

# Saudi Soft Power



## Legends

شركة ليجنڈز للعلاقات العامة والاتصال  
Legends PR & Communication Company

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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



**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



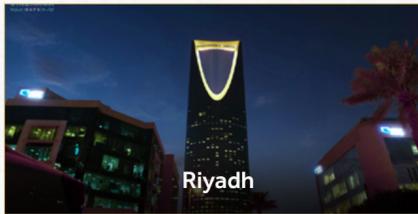
Turki Al-Sheikh



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



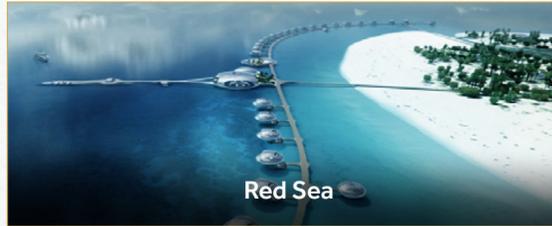
Esports World Cup



Riyadh Season bout between Hamzat Chimaev and Robert Whittaker at the UFC Mixed Martial Arts Championship



Tourist visa



Red Sea



Picardy

Île-de-France (Paris)

Alsace

Nord-Pas-de-Calais



## China

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



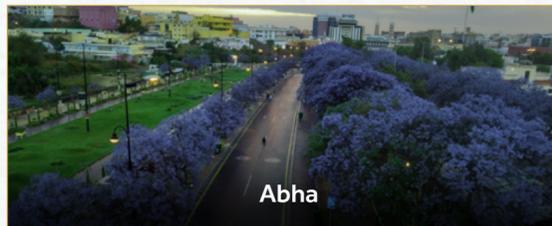
Saudi national football team



Riyadh



Dammam



Abha



Hebei

Shandong

Shaanxi



## India

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



Hajj



Al-Ula



Desert



Petrodollar agreement



Jammu and Kashmir

Kerala

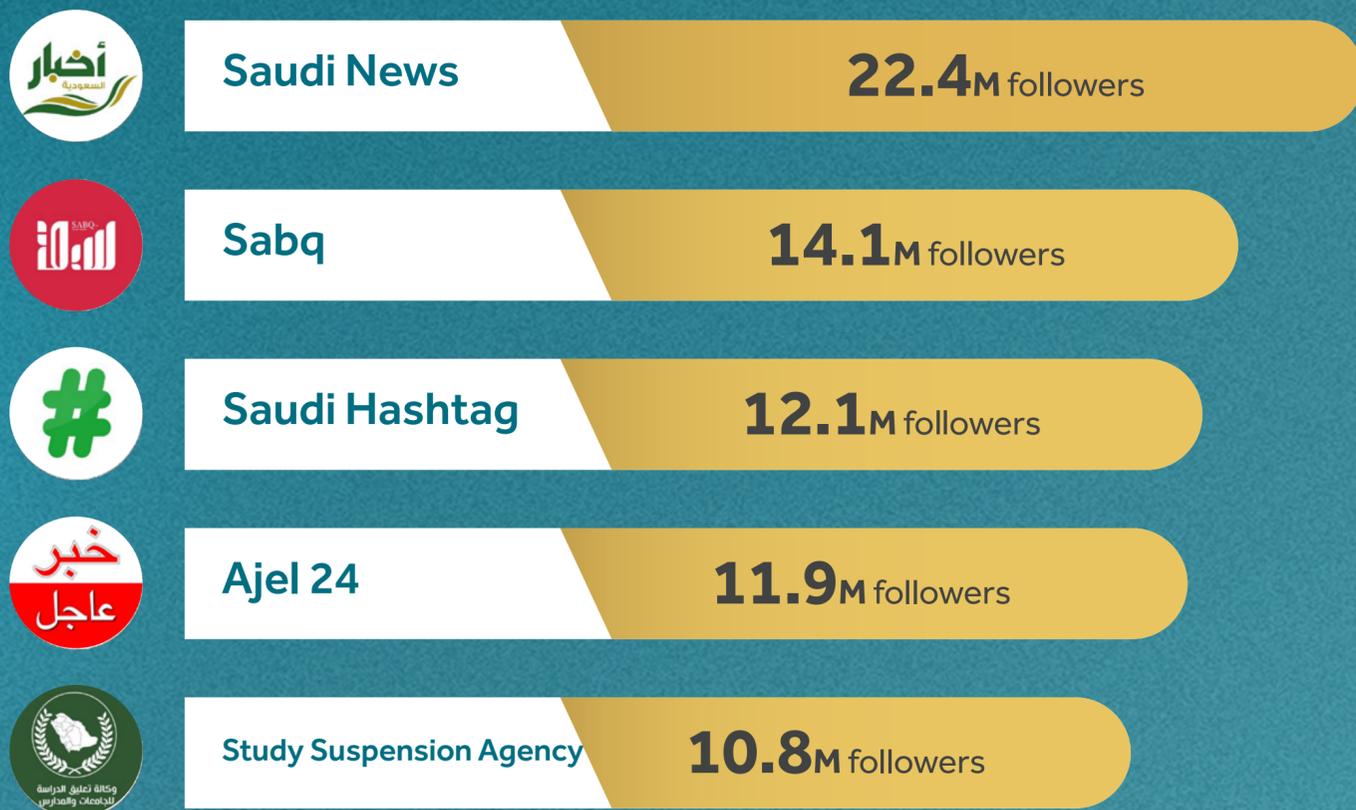
Telangana

Delhi

# Saudi Arabia in X

Top participating accounts

## Top Saudi accounts in 2023



## Top global accounts in 2023





# Top trending topics in 2023



%5

The 4th edition of the Saudi Dakar Rally

%7

Spanish Super Cup competition

%8

Italian Super Cup competition

%3

World Boxing Championship bout in Diriyah

%19

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

%13

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

%95

Jeddah hosted the Formula1 Grand Prix

%17

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

%13

Saudi Arabia confirmed as the host of the Esports World Cup

%6

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

## Impressions

Negative

Neutral

Positive

%12

%33

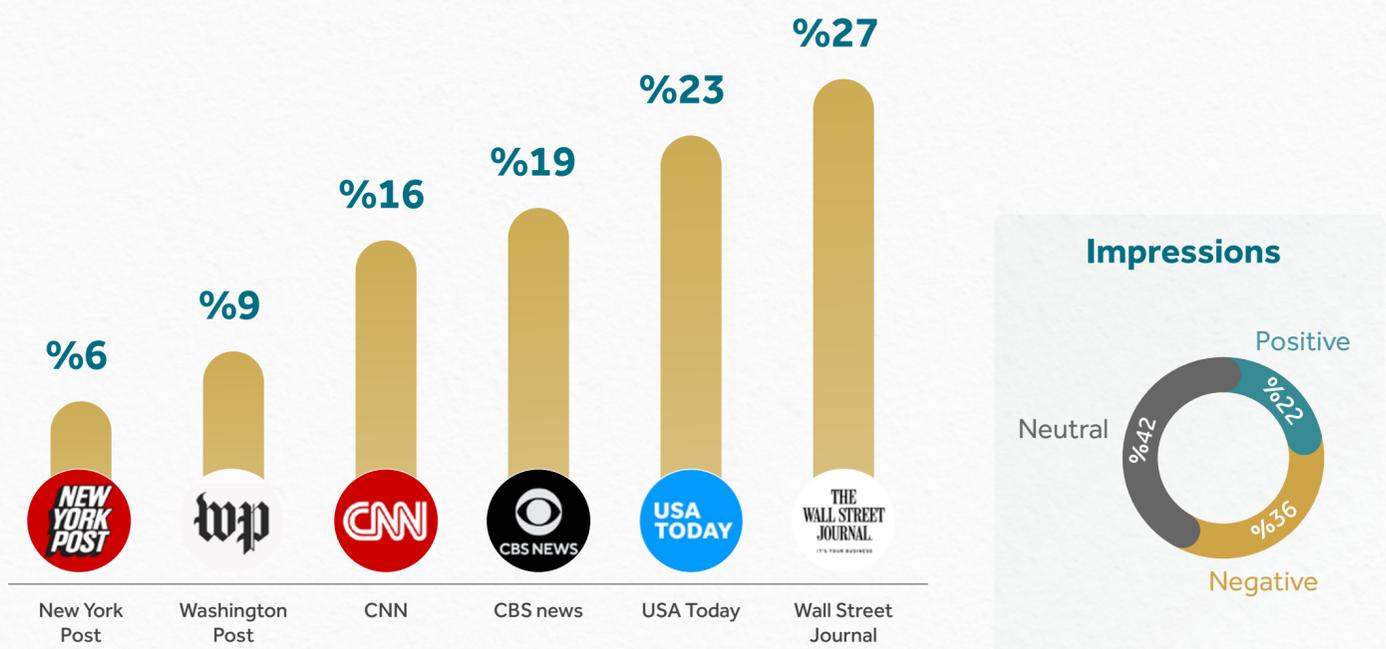
%55



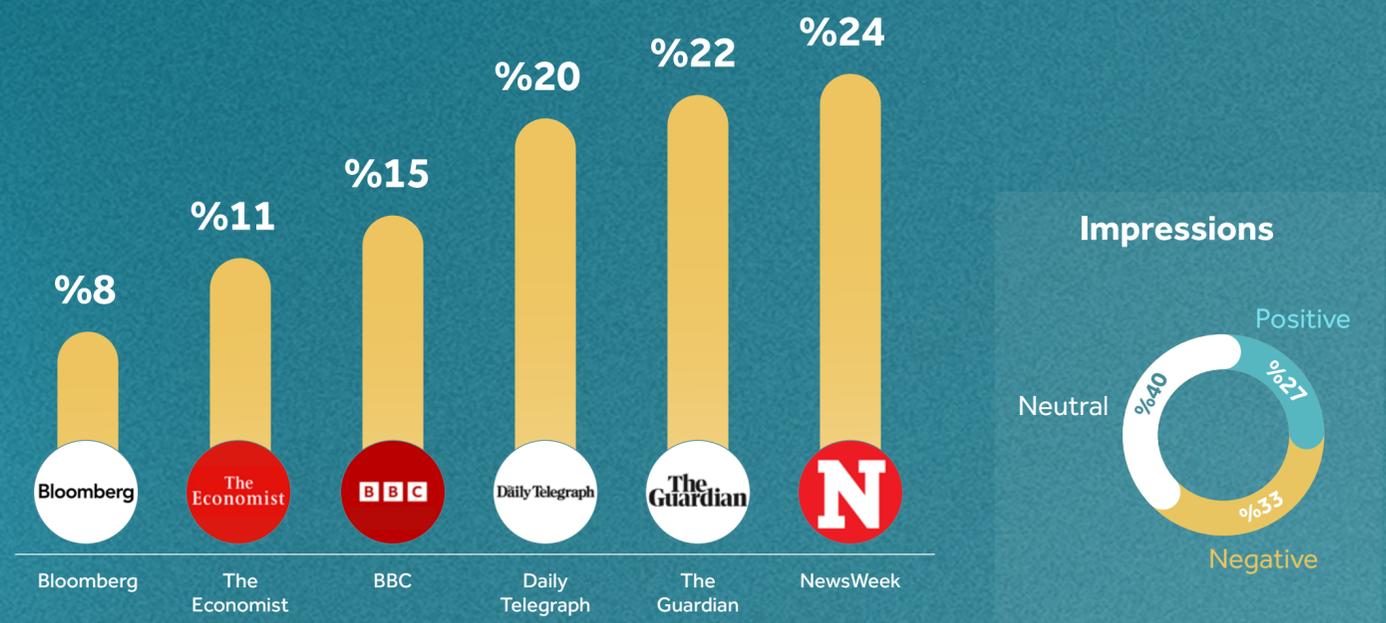
# Coverage in foreign media

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

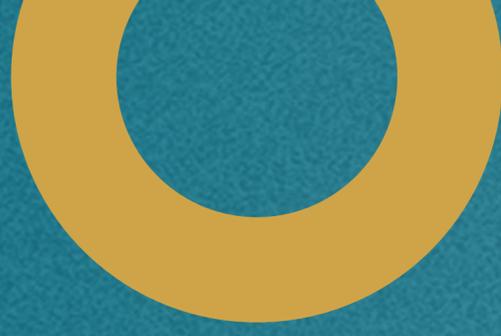


2030 Riyadh World Expo



2034 FIFA World Cup





# Bridging Cultures Amplifying Voices

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