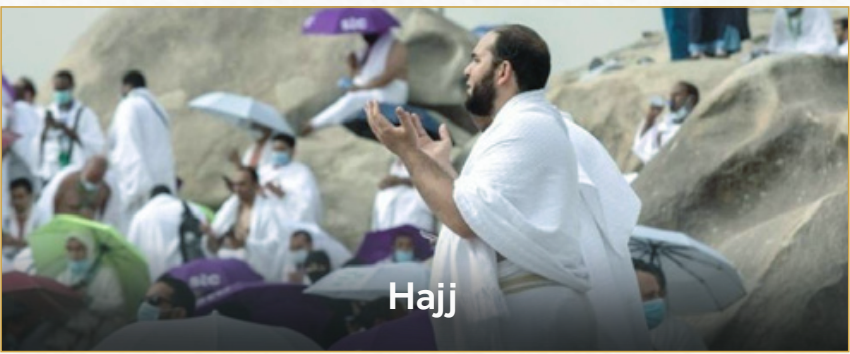
- Hebei
- Shandong
- Shaanxi



India

Key topics and search queries on Google over the past 12 months

 Search Queries



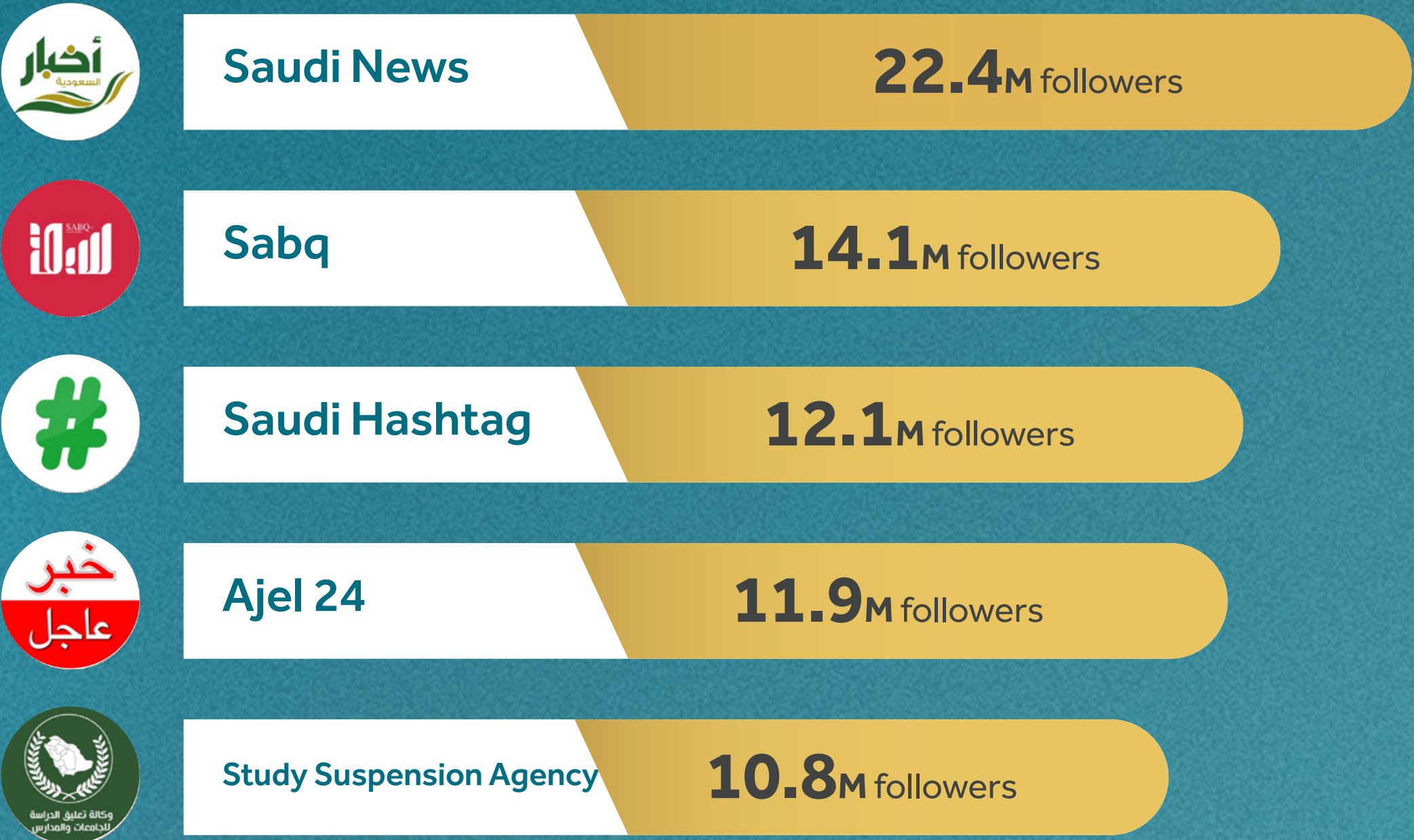
 Cities

- Jammu and Kashmir
- Kerala
- Telangana
- Delhi

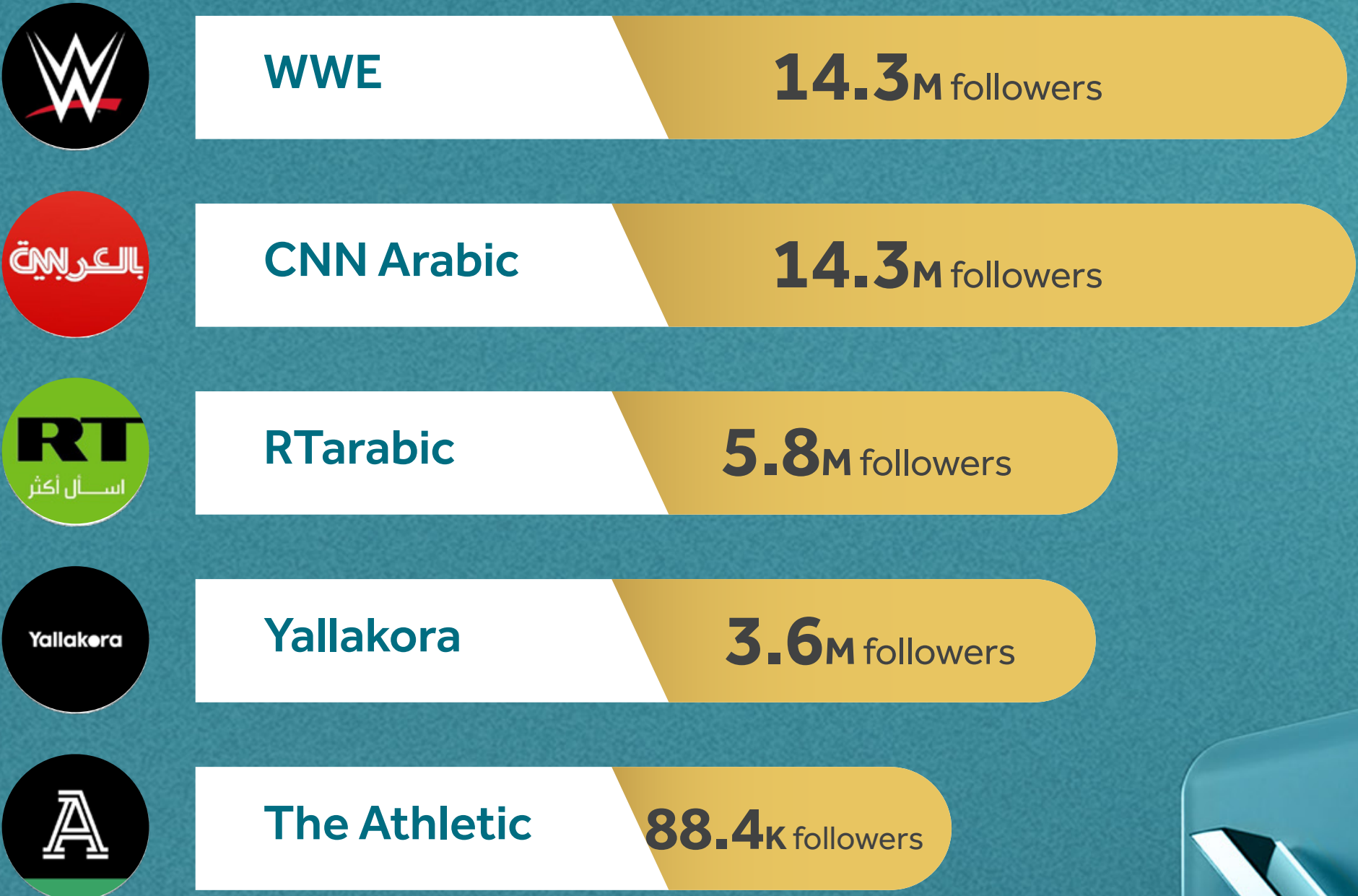
Saudi Arabia in X

Top participating accounts

Top Saudi accounts in 2023



Top global accounts in 2023





Top trending topics in 2023



The 4th edition of the Saudi
Dakar Rally



Spanish Super Cup
competition



Italian Super Cup
competition



World Boxing Championship
bout in Diriyah



Saudi Arabia announced as the
host of the 2027 AFC Asian Cup



Saudi Arabia secured the hosting rights
for the 2023 FIFA Club World Cup



Jeddah hosted the Formula1
Grand Prix



Saudi Arabia announced its bid to
host the 2034 FIFA World Cup



Saudi Arabia confirmed as the
host of the Esports World Cup



Jeddah hosts the 20th edition of
the FIFA Club World Cup

Impressions

Negative

Neutral

Positive

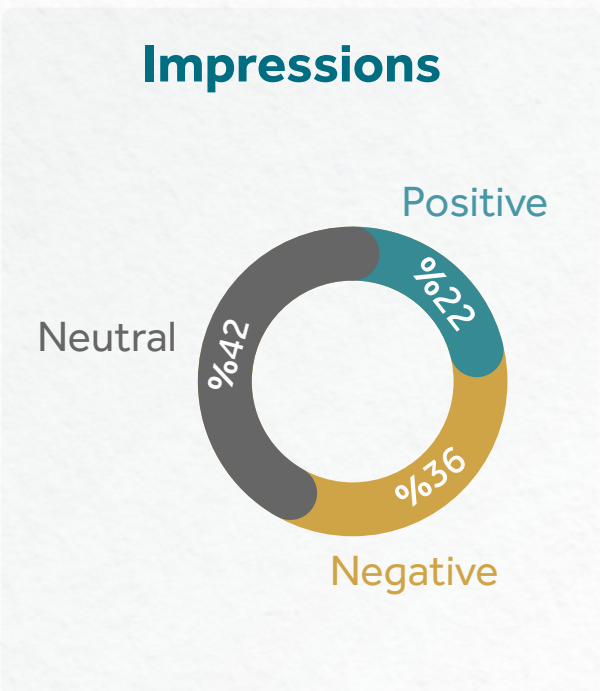
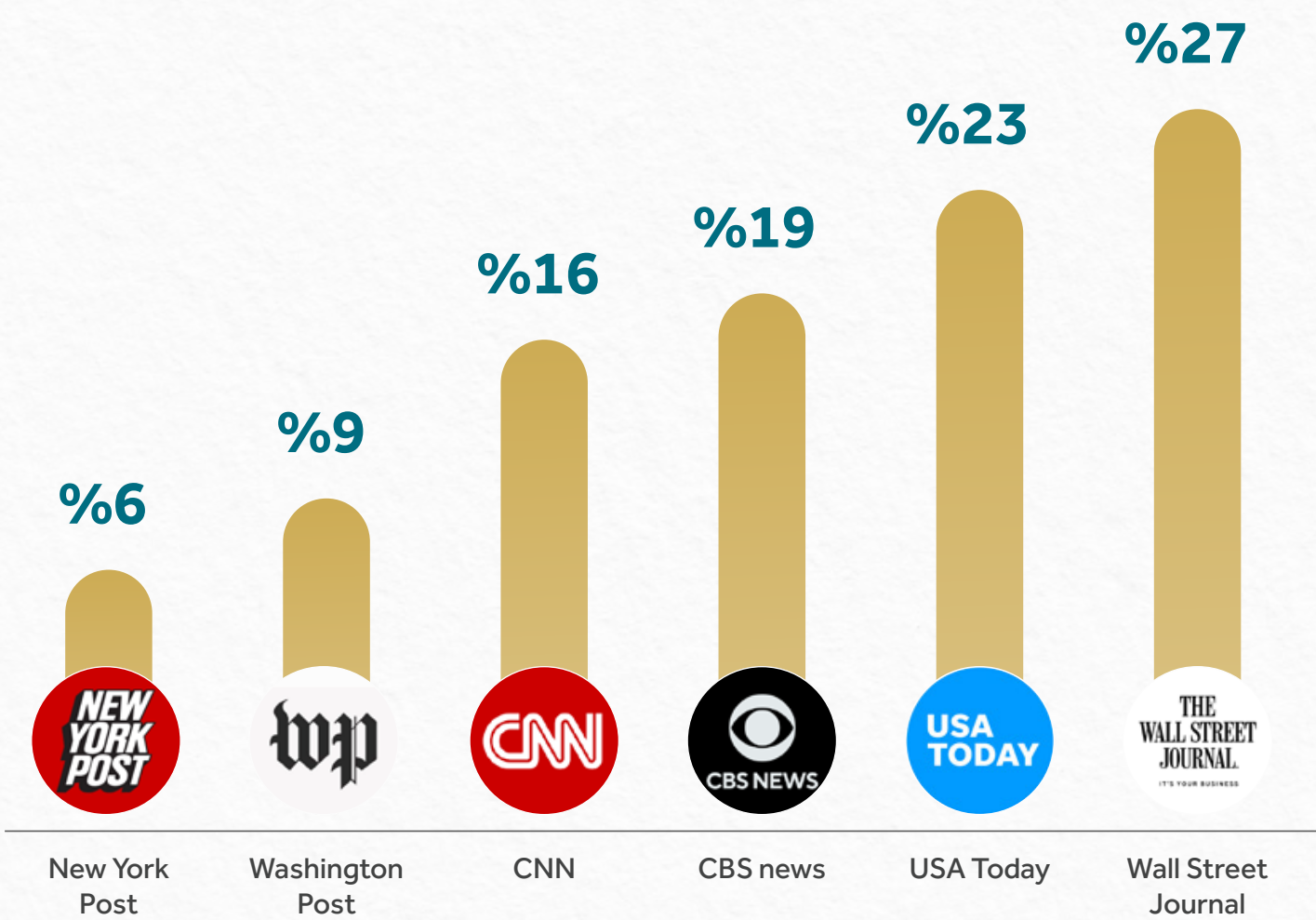




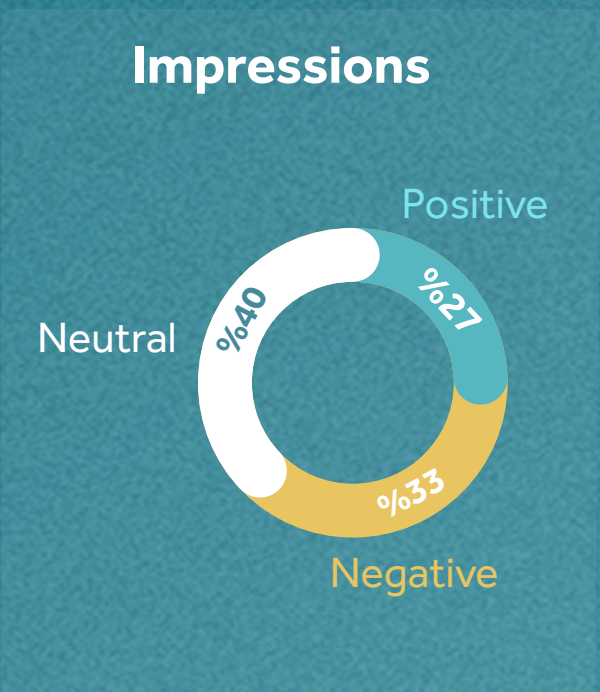
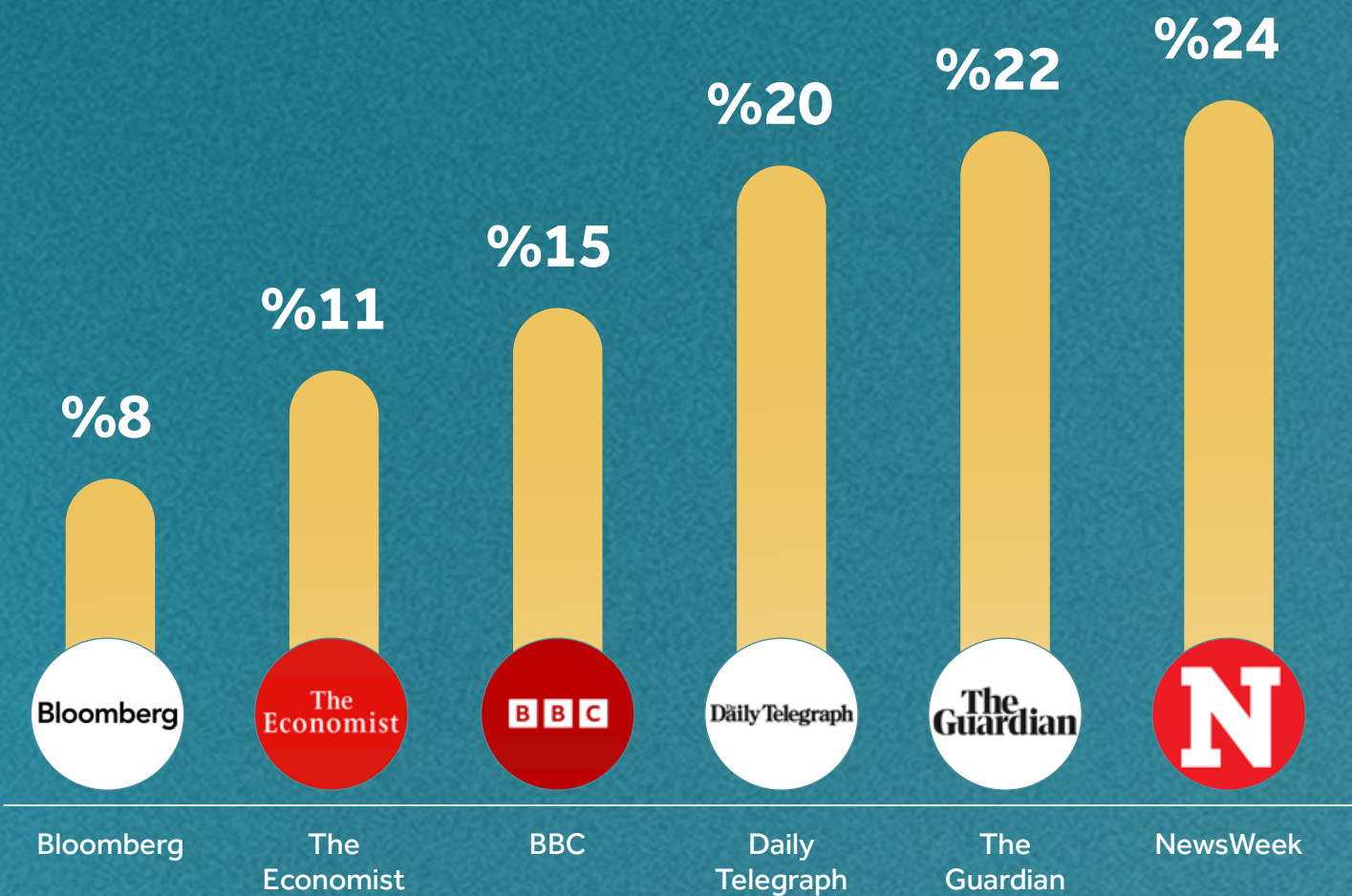
Coverage in foreign media

A total of 5,327 articles were identified in American and British media during 2022 and 2023. To ensure a logical analysis, a 10% sample of the total material was selected, resulting in 1,064 articles being analysed for both periods. Below are the key general impressions, trending topics, and the most active newspapers and websites in terms of publication:

Top newspapers and websites publishing in American media



Top newspapers and websites publishing in UK





Analysis of key topics in British and American media

Positive topics

1. The Public Investment Fund (PIF) is in "advanced talks" for a significant investment to fund the second Indian Premier League.
2. The Gulf region has long shown great interest in horse racing. Today, the world's best thoroughbreds and jockeys head to King Abdulaziz Racetrack in Riyadh for the 2025 Saudi Cup Festival, offering prizes worth over \$38.1 million.
3. Saudi Arabia's strong bid to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup has been praised, highlighting football as an integral part of Saudi culture and the passion of its people for the sport.
4. Saudi Arabia offers many positive narratives, including those about Hajj, football, and major sporting events taking place in the Kingdom today.
5. Events like Formula racing, the Desert Challenge, and the Dakar Rally provide exciting opportunities for enthusiasts to explore Saudi Arabia and its golden sand dunes.

Negative topics

1. Following Aramco's sponsorship of the Indian Premier League, international media attributed global greenhouse gas emissions since 1965 to the Saudi-owned Public Investment Fund.
2. Some athletes and brands rejected offers to collaborate with Saudi Arabia due to allegations of human rights and civil liberties violations, although many reversed their positions after accepting commercial deals despite ongoing allegations.
3. Negative reactions arose after announcements of Saudi-backed golf tournaments and sponsorships, with foreign media spreading claims of suppressed freedom of expression among journalists or writers, allegedly driven by political motives.
4. Saudi investment in sports is seen by foreign media as a marketing tool to amplify positive stories and suppress or divert attention from negative ones.
5. Western media tied issues such as anti-LGBTQ+ policies to Saudi Arabia's sports investments, framing it as part of broader concerns about suppressing fundamental freedoms—an international worry before the 2034 FIFA World Cup.



Major events by Riyadh time



Saudi Arabia’s victory over Argentina in the 2022 FIFA World Cup



The first meeting between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and FIFA President Gianni Infantino in 2017.



Karim Benzema performing Umrah



Cristiano Ronaldo wearing traditional Saudi attire



Saudi Arabia securing the hosting rights for the 2034 FIFA World Cup



Lionel Messi enjoying his vacation at the Red Sea



Major events by Riyadh time



2025 Asian Archery
Championship



2025 Asian Indoor and Martial
Arts Games



2025 UCI Urban Cycling
World Championships



2026 AFC Challenge Cup



2028 UCI Gravel World
Championships



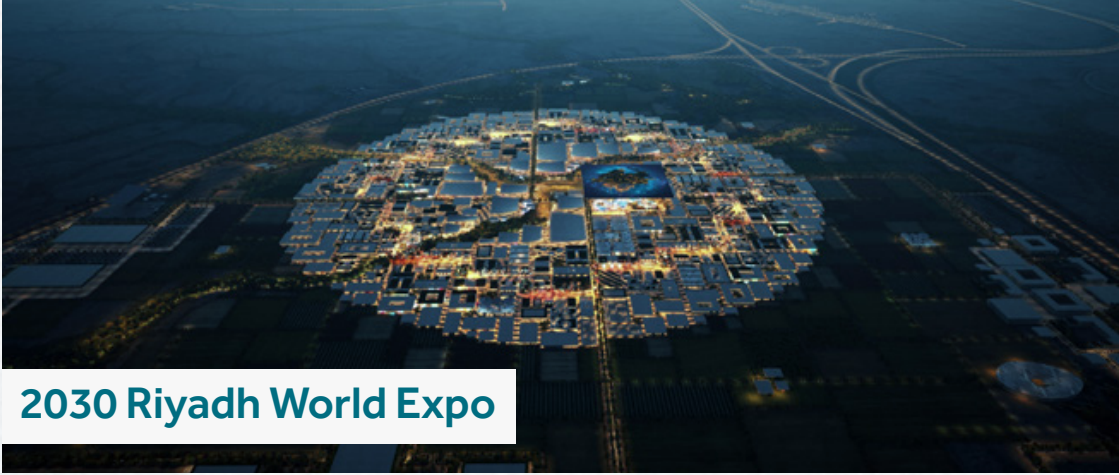
2029 Winter Olympics in
Trojena, NEOM



2027 AFC Asian Cup



2034 Asian Games



2030 Riyadh World Expo



2034 FIFA World Cup





Bridging Cultures Amplifying Voices

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