States, Stories and Sightseeing: tourism policy and narrative control in foreign policy

States, Stories and Sightseeing: tourism policy and narrative control in foreign policy

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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McMaster University DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2024) Hamilton, Ontario (Political Science) TITLE: **States, Stories and Sightseeing: tourism policy and narrative control in foreign policy** AUTHOR: Dana Shuqom, B.B.A. (American University of Beirut), MSc (University of Bristol), M.A. (University of Miami) SUPERVISOR: Professor Lana Wylie NUMBER OF PAGES: xiii, 210

Abstract

This dissertation explores the possibility of the use of tourism policy as a tool of foreign policy. By examining the case study of Saudi Arabia, it shows how a state's tourism policy could perform similar functions as public diplomacy, allowing a state to address foreign publics. The dissertation proposes a new model, 'The Narrative Control Mechanism' to summarize how this is done.

In examining the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia closely, the dissertation shows that several of the Kingdom's foreign policy goals can be affected by how the Saudi state is perceived among Western public audiences. It suggests that Saudi Arabia's opening up to tourists, hosting of celebrities and high level events, and engagement in intensive marketing and PR operations to promote its tourism product have several objectives. It proposes that these tourism related developments are not only intended for domestic economic goals but are also tied to the objective of changing the state's image among Western public audiences.

This dissertation is multidisciplinary, combining elements from international relations and foreign policy analysis; tourism; and communications. It draws on literature on 'Informal Diplomacies' and contributes to discussions in diplomatic studies about how different aspects of tourism could be used as vehicles of public diplomacy. It also provides a model that adds to the discussions about sports washing and whitewashing, by proposing a mechanism that summarizes how sports and tourism activities can alter a state's image among foreign audiences. By using the case of Saudi Arabia, this research addresses the recent interest of a number of states in the Arabian Gulf in hosting large scale sports and entertainment events and their focus on expanding their tourism industries. The research also contributes to the political communications literature, especially that which looks at the different tools used by autocratic states to manage their image internationally.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Khaled and Rayyana, my beautiful children. Thank you, mama, for making this long and very difficult journey bearable, and even fun. Your wit and humor have kept me grounded. Your beautiful presence has reminded me repeatedly that I am lucky and that I already have everything I need, and that working on my PhD was neither a burden nor a necessity, but a gift and a privilege.

I thank God for your presence in my life. I also thank him for the strength, resources, and guidance he has so generously provided, allowing me to pursue and complete this PhD journey of spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Lana Wylie, for helping me navigate the long and challenging path of the PhD. As a newcomer to Canada, a single mother, and a mature student in my forties, I felt supported, respected and understood by my supervisor. Her wisdom, kindness, empathy and work ethic have set high standards that I wish to emulate when I mentor my own students in the future.

I am also especially grateful for Professor Wylie's patience. She has given me the space to explore so many areas of IR as potential themes for the dissertation and tolerated my numerous changes of the research topic and question. In the end, I am extremely happy that I chose to investigate a multidisciplinary subject that combined tourism, foreign policy, and communications. This emerged out of my attendance of her Foreign Policy class, an introspection into my own experience and interests as a professional, insights into the literature of 'Other Diplomacies' gained through working as Dr. Wylie's research assistant and collaborator, and many consultations with her to crystallize my research question.

I would also like to give tremendous thanks to Dr. Stephen McBride and to Dr. Marshall J. Beier. I learned a great deal about passionate teaching and commitment to honest and critical scholarship from them, and I am grateful that they were willing to serve on my dissertation supervisory committee. I also wish to thank my committee's external examiner Dr. Rebecca Tiessen for her willingness to read and comment on my research and to serve on my examining committee.

My brother Karim deserves a special acknowledgement for his lifelong habit of stepping in to be my rock in times of crises, and for offering the affection, support and practical solutions that resolve my emergencies. I thank him and my brothers Faisal and Talal, as well as Samar, Leen, Anisah, and my nieces Anna and Nina for giving me the supply of love, support, encouragement and advice that was so necessary to survive in a new land. I say the same to the members of my extended family of uncles, aunts and cousins who kept checking on me despite living thousands of miles away.

I send my affection to the many friends who were there for me, each in their own way, during the different stages of the PhD journey, for providing practical help; offering safe physical and emotional spaces allowing me to process the personal and spiritual growth that accompanied this academic pilgrimage; or entertaining intellectual discussions that informed my research.

I owe special appreciation to the people who, after I left the PhD program at UM, kept asking me, for years, when I was going back to finishing my studies: my late father, my stepmother Samar Hammad; my aunt Nermeen Shuqom; my dear friend Jonathan Rosen who regularly provided suggestions on programs I should pursue; and my brother Karim who insisted I apply to McMaster as he had done years before when he insisted I apply to UM. Their unwavering belief in the inevitability of my return to graduate studies was an important motivation behind pursuing this PhD.

My gratitude is owed to the persons who have directly contributed to the successful development of this dissertation: the interviewees who agreed to speak to me to inform the research; Dr. Yusuf Mansur and his team at Envision Consulting who hosted me for two summers at their office, offering a welcoming, intellectually stimulating, and friendly space to work on my dissertation; my dear friends Dr. Lilia Arakelyan and Dr. Yusuf Mansur for providing valuable suggestions that improved my writing; Ms. Abeer Malhas who kindly created the illustration for the Narrative Control Mechanism; the Qistas team who generously provided free access to their database; and Ms. Manuela Dozzi who has kindly helped me navigate the regulations of McMaster University and the Department of Political Science.

I also would like to acknowledge the many wonderful professors who taught me at McMaster University, the University of Miami, the University of Bristol and at the American University of Beirut. I am grateful to Dr. Yusuf Sidani, Dr. William C. Smith, Dr. Hasmet Uluorta, Dr. Evangelos Dedousis, and Dr. Richard Hodder-Williams for writing the recommendations that furthered my academic pursuits, and for teaching the courses that inspired my professional growth.

Professionally, I am indebted to HRH Prince El-Hassan bin Talal; HRH Princess Rym Ali; Dr. Roger Kanet, Mr. Akel Biltaji, Dr. Susan Razzaz, Mr. Alain McNamara, Mrs. Hayfa Najjar, Dr. Carlos Cuellar, Mr. Sami K. Samawi, and Dr. Donald E. Hawkins. Each one of them has had a particularly significant impact on my career.

Finally, I wish to thank my late parents, Fadia Kabariti and Said Shuqom. I have inherited their belief in my capabilities; resilience; conviction that tomorrow is always better than today; inability to quit; commitment to making the world a better and more beautiful place; willingness to challenge the restrictions created by society; and their interest in continuous learning and growth. These qualities have kept me going on the PhD journey, as has my desire to make them proud, a need that persists despite my age and their passing.

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BRI:	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS:	The BRICS group of emerging countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CPVPV:	The Saudi Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice
DW:	Deutsche Welle News Network
FARA:	Foreign Agents Registration Act
FDI:	Foreign Direct Investment
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GEA:	General Entertainment Authority
GFSS:	The Gallup Poll Social Series
IRGC :	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRT:	Image Restoration Theory
ISIS:	The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JTB:	Jordan Tourism Board
KSA:	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MBS:	Mohammad bin Salman
MENA:	Middle East and North Africa
NBI:	Nation Brand Index
NPR:	National Public Radio
OHCHR:	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPEC:	The Organization of the Oil Producing Countries
OPEC+:	OPEC countries plus Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan, and Sudan
PIF:	Public Investment Fund
PR:	Public Relations
SCTH:	Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
UK:	United Kingdom
UN:	United Nations
UNOCHA:	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USA:	United States of America
UAVs:	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
VAT:	Value Added Tax
WEF:	World Economic Forum

Chapter 1: Introduction

> "Diplomacy is too important to be left to diplomats."
>
> Tom Fletcher, British diplomat, former Ambassador to Lebanon
> (Constantinou, Cornago & McConnell 2017, 41)

The Dissertation's Focus and Scope

This dissertation aims to answer the research question: "How does the Saudi state use tourism policy to serve its goal of altering its negative image among Western public audiences?". Given the question's focus on Western publics and the framing of the question in terms of foreign policy, the dissertation chose the theoretical framework of public diplomacy to guide the direction of the research.

Positionality and Choice of Case Study

My interest in the Saudi tourism case study stems from the rapid and shocking changes made to Saudi laws since the ascension of King Abdullah bin Salman and his son Mohammad bin Salman [MBS]; the Kingdom's adoption of tourism measures that are contradictory to the state's almost decade-long domestic policies and international positioning; the quick advances in tourism development at the infrastructure, legislation and societal change levels; and the way the state managed resulting adjustments within society. The country's persistent negative portrayal in Western media is another issue that piqued my interest, and I wondered how the two aspects were related.

My interest and specialization in foreign policy and international relations were nurtured by my graduate studies. They contributed to shaping my choice to research a foreign policy issue. However, the formulation of an interdisciplinary research question and the approach selected to answering it were influenced by my professional background; a two decade career outside of academia between the fields of communications, tourism, and public diplomacy. I owned a communications agency that primarily serviced the Jordan Tourism Board [JTB]. I also shortly worked for the JTB as their communications officer. Several years later, I managed an American not for profit that was one of the primary contractors implementing the US embassy's educational and cultural public diplomacy activities in Jordan.

My positionality is also affected by living and working in the Middle East for almost three decades. Saudi Arabia has always been a major player in the domestic politics of my country, as well as the politics of the region. Its Wahhabi influence has changed the identity of the Jordanian society during my lifetime, pushing the population towards more social and cultural conservativism. The changes that were caused by Saudi Wahhabi influence make the kind of

events that are now hosted publicly in Saudi Arabia unacceptable and offensive to the population in Jordan because of the way performers are dressed. Whereas Jordan always presented itself as an oasis of tolerance and modernity to the West, it has now become more conservative than the newly liberalizing Saudi Arabia in the context of tourism and events. Therefore, the sudden and extreme Saudi flip to a relatively liberal tourism scene was shocking and largely incomprehensible to me, as it is to many of my contemporaries.

I was also concerned by Saudi Arabia's aggressive presentation of itself as a competitor to Jordan as a tourism destination, even comparing its Nabatean ruins to Jordan's Petra (Interviewee #2 2023). The Saudi Kingdom is also hiring Jordanian tourism experts to support its tourism sector development (Interviewee #3 2023). I wanted to understand why Saudi Arabia adopted such an aggressive approach to developing its sector. This was especially concerning since the achievement of Saudi's dual tourism goals of preventing leakage of its domestic tourists and attracting foreign tourists who plan to visit the region could potentially harm Jordan's tourism sector.

Finally, as a communications expert, I was continuously frustrated by Jordan's seemingly reactive approach to managing its image, its failure to coordinate the different sectors' contribution to that image, and its neglect to manage it centrally to serve Jordan's goals. I could identify a coordinated, intentional and successful example of such an endeavor in the Saudi case study, and I wanted to explore it in depth. Given the dissertation's limitation of time and space, I chose to focus on the relationship between the image of Saudi Arabia and its foreign policy goals, and study how different policies of the Saudi state contributed to that image.

The Relevance of the Research

This exploratory research examines how states use tourism policy to serve their foreign policy goals. My research explores how tourism policies and marketing efforts undertaken by governments are foreign policy strategies intended to serve the goals of the state, as they relate to its international image and objectives. This looks at tourism policy from a new perspective, other than how it serves the economic/ domestic objectives of a government. It also explores how nation branding efforts serve more than to market the tourism product of a country to attract tourists who support the domestic economy. Both are part of the foreign policy strategy focused on building a particular image of a country or countering or altering an existing image abroad, and on influencing the actions of foreign governments through their publics.

The research falls within alternative diplomacy literature that explores the ways in which states use vehicles other than formal diplomacy, economic statecraft or security tools to achieve foreign policy goals. It seeks to contribute to the International Relations literature by exploring how tourism policy is used by Middle Eastern state actors, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [KSA], as a public diplomacy tool. It presents a form of public diplomacy that has been mostly neglected by the discipline. In addition to its theoretical contribution, my dissertation seeks to contribute empirically to the International Relations literature by exploring how tourism policy is used by Middle Eastern state actors, in this case the KSA, to alter the negative image that Western publics have of them.

The Question and Objectives

Research question: "How does the Saudi state use tourism policy to serve its goal of altering its negative image among Western public audiences?"

Thesis Statement: Tourism policy is used by the Saudi state as a public diplomacy instrument to alter its image among Western publics.

My arguments to support the claim that Saudi Arabia's tourism policy is a public diplomacy tool are the following:

H1: Saudi tourism policy addresses a foreign policy goal and need

H2: Outward targeting elements of Saudi tourism policy can influence the state's image abroad using the same mechanism employed by several Saudi public diplomacy tools

H3: Saudi tourism policy meets the definition of public diplomacy and delivers the goals of public diplomacy

Research aims: This dissertation aims to prove that the Saudi state uses tourism policy as a public diplomacy tool to change its negative image among Western publics. Adopting an interpretivist research methodology, and using the case study research design, a qualitative research approach is adopted to support this claim.

An Overview of the Dissertation Structure / Dissertation Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction
The introduction lays out the structure of the dissertation. It also introduces the case study, the research question and the three hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 used to support the thesis statement. It also presents Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's tourism policy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Analytical Frameworks
The theoretical framework chapter introduces the different theories that contributed to framing the dissertation's data collection and analysis processes. It also presents a review of the literature on the different theories and concepts used in the dissertation. This clarifies the theoretical basis that informs the assumptions and analysis within the substantive chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approach
The research design chapter lays out the philosophy of research and the research design. It also introduces the two qualitative data analysis techniques that were primarily used in this dissertation: thematic analysis and process tracing.

This chapter contributes to the overall aim by showing how the data used as evidence to answer the research question was collected and analyzed.

Chapter 4: The Negative Image of Saudi Arabia in the Western World
This chapter identifies the image of the Saudi state in the eyes of Western publics, and the stereotypical persona the West perceives it to have. It identifies the main issues that the KSA is criticized for, and the Saudi behavioral sources of that image, as well as exogenous sources affecting the way the KSA is perceived by Western publics.

This section contributes to the overall aim of the dissertation by a) clarifying the parts of the research question, thesis statement and hypotheses that mention Saudi Arabia's image abroad, and b) providing findings that inform the analysis in following chapters. This includes analysis regarding the effect of the negative image on the Saudi state's foreign policy objectives (Chapter 5); the actions the Saudi state has taken to change the narrative about it among Western publics (Chapter 6); and the limitations to the state's ability to change its negative image (conclusion chapter).

Chapter 5: The Foreign Policy of the KSA Under King Salman and MBS
The chapter identifies the foreign policy goals of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, based on their domestic and international sources. To prove H1, that Saudi tourism policy addresses a foreign policy goal and need of the Saudi state, the dissertation first needs to establish whether altering the state's image among Western publics is a foreign policy priority for the Saudi state.

This chapter analyzes the foreign policy goals of the Saudi state to determine 1) whether the negative image of the KSA, as established in Chapter 4, is indeed detrimental to the achievement of its domestic and international goals, and 2) whether altering that negative image is a foreign policy goal. The chapter concludes that altering the state's image abroad is one of the foreign policy priorities of the Kingdom.

Chapter 6: Image Altering Public Diplomacy Strategies and the Activation of the Narrative Control Mechanism
This chapter explores the way public diplomacy is used by the Saudi state to alter its image among western public audiences. It introduces the model of the 'Narrative Control Mechanism' which summarizes the three actions taken by the state to affect the content (quality) and extent (quantity) of narrative circulating about it abroad.

This chapter contributes to the dissertation by explaining the mechanism that is referred to in H2. It also confirms H2 which states that outward targeting elements of Saudi tourism policy can influence the state's image abroad using the same mechanism employed by several Saudi public diplomacy tools. The public diplomacy tools used in the chapter as examples were Nation Branding and Image Restoration Theory.

Chapter 7: Saudi Tourism Policy as a Tool of Public Diplomacy
This chapter answers the research question by confirming H3, which states that Saudi tourism policy meets the definition of public diplomacy and delivers the goals of public diplomacy. The chapter does so by showing how tourism policy shares some definitions, mechanisms and practices with other public diplomacy instruments.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion
This chapter summarizes the findings of the dissertation and suggests future research, and highlights limitations of the current research.

Scope of Research

The singular focus of the dissertation has been on tourism policy's foreign policy contribution of altering the image of Saudi Arabia in the eyes of Western publics when it is used as a tool of public diplomacy. The research did not address all of the benefits of tourism to a state. For example, it did not focus in depth on its domestic outcomes like economic contribution to the GDP, its potential to provide employment opportunities, or even its capability to change the identity of the population or to increase the legitimacy of the ruling regime. The dissertation also did not delve into all of the uses of tourism as a tool of foreign policy. For example, it did not explore the use of tourism as a tool of economic statecraft and coercive diplomacy by Saudi Arabia against Türkiye after 2018, when it urged its citizens to avoid travelling there, affecting Türkiye's already struggling economy (Alkhereiji, 2019). While all of the above are important aspects and very relevant to the Saudi context, these contributions were only referred to occasionally to provide a context for the research, and generally were deemed out of the scope of the dissertation.

Case Study Background

General Background

King Salman bin Abdul Azeez was selected by the royal Family Council as King of Saudi Arabia in January of 2015, upon the passing of his brother King Abdullah. He appointed his son, Mohammad bin Salman as Minister of Defense, responsible for Saudi Arabia's security. Shortly thereafter, in April of 2015, he promoted MBS to deputy crown prince, second deputy prime minister and president of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs (BBC 2020). As president of that Council, MBS also became responsible for Saudi Arabia's economy. In that role, in 2016, MBS unveiled Vision 2030, an ambitious strategy to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy away from almost total reliance on oil revenues.

The 14 year plan involved restructuring the educational and social systems as well as introducing and supporting new economic sectors to enable economic change (Vision 2030 Projects, n.d.). One of these sectors was tourism. Major changes to regulations were enacted in the following years to enable the development of the tourism sector, including creating a tourism visa; allowing women to enter the Kingdom without a male guardian; allowing the organization of concerts and events, announcing the opening of new entertainment zones, and changing residency rules in hotels allowing non-married mixed gender individuals to stay in the same room (Hamdi 2021). These regulations were shocking to the Wahhabi Saudi Arabia.

However, under MBS, any criticisms of the decisions of the Saudi state were met harshly. Foreign sources reported, for example, that religious leaders and social activists, at two ends of

the spectrum of reaction to the Saudi State's economic and social reforms, were sentenced to long and harsh prison sentences, and that dissidents accused of terrorism were met with mass executions (Qiblawi 2019; al-Hathloul 2019; US Department of State 2016). In 2017, Mohammad bin Salman was appointed Crown Prince and became the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2024). Harsh responses to critics persisted under his new role, as was evident from the Ritz Carlton incarceration and assets seizure of tens of business leaders and princes in 2017 (Chulov 2020), and the assassination of Saudi American journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 (CNN Editorial Research 2019).

The opening up of Saudi Arabia to tourism and the accompanying liberalization of the country is in stark contrast to the foundations of the historic alliance between the clan of Saud [Āl Suʿūd] and the Shaykh clan [Āl al-Shaykh]. The alliance granted the imamate, or the supreme leadership of the Muslim Community, to Āl Saud, and endowed the family of Mohammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, known as the Āl al-Shaykh with the domain of the religious establishment (Bunzel 2023, 208). The Al Saud "were the masters of the state", while the Al al-Shaykh, along with other Wahhabi scholars, "were first and foremost preachers who sought to enforce conformity with the Wahhabi creed and Islamic law" (Bunzel 2023, 209; Interviewee #6 2023). The alliance sought to enforce social control through violence and religion (Shahi 2012). Wahhabism adopted a puritan ideology emphasizing a return to traditional religious practices and applying strict moral values (Murtado and Waehama 2024, 34). Music, for example, was singled out by Wahhabism as one of the abominations of society to be avoided by believers (Otterbeck 2012, 341). The State established the Saudi Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice [CPVPV]. Known in Saudi Arabia as Mutaaween, the CPVPV, established in the 1940s became more extreme in the early 1980s. According to Sheikh Ahmad bin Qasem AlGhamidi, a former regional head of CPVPV, "the Kingdom adopted a hardline religiously and socially" following terrorist activities in the Kingdom in 1979 (Bashraheel 2019). Headed by a member of Al- alSheikh, CPVPV "destroyed musical instruments, raided beauty salons, shaved heads, whipped people, burnt books". Its members could arrest, beat, and intimidate people to enforce such actions as segregation of the sexes, closing of shops during prayer times, and women's adherence to specific dress rules. Their powers kept growing and went unchecked (Bashraheel 2019).

MBS took drastic steps to liberalize the country and create a welcoming environment for tourism: he curbed the powers of the religious police [CPVPV] and established the General Entertainment Authority [GEA] almost simultaneously. In April of 2016, the Saudi Cabinet approved changes that stipulated that "Neither the heads nor members of the CPVPV are to stop or arrest or chase people or ask for their IDs or follow them" (AlJazeera 2016). The GEA was established by Royal Decree on May 7, 2016, to regulate and develop the entertainment sector (GEA, n.d.-b). Despite the gradual opening up of the Kingdom to pop culture and film at the beginning of this decade (Otterbeck 2012, 341), the newly introduced dance, fashion shows, musical performances and other forms of entertainment and events by the GEA were alien to the Kingdom's social scene over the past Century. They also opposed the decades long "official and systematic segregation of unrelated men and women in the public sphere in Saudi Arabia" (Shahi 2012, 22).

The Saudi state has suffered terrible blows to its image as a result of enforcing Wahhabism on its population and promoting it abroad. In the eyes of the West, this puritanical version of Islam was

seen as extremist, violent, and a foundation of terrorism (Choksy and Choksy 2015). The 9/11 attacks further worsened the image of Saudi Arabia in the West as most of the attackers were Saudi citizens (Neumeister 2024). Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, and its leadership of OPEC and OPEC+ have further negatively affected the way it is perceived by Western publics (DiChristopher 2019). In addition to the state being portrayed negatively in official media for decades, its residents were often portrayed as terrorist, backward, obnoxious and mysterious by pop culture. Saudi Arabia's portrayal in media and its actions have created public animosity to the country in the West, where publics of democratic countries called on their Western governments to cut economic and political relations with the Kingdom on several occasions (Chapter 4). Improving its image among Western publics became one of the foreign policy goals of the Saudi state (Chapter 5). Therefore, the Saudi state has been trying for decades to improve its image abroad using various public diplomacy tools such as image restoration strategies and nation branding (Chapter 6), scholarships, lobbying and foreign aid. This dissertation shows how the Kingdom has used tourism policy as one of the tools employed to achieve the foreign policy goal of improving its image among Western publics since the Saudi National Tourism Strategy was launched in 2019 (Chapter 7).

Vision 2030

Vision 2030 is a strategic road map, launched in 2016, spearheaded by the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman. He called it "Saudi Arabia's vision for the future" and declared that it is "an ambitious yet achievable blueprint" which expresses Saudi Arabia's long term goals and expectations and reflects the country's strengths and capabilities (Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, n.d.). The Vision 2030 official website declares the Vision as Saudi Arabia's ambitious roadmap for economic diversification, global engagement, and enhanced quality of life. Other sources have quoted Vision 2030's core mission as reducing oil dependence, diversifying income sources and bolstering competitiveness" (Citi Global Insights 2024).

The Vision is designed around three of Saudi Arabia's strengths, called Pillars in the official document. There are two main plans (or overarching objectives) developed around each pillar. The first pillar is the Kingdom being an 'Ambitious Nation'. Under this pillar the state plans to 1) enhance government effectiveness, and 2) enable social responsibility. The second pillar is Saudi Arabia having a 'Thriving Economy'. Under this pillar are the state's plans to 1) grow and diversify the economy, and 2) increase employment. The third pillar is what the Vision calls Saudi Arabia's 'Vibrant Society'. Under this pillar are the state's plans to 1) strengthen Islamic and national identity, and 2) offer a fulfilling and healthy life. These six overarching objectives are divided into 27 branch objectives. These branch objectives are further divided into 96 strategic objectives. The state has created 11 Vision Realization programs that are cross cutting. Each contributes to fulfilling several strategic objectives from the different Vision pillars. The vision also outlines measurable targets or goals that are to be achieved by 2030 (Vision 2030, n.d.). The pillars, plans, branch objectives, strategic objectives and targets are summarized in Appendix of Chapter1 at the end of this chapter.

The vision requires heavy funding but has already started delivering significant improvements to the Kingdom's economy and business eco system. Credit rating institution Standard and Poor, estimates that the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, called the Public Investment Fund [PIF], aims for $40 billion in investments in the local economy per year to support the Vision[1] (Gupta et al. 2024). Citigroup conducted an assessment of the achievement of 18 of the goals of the Vision in eight key areas—governance, business regulation, external sector, labor market, credit market, education, health and environment. As seen in Table1 below, the report shows that the implementation of Vision 2030 has already contributed significant improvements to the economy of the Kingdom, seven years into the launch of the 14 year roadmap. This is particularly significant in the areas of female labor participation; reduction in the rate of unemployment among Saudis; growth in the value of assets held by the PIF; growth in non-oil fiscal revenues; and percentage of home ownership by Saudis. As can be seen in the summary table, while the Kingdom still needs "enhanced momentum" to achieve four of the measured goals, it has also made satisfactory progress on nine of the goals.

Table 1- Selected Vision 2030 Objectives: Actuals vs. Targets. Source: Half Time Report by Citi Group

Pillars/Economic Goals	Baseline	Target	Latest	Remarks
A Thriving Economy				
Size of the economy (rank)	19th	15th	17th	Satisfactory progress
SME share of GDP (%)	20%	35%	29%	Satisfactory progress
Global competitiveness (rank)	25th	10th+	17th	Satisfactory progress*
Non-oil exports (% of non-oil GDP)	16%	50%	15%	Requires enhanced momentum
Female labor participation (%)	22%	30%	36%	Target exceeded
Unemployment (Saudis, %)	11.6%	7%	8.6%	Significant progress
PIF Assests (SARtrn)	0.6trn	7trn	2.9trn	Significant progress
SME loans as % total bank credit	2%	11%	8.7%	Satisfactory progress
Logistic performance (rank)	49th	25th	38th	Satisfactory progress
Private sector share of GDP (%)	40%	65%	46%	Satisfactory progress
FDI inflow (% of GDP)	3.8%	5.7%	0.7%	Requires enhanced momentum
An Ambitious Nation				
Non-oil fiscal revenues (SARbn)	163bn	1.0trn	473bn	Significant progress**
Government effectiveness (rank)	80th	20th	63th	Satisfactory progress
Ranking of the Kingdom in the UN eGov. Dev. Index	44th	5th	31th	Satisfactory progress
A Vibrant Society				
Home ownership by Saudis (%)	47%	70%	67%	Significant progress
Non-resident Umrah pilgrims (mn)	8mn	30mn	8.4mn	Requires enhanced momentum
Tourism sector contr. in GDP (%)	3.6%	10%	4.5%	Requires enhanced momentum
Life expectancy (years)	77	80	78	Satisfactory progress

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[1] According to S&P, the PIF has held $925 billion in assets under management as of Dec. 31, 2023, which it aims to increase to about $1 trillion by 2025. The expansion has been mostly financed by debt issuances. Source: Gupta, Zahabia S, Dhruv Roy, Ravi Bhatia, and Trevor Cullinan. 2024. "Vision 2030: Four Scenarios for Saudi Arabia's Public Finances." May 6, 2024. https://www.spglobal.com/ratings/en/research/articles/240506-vision-2030-four-scenarios-for-saudi-arabia-s-public-finances-13088038.

Saudi Tourism Policy

This dissertation discusses the Saudi tourism policy's contribution to the Kingdom's image management efforts. Tourism policy is defined as "a set of discourses, decisions, and practices driven by governments, sometimes in collaboration with private or social actors, with the intention to achieve diverse objectives related to tourism" (Velasco 2017, 1). Several categories of instruments used by public decision-makers to attain tourism policy goals have been identified by scholars. These include organizational instruments, regulatory instruments, incentive and promotion instruments, improving knowledge instruments, and communication instruments (UNWTO, n.d.).

The Saudi tourism strategy and policy adopt a comprehensive approach to tourism. The components of Saudi tourism policy include legislation development and reform; promotion; product development; giga projects[2]; events; human resource development and sector governance (Boston Consulting Group BCG 2019, slides 19 & 18). Six public entities were created to implement the National Tourism Strategy: The Ministry of Tourism; the Tourism Development Fund; the Saudi Tourism Authority; the Tourism Development Council; Air

[2] Giga-projects "are large-scale, self-contained developments in different regions focusing on particular industries, such as technology, energy, logistics, tourism, entertainment, and infrastructure. Many of these initiatives are developed by subsidiary companies of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), the Kingdom's sovereign wealth fund. These projects include:

- NEOM: a $1.5 trillion long-term development project to build a futuristic "independent economic zone" and city in northwest Saudi Arabia. This initiative includes:
    - Trojena: NEOM's mountain destination blending natural and developed landscapes. This project will include a man-made lake, a wildlife reserve, and a ski resort that will host the 2029 Asian Winter Games.
    - Sindalah: one of NEOM's luxury island destinations in the Red Sea.
- Qiddiya: a large-scale entertainment, amusement, sports, housing, and cultural complex near Riyadh.
- New Murabba: a planned commercial downtown in southwest Riyadh spanning almost 12 square miles with residential, retail, hotel, community, and office spaces.
- Red Sea Project: a massive tourism development on the archipelago of islands along the western Saudi coast, which aims to create 70,000 jobs and attract one million tourists per year. This project includes Amaala, a wellness, healthy living, and meditation resort projected to include more than 3,000 luxury hotel rooms and 900 residential villas.
- Diriyah Gate: a $50 billion project transforming Diriyah, a suburb of Riyadh, into a premiere destination for culture and heritage, entertainment, hospitality, retail, and education.
- Asir: a $13 billion project to develop the southwestern region of Asir into a global tourism hub, aiming to attract more than 10 million visitors by 2030."

  Source: Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, US Department of State
  https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-investment-climate-statements/saudi-arabia/

Connectivity Program: and the Saudi Red Sea Authority [3] (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.-c). The Ministry of Tourism states that the objectives of this tourism ecosystem are contributing to national economy diversification; creating suitable job opportunities for citizens; attracting investments; and increasing income resources (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.-a). A number of other entities that are not part of the Ministry of Tourism's organizational chart contribute to the development and growth of the sector. These include the Ministry of Culture, the Film Commission and the General Entertainment Authority.

As an ultra-conservative country, Saudi Arabia was not traditionally a tourism destination to those looking for leisure travel. It did not even have a tourist visa category before King Salman's

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[3] According to the Ministry of Tourism's website, the six entities have the following responsibilities:

"**Ministry of Tourism:** Laying down legislation, rules, and regulations for the development of the tourism sector. Developing the latest technology technologies and infrastructure to serve the various tourism activities. Providing an attractive investment environment. Attracting quality investments. Issuing licenses and classifications for tourism activities and projects. Creating new job opportunities as part of the kingdom's tourism sector.

Tourism Development Fund: Supporting investment and developing tourist destinations in the targeted locations. Developing the latest technologies and infrastructure to serve the various tourism activities. Financing academic training centers, universities and institutes specialized in tourism. Financing establishments active in the field of tourism. Concluding contracts and agreements with financing agencies. Providing loans and launching initiatives related to the sector.

Saudi Tourism Authority: Highlighting the kingdom as the global and local attractive tourist destination. Participating in local and international tourism exhibitions. Supervising marketing and promotional campaigns for touristic destinations in the Kingdom. Developing tourism packages and products. Keeping a keen eye on new tourist experiences and suggesting improvements.

Tourism Development Council: Aligning national and strategic goals. Coordinating development, organization and follow up efforts with relevant ministries and government agencies. Evaluating activities and projects implemented by ministries and government agencies related to the sector. Coordinating efforts to develop the tourism sector. Coordinating with the concerned authorities to enable the private sector to invest in the tourism sector

Air Connectivity Program: Supporting airlines in establishing new domestic and international air routes. Offering incentives to bridge the gaps related to air connectivity as required for tourism development in the Kingdom. Increasing competitiveness by building an interactive relationship with existing and potential airlines. Enhancing flight frequency, as well as flights, to existing and targeted destinations. Supporting efforts related to the improvement and development of airport infrastructure.

Saudi Red Sea Authority: Identify present and future infrastructure requirements for navigation and maritime operations. Grant permits and licenses to govern the navigation and nautical activity within the geographical scope. Develop a mechanism focused on preserving healthy marine ecosystems within the geographical scope of navigation and marine activities. Increasing marine and nautical investment through marketing and hosting of forums locally and abroad. Create strategies and initiatives to facilitate marine activity, regulate navigation, and ensure its long term viability. Review the competencies of the entities operating within the geographical scope and organize their activities as per the requirements of maritime security and safety. Provide advice and administrative support services to nautical and maritime investors."

rule. It did, however, receive annually between one and three million visitors travelling into the Kingdom to perform the Muslim pilgrimages of Hajj during its two week window (Saleh 2023). Millions more travel to perform the lower pilgrimage, called Umrah, during the rest of the year. In terms of outbound tourism, Saudi Arabia is one of the world's top tourist-generating markets (Alshammari, South, and Raleigh 2023). In 2018, the Kingdom ranked 15th globally, with Saudi international tourist expenditures growing from seven to 20 billion USD between 2002 and 2018, and more than 21.8 million trips taken by Saudis internationally in 2018 (Alshammari, South, and Raleigh 2023).

The Kingdom established the Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage [SCTH] in 2000 with the aim of capturing some of the Saudi outbound tourism expenditures, by encouraging Saudis to undertake domestic tourism instead of travelling abroad. The SCTH, which was headed by Prince Sultan bin Salman, the brother of the current Crown Prince, was also designed to build on the capacity of tourism to be "one of the productive sectors …, at the same time increasing investment opportunities, developing human resources, and expanding and creating new job opportunities for Saudi nationals" (SCEGA 2023). In 2019, the Kingdom announced that it would be issuing tourist visas, welcoming international tourists, and relaxing the dress codes for visiting women, so that they no longer needed to cover the head or wear long covering robes above their regular clothes (Hincks 2019).

The tourist visa was one of several actions that were recommended in SCTH's Saudi Tourism Strategy. These also included upgrading the SCTH to become a Ministry of Tourism; setting up a specialized tourism promotion body; and dedicating billions of Saudi Riyals to support the establishment of these bodies and facilitate investment in tourism infrastructure and initiatives. The recommended establishment of the Kingdom's tourism promotion arm- the Saudi Tourism Authority, showed a new focus on attracting international tourists. Reducing the travel of Saudi tourists abroad, referred to by the strategy as leakage, and directing them to visit local attractions is another of the main pillars of the Saudi tourism strategy. Other critical initiatives identified under the strategy included developing a comprehensive legislative framework for basic tourism activities; steering the master planning, design and development of 38 tourism sites to be ready between 2019 and 2022; marketing and communication campaigns: and fostering private and public partnerships on accommodation, activities, mobility, human capital, funding and investment, technology, and sustainability (Boston Consulting Group BCG 2019).

Tourism has had significant positive effects on Saudi Arabia's economy, particularly in relation to contribution to the Kingdom's gross domestic product [GDP]; job creation; supporting commercial establishments; and attraction of foreign direct investments [FDI]. As per the Saudi Ministry of Tourism (see Table 2 below), since the tourism strategy was launched in 2019, tourism spending in the Kingdom saw annual growth, except during the COVID pandemic. The latest figures show that it reached 28.59 billion USD in 2022 [24.2 billion USD in real growth after adjusting for inflation]. The UN World Tourism Organization estimates that tourism created 880,000 jobs in the KSA in 2022 (UN Tourism, n.d.), a growth from about 680,000 persons employed in 81,859 tourism- related establishments in 2020 (General Authority for Statistics Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2023). According to the OECD, tourism directly contributed 3.8% of GDP in 2019. Following the pandemic, this contribution fell to 1.7% (OECD 2022). According

to the Saudi Ministry of Tourism, tourism expenditures by domestic and international tourists in 2023 represented over 4% of GDP and 7% of the Kingdom's non-oil GDP (Ministry of Tourism 2024). This brings the Kingdom closer to its goal of tourism contributing 10% of non-oil GDP by 2030. The Tourism strategy aims to contribute 80 billion USD to the economy in tourism-related foreign FDI by 2030 (Burke and Martin 2024). So far, the tourism sector has attracted about $13 billion in private sector investments into the Kingdom (Abuljadayel 2024).

Conclusion

This first chapter of the dissertation introduced the research question, as well as the thesis statement and hypotheses used to answer the question. It provides the reader with information about the case study, presenting some general information about the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and specific information about the state's tourism policy and its economic strategy [Vision 2030]. This background information helps inform future discussions about the state's foreign and tourism policies. It advises the reader on why the author chose to address the multidisciplinary themes of foreign policy, tourism, and communication simultaneously.

The next chapter discusses several theories that have tackled the themes that are present in the dissertation and introduces the literature review. The chapter is used to introduce the theoretical framework that will be used to frame the research and analysis, linking the findings to previous knowledge in a number of disciplines.

Appendix of Chapter 1

Table 2- Saudi GDP and Tourism Contributions to the Economy of the KSA 2015-2022

Year	GDP of the KSA in current USD in billions (Source: World Bank, n.d.)	Growth Rate of GDP	Tourism Spending in the KSA in USD in billions [Nominal] (Source: Tourist Intelligence Center, n.d.)	Tourism Spending Change Year on Year [Nominal]	Tourism Spending in the KSA as a Percentage of GDP	Inflation (Source: World Bank Group, n.d.)	Tourism spending in USD in billions [Real]
2022	1110	27%	28.6	5%	2.6%	1.18	24.2
2021	874.16	19%	27.2	136%	3.1%	1.133	24.0
2020	734.26	-12%	11.6	-29%	1.6%	0.908	12.7
2019	838.56	-1%	16.3	27%	1.9%	0.98	16.7
2018	846.58	18%	12.8	4%	1.5%	1.04	12.3
2017	714.99	7%	12.3	-17%	1.7%	0.83	14.8
2016	666	-1%	14.8	14%	2.2%	1.14	13.0
2015	669.48	-13%	12.9		1.9%	0.84	15.4

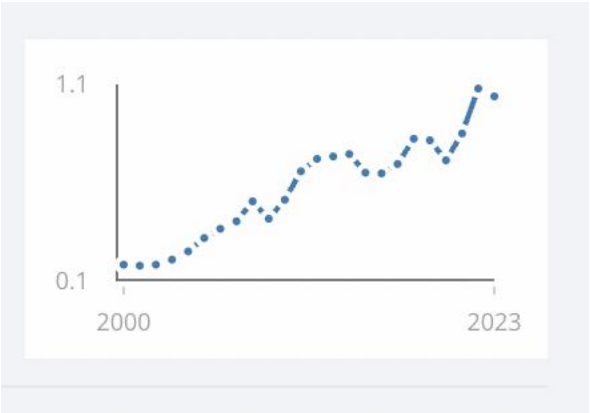

Figure 1-GDP of the KSA in billions of USD 2000-2023 (World Bank, n.d.)

Figure 2- Tourism Spending in the KSA 2015-2022 in billions of Saudi Riyals according to the Saudi Ministry of Tourism (Tourism Dashboard, n.d.)

Table 3- The Relationship Between Vision 2030 Pillars, Plans, Vision Realization Programs, and Strategic Objectives (Vision 2030, n.d.) [4]

Vision 2030 Pillar	Ambitious Nation		Thriving Economy		Vibrant Society	
Vision 2030 Plans (Overarching Objectives)	Enhance Government Effectiveness	Enable Social Responsibility	Grow and Diversify the Economy	Increase Employment	Strengthen Islamic and National Identity	Offer a Fulfilling and Healthy Life
Branch Objectives	Balance Public Budget Improve Performance of government apparatus Engage effectively with citizens Protect vital resources of the nation	Enable citizen responsibility Enable social contribution of businesses Enable larger impact of non-profit sector	Grow non-oil exports Grow contribution of the private sector to the economy Maximize value captured from the energy sector Unlock potential of non-oil sectors Grow the public investment funds assets and role as a growth engine Position the Kingdom as a global logistic hub Further integrate the Saudi economy regionally and globally	Develop human capital in line with labor market needs Ensure equal access to job opportunities Enable job creation through SMEs and Micro-enterprises Attract relevant foreign talents for the economy	Foster Islamic values Serve more Umrah visitors better Strengthen the national identity	Improve healthcare services Promote a healthy lifestyle Improve livability in Saudi cities Ensure environmental sustainability Promote culture and entertainment Create an empowering environment for Saudis

[4] Tables created by author. Source of information: (Vision 2030, n.d.)

Vision 2030 Targets

An Ambitious Nation	A Thriving Economy	A Vibrant Society
Rally one million volunteers annually compared to 11,000 in 2016	Increase Saudi Arabia's share of non-oil exports in non-oil GDP from 18.7% to 50%	Increase the average life expectancy from 74 years to 80 years
Increase the nonprofit sector's contribution to GDP from <1% to 5%	Raise Saudi Arabia's Logistics Performance Index ranking from 49th place to 25th place	Raise Saudi Arabia's Social Capital Index ranking from 26th to 10th place
Increase household savings of total income from 6% to 10%	Increase the private sector's contribution to GDP from 40% to 65%	Rank 3 Saudi cities amongst the top 100 globally
Raise Saudi Arabia's E-Government Survey Index ranking from 36th place to the top 5	Increase foreign direct investment's contribution to GDP from 3.8% to 5.7%	Increase the population's rate of weekly exercise from 13% to 40%
Raise Saudi Arabia's Government Effectiveness Index ranking from 80th place to 20th	Raise Saudi Arabia's Global Competitive Index ranking from 25th place to the top 10	Increase household annual spending on local cultural & entertainment activities from 2.9% to 6%
Increase non-oil government revenue from $43bn+ to $265bn+	Increase the Public Investment Fund's assets from $159bn+ to $1.86trn+	Double the number of Saudi properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List
	Raise Saudi Arabia's economic position from 19th largest to the top 15	Increase Saudi Arabia's annual capacity to welcome Umrah visitors from 6.2 million to 30 million
	Increase the localization of the oil and gas sector from 40% to 75%	
	Increase women's participation in the workforce from 22% to 30%	
	Increase the SME's contribution to GDP from 20% to 35%	
	Lower the rate of unemployment from 12.3% to 7%	

	The Vision 2030 Realization Programs [11 VRPs]
1	Pilgrim Experience Program
2	Quality Of Life Program
3	National Transformation Program
4	Fiscal Sustainability Program

5	Public Investment Fund Program
6	Housing Program
7	Privatization Program
8	Health Sector Transformation Program
9	National Industrial Development and Logistics Program
10	Financial Sector Development Program
11	Human Capability Development Program

Pillar: A Vibrant Society	**Vision Realization Program**										
Strategic Objectives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Foster Values of Moderation and Tolerance											x
Foster Values of Excellence and Discipline											x
Foster Values of Equity and Transparency			x								
Foster Values of Determination and Perseverance											x
Facilitate Hosting More Umrah Visitors and Provide an Easier Access to The Holy Mosques	x										
Improve Quality of Services Provided to Hajj and Umrah Visitors	x	x									
Enrich The Spiritual and Cultural Experience of Hajj and Umrah Visitors	x										
Instill National Values and Strengthen the Sense of National Belonging											x
Conserve And Promote Islamic, Arab and National Heritage of The Kingdom		x									
Uphold The Arabic Language											x
Ease The Access to Health Care Services								x			
Improve Value of Health Care Services								x			
Strengthen Prevention Against Health Threats								x			
Increase Public Participation in Sports and Athletic Activities		x									
Reach Regional and Global Excellence in Selected Professional Sports		x									
Improve Quality of Services Provided in Saudi Cities			x								
Improve The Urban Landscape in Saudi Cities		x									
Enhance The Nation's Immunity Towards Drug Abuse		x									
Enhanced Traffic Safety								x			
Reduce All Types of Pollution (E.G. Air, Sound, Water, Soil)			x								
Safeguard The Environment from Natural Threats			x								
Protect And Rehabilitate Natural Landscapes			x								
Develop And Diversify Entertainment Opportunities to Meet Populations Needs		x									

Grow Saudi Arabia's Contribution to Arts and Culture		x									
Enhanced Family Involvement in Preparing for Their Children's Future											x
Enable Suitable Home Ownership Among Saudi Families						x					
Develop Positive Attitude, Resilience and Hard Work Culture Among Our Children											x
Empower Citizens Through the Welfare System			x								
Improve Effectiveness and Efficiency of The Welfare System			x								

Pillar: A Thriving Economy	**Vision Realization Program**										
Strategic Objectives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Enhance Ease of Doing Business			x								
Unlock State Owned Assets for The Private Sector							x				
Privatized Selected Government Services							x				
Ensure The Formation of an Advanced Capital Market										x	
Enable Financial Institutions to Support for Private Sector Growth										x	
Attract Foreign Direct Investment			x								
Create Special Zones and Rehabilitate Economic Cities									x		
Increase Localization of Oil and Gas Sector									x		
Increase Gas Production and Distribution Capacity									x		
Develop Oil and Gas Adjacent Industries									x		
Grow Contribution of Renewables to National Energy Mix									x		
Enhance Competitiveness of The Energy Market									x		
Grow And Capture Maximum Value from The Mining Sector									x		
Develop The Digital Economy			x								
Localize Promising Manufacturing Industries									x		
Localize the Military Industry									x		
Enable The Development of The Retail Sector			x								
Enable the Development of The Tourism Sector		x									
Increase Localization of Non-Oil Sectors									x		

Grow Assets of The Public Investment Fund					x						
Unlock New Sectors Through the Public Investment Fund					x						
Localize Edge Technology and Knowledge Through the Public Investment Fund					x						
Build Strategic Economic Partnerships Through the Public Investment Fund					x						
Create and Improve Performance of Logistic Hubs									x		
Improve Local, Regional and International Connectivity of Trade and Transport Networks									x		
Push Forward the GCC Integration Agenda			x								
Develop Economic Ties with The Region Beyond GCC			x								
Develop Economic Ties with Global Partners			x								
Support National Companies to Consolidate Their Leadership Globally			x								
Develop Promising Local Companies into Regional and Global Leaders			x								
Build A Lifelong Learning Journey											x
Improve Equity of Access to Education (Especially in Rural Areas)											x
Improve Fundamental Learning Outcomes											x
Improve Ranking of Educational Institutions (E. G. Universities)											
Develop Our Brightest Minds in Priority Fields											x
Ensure Alignment of Educational Outputs with Labor Market Needs											x
Expand Vocational Training to Provide for Labor Market Needs											x
Improve Readiness of Youth to Enter the Labor Market											x
Increase Women Participation in The Labor Market											
Enable Integration of People with Disabilities in The Labor Market			x								
Nurture And Support the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Culture											x
Grow SME Contribution to the Economy			x								
Grow Productive Families Contribution to The Economy			x								
Improve Living Conditions for Expats		x									
Improve Working Conditions for Expats			x								
Source Relevant Foreign Talent Effectively			x								

Pillar: An Ambitious Nation	**Vison Realization Program**										
Strategic Objectives	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**

Enhance Effectiveness of Financial Planning and Efficiency of Government Spending											
Maximize Revenues from Government State Owned Assets											
Maximize Revenues Collected from Service Fees											
Increase Revenues from Fees without Introducing Taxes on Income or Wealth on Citizens											
Maximize Revenues Generated from Oil Production											
Design a Leaner and More Effective Government Structure											
Enhanced Performance of Government Entities											
Improve Productivity of Government Employees			x								
Develop The E-Government			x								
Improve Quality of Services Provided to Citizens											
Enhance Transparency Across Government Roles			x								
Strengthen Communication Channels with Citizens and Business Community			x								
Ensure Responsiveness of Government Entities to Stakeholders' Feedback			x								
Ensure Development and Food Security			x								
Ensure Sustainable Use of Water Resources			x								
Promote and Enable Financial Planning										x	
Encourage Volunteering			x								
Enhance Businesses Focus on their Social Responsibilities			x								
Enhance Businesses' Focus on the Sustainability of The Economy			x								
Support Growth of Nonprofit Sector			x								
Empower Nonprofit Organizations to Create a Deeper Impact			x								
Fintech Strategy										x	

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Analytical Frameworks

> "[I]t is essential that the tourist who visits us not only returns here, but that he is converted into the most active propagandist of our nation, increasing in this manner our prestige in the world."
>
> Spanish Ministry of Information and Tourism during the Franco regime, 1952 (Rosendorf 2010, 111)

Introduction

This chapter presents the dissertation's literature review, and shows how different theories and concepts shaped the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in the dissertation. The literature review adopts an integrative approach presenting an overview of different theoretical concepts utilized in this dissertation. These include the concepts of Foreign Policy; Diplomacy; Public Diplomacy; State Image Management including Image Repair Discourse, Nation Branding, the Dukalskis Framework and the Narrative Control Mechanism; and the nexus between Tourism and Foreign Policy. This integrative approach is useful since the purpose of the review is not to cover all articles ever published on the topic but rather to combine perspectives and insights from different fields or research traditions" (Torraco 2005). The analytical framework explains how these different theories and concepts are utilized in the dissertation to answer the research question.

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Derek Beach suggested three analytical questions to analyze foreign policy making (Beach 2012, 12-13). The dissertation used two of these questions to analyze the foreign policy actions of Saudi Arabia as they relate to the research question. The first question asks, 'what do states want?'. Exploring this question opened the possibilities to explore preference formation at the systemic and state levels. This was utilized in the chapter on Saudi foreign policy (Chapter 5), presenting the domestic and international sources of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy goals. The second question, also used in the dissertation, is 'what do states do?'. It was helpful in that it allowed the exploration of the foreign policy outputs (security, diplomacy, and economic policies) that are linked to the domestic and international challenges and priorities of the Saudi state as they relate to the research question. Although it may have made some passing reference to this issue, the dissertation did not tackle the third question suggested by Beach which asks, 'how do states make decisions in foreign policy?'.

This dissertation explored Saudi tourism policy as a form of diplomacy- particularly public diplomacy. Beach suggested that the state has three foreign policy output options: Security, diplomacy and economic policies (Beach 2012, 14). Saudi Arabia's tourism policy, as explored

in this dissertation, is better categorized under diplomacy which refers to the state's "range of non-violent foreign policy actions" than as an instrument of security or economic statecraft (Beach 2012, 172).

The dissertation adopts a state-centric analysis of foreign policy, looking primarily at the actions of the Saudi state, rather than at other non-state actors like non-governmental organizations, the private sector or individuals (Cooper 2013; Tiessen and Lough, n.d.). However, the focus of my research is not on direct state-state interactions through official representatives, as happens in traditional diplomacy. Rather, it is on the Saudi Arabian state's efforts to influence Western foreign publics, defined as public diplomacy. The frameworks of foreign policy and diplomacy are mostly used in chapters 5 and 7.

Public Diplomacy

There are several definitions of public diplomacy advanced by Diplomatic Studies' scholars. One approach sees public diplomacy 'an instrument used by states... influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values' (Melissen 2013, 437). A broader definition of public diplomacy provided by Cynthia Schneider suggests that the term covers "all a nation does to explain itself to the world"(Merickova 2014, 353). Both approaches see the goal of public diplomacy is "to affect public opinion, values and attitudes of public of different states to advance the interests of an influencing state" (Merickova 2014, 353). Gilboa references Hans N. Tuch (1990, 3) in stating that public Diplomacy's goals include attempting to elicit understanding for the nation's ideas, ideals, institutions, culture, national goals and policies (Gilboa 2008, 57). Joseph Nye saw public diplomacy as important for "building long term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies" (Nye 2008).

Scholars have linked certain activities and instruments to the practice of Public Diplomacy. Nicholas Cull outlined five activities with the practice: listening to the targeted foreign audiences and refining policy accordingly; advocating to promote a particular policy towards that international public audience; engaging in cultural diplomacy to export particular practices and building good will in target countries; exchanging "traditional" diplomacy to build networks; and using media channels to provide news to foreign publics (Cull 2008 b, 118). Propaganda (including television broadcasts, advertisements, and state-sponsored media), movies, literature, gastronomy, and state-funded cultural and educational exchanges have been identified as tools of old public diplomacy (Tóth 2019, 9). These traditional tools continue to be used today. Newer Public Diplomacy tools include the use of social media and new technology that can filter audiences for targeted impact (Tóth 2019, 9). This results in the creation of a new character for New Public Diplomacy, that of blurring traditional distinctions between international and domestic information activities, between public and traditional diplomacy, and between cultural diplomacy, marketing and news management" (Vickers 2004; Melissen 2013; Pamment 2012).

Public diplomacy is one of foreign policy's socialization strategies. Jean-Frederic Morin and Jonathan Paquin group foreign policy instruments into three categories: socialization, coercion, and political or miliary interventions. Socialization "targets the maintenance or modification of ideas" through "the transfer of beliefs, values and ideas from one actor to another" (Morin and

Paquin 2018, 32, 37). Coercion "targets the maintenance or modification of interests" and is "designed to influence how a target state behaves by modifying the way its interests are calculated, without directly intervening in foreign territory" (Morin and Paquin 2018, 35). Political or military interventions, which "target the maintenance or modification of the domestic political structures of a foreign state involve "incursions in the domestic affairs of a foreign state to bring about internal structural change" (Morin and Paquin 2018, 32 & 37).

Public diplomacy as a sub-discipline of International Relations continues to lack a comprehensive and integrated theoretical framework, according to Eytan Gilboa (Gilboa 2008, 73). However, a number of models and theories have been borrowed from other disciplines, particularly communications and marketing, and applied to public diplomacy issues (Merickova 2014, 353). These include Entman's cascading activation model, Grunig's PR models, Gilboa's public diplomacy models, Benoit's Image Restoration Theory (Gilboa 2008, 74), as well as Anholt's Nation-Branding concept (Anholt 2006).

The dissertation borrows the models of nation branding and image restoration theory to explore the mechanism of changing a state's image through public diplomacy. It also introduces the model of tourism policy as a vehicle of public diplomacy. Chapters 6 and 7 use the public diplomacy framework as they explore the role of public diplomacy in changing the Saudi state's image among Western publics.

Causal Mechanisms

A causal mechanism is defined as "a theory of a system of interlocking parts that transmits causal forces between a cause (or a set of causes) and an outcome" (Beach 2016, 465). According to Derek Beach, "a theorized causal mechanism describes each part of the mechanism whereby causal forces are transferred from cause to outcome" (Beach 2016, 465-466). Causal mechanisms describe the activities that cause the move from "an initial causal condition X" to "an outcome Y" (Beach 2016, 465- 466). Alexander Dukalskis commended the utility of mechanisms as causal pathways that explain a relationship because they open up the "black box" of the relationship "in order to answer the question: how does it work?" (Dukalskis 2021, 35-36). Gudmund Hernes reminded scholars that mechanisms are not laws, and they are also not the reality. Instead, he explained, they are a way that scholars seek to understand and represent processes they are observing. He says: "A mechanism, like a model, is a stripped-down picture of reality; it is an abstract representation that gives the logic of a process that could have produced the initial observation" (Hernes 1998).

This dissertation uses the concept of mechanisms to explain how public diplomacy works to alter the Saudi state's image abroad. It introduces, in chapter 6, the 'Narrative Control Mechanisms', a model developed by the author of the dissertation to summarize the three main actions delivered by some vehicles of Saudi public diplomacy to alter the state's negative image among foreign public audiences.

Foreign Policy and State Image Management

Why States Manage their Image Abroad

International Relations literatures gives numerous examples of the use of image management to achieve foreign policy goals. These goals have included improving a country's image overseas (Surowiec 2016, 154); enhancing a country's soft power (Fan 2008); obtaining visibility internationally with the aim of achieving better status and recognition (Browning 2013); building national self-esteem (Browning 2013); re-imaging of national identity (Surowiec 2016, 143); and promoting certain values and systems of ideas (Demergis 2023, 192). From a security perspective, image management can support a country's quest of entering into desired alliances, as seen by many Eastern European countries seeking to enter the EU (Szondi 2008, 15). It also helps states with reputational security, whereby "states with positive reputations are more secure […] because the global community objects when they are threatened. Conversely, states without well-developed images […] or with negative images […] have been left to the mercy of hostile neighbors or internal extremists (Dinnie 2009, 230)." Rasmus Rasmussen and Henrik Merkelsen link public diplomacy to a state's material security, making reference to the theory Joseph Nye's soft power *(Nye, 2004, 2008)*. They say: "According to Nye's neoliberal theory of soft power, the national reputation is the very foundation for conducting foreign policy; not only does a favorable reputation enhance soft power such as values, culture, policies and institutions, it can also help to legitimize the use of traditional hard power such as military interventions and economic sanctions" (Rasmussen and Merkelsen 2012, 813). Dukalskis has explored the management of a state's image to legitimize and protect authoritarian rulers (Dukalskis 2021).

How Images of States are Managed

Image Repair Discourse

Public relations theories that explain how commercial enterprises act in crises, have been useful in understanding the responses of states to problems affecting their international image. William Benoit's theory of Image Restoration was developed to account for the behavior of companies (Benoit 1997, 177-186). It was later used by Benoit and Juyn Zhang to analyze the image restoration efforts of Saudi Arabia to media attacks in two incidents: following 9/11 and after refusing to participate in the first war on Iraq (Zhang and Benoit 2004). Eli Avraham and Eran Ketter analyzed the strategies of different states to alter unsafe place perceptions, and negative stereotypes held by foreigners regarding these states (Avraham and Ketter 2008; Avraham 2020).

Some communications experts group states' responses to image related crises under four categories: Denial strategies; Corrective Action; Apology strategies; and Evasion Strategies, which may be undertaken separately or together (Abbas 2023). Benoit's Image Restoration Theory uses similar categorization of strategies and adds one more: Reduce offensiveness (Benoit 1997, 177-186). Avraham lists three marketing and strategy options to deal with crises; Source Strategies; Message Strategies; and Audience Strategies. Each of these strategies has multiple tactics that are available to deal with negative image and media attacks (Avraham 2020). According to Situational Crisis Communication Theory, to decide whether to choose

denial, diminishing, rebuilding or bolstering as the crisis' response strategies; the decision-maker needs to first look the dimensions of the rises: its type and its history (Abbas 2023).

The dissertation builds on the Image Restoration model to analyze Saudi Arabia's use of public diplomacy to alter its image in Chapter 6.

Nation Branding

Nation Branding has a variety of definitions and tools. According to Gyorgy Szondi, it involves a government's use of branding and marketing techniques to promote or alter the nation's image (Szondi 2008, 3-4). Simon Anholt, who originally coined the term Nation Brand argues that "claiming that places can be branded" is "an excessively ambitious, entirely unproven and ultimately irresponsible claim" (Anholt 2008, 2). Instead, he advocated for changing the state's policies to achieve a long term change in the way a nation is perceived Anholt 2008, 1). Branding experts have suggested tourism, Foreign Direct Investment, exports, and culture as tools by which a country can get noticed, promoted, and convey its messages to the world (Alimaskoski 2022). Anholt developed an index to measure how favorably a country was perceived by international publics. The country's brand index measured six aspects: Governance, Investment and Immigration, Culture and Heritage, People, Exports and Tourism (NBI 2022).

Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy are closely linked. Anholt argued that Public Diplomacy was a subset of Nation Branding. In his view, Public Diplomacy was "a means of presentation and representation of the national interest […] primarily concerned with the communication of policies rather than with their execution or conception" (Anholt 2006, 271). According to his theory of nation branding "government policy is simply one point of the 'hexagon' of nation brand, one-sixth of the picture which nations habitually paint of themselves, whether by accident or by design" (Anholt 2006, 271). Several years later, he adjusted his position and declared that the previous view was a result of a narrow view of Public Diplomacy and that nation branding was a subset of Public Diplomacy (Anholt 2006, 272).

Scholars have linked the efforts of nation branding with different foreign policy goals. These have included enhancing international credibility, building legitimacy, attracting foreign investment, generating international political influence, drawing tourists, and attracting and keeping international talented human resources. It has also been linked to attempts to changing negative perceptions of a country, such as in areas of environmental or human rights (Viktorin et al. 2018, 2). This viewpoint sees that by "creating and promoting an attractive package for domestic and international consumption", nation branding becomes a vehicle "to control and channel information to manipulate the resulting imagery" (Viktorin et al. 2018, 2).

Chapter 6 explores the use of nation branding by the Saudi state to improve its image among Western public audiences.

Dukalskis' Framework

Alexander Dukalskis' framework of image management categorizes the actions or tactics of states (especially autocratic states) under four higher-order groupings of mechanisms:

Promotional/ Diffuse; Obstructive/Diffuse; Promotional/ Specific; and Obstructive/ Specific. These are based on the form of activities and the intended target audience of the tactics. Promotional and Obstructive activity forms relate to what these activities do to narratives, while Diffuse and Specific relate to the target groups (Dukalskis 2021, 34).

Table 4- Dukalskis' Framework of Image Management (Dukalskis 2021, 34 -35)

	Promotional	**Obstructive**
Diffuse	"Promotional/ Diffuse mechanisms under this framework "disseminate favorable messages or symbols about the state to foreign publics"	"Obstructive/Diffuse mechanisms protect the state's narrative by censoring, obscuring, or refuting unfavorable information circulating in foreign public spheres"
Specific	"Promotional/ Specific mechanisms attempt to persuade foreign elites or other relevant groups to view the state favorably"	"Obstructive/ Specific mechanisms are the most coercive and see the state target individuals or groups beyond its borders (or foreigners within borders) that are critical of the state"

The Narrative Control Mechanism Model

The dissertation suggests a model to explain how the Saudi state moves from X "an initial causal condition" of a negative narrative circulating about the KSA, to Y "the outcome" of a changed image of the state among Western publics. The Narrative Control Mechanism model theorized in this dissertation suggests that the state moves from X to Y by controlling the quality (content) and quantity of narrative circulating about the Saudi state abroad through activating three actions: 1) introducing a new narrative, 2) propagating that new narrative, 3) and minimizing the negative narrative. When controlling the quality of the narrative, the actions of the state, as summarized in the mechanism ensure that the negative narrative is weakened by discrediting it or drowning it with the alternative narrative that is more advantageous to the state. When controlling the quantity, the state strives to maximize the positive narrative by spreading that narrative as widely and powerfully as possible. It also attempts to minimize the quantity of the negative narrative circulating by discrediting it or drowning it in the flow of alternative positive narrative.

The model of the Narrative Control Mechanism proposed in this dissertation benefits from the framework created by Alexander Dukalskis, as it looks at activities from the perspectives of promotion and obstruction. However, it categorizes the mechanisms differently, whereby categorization in the Narrative Control model is based on contribution to explaining distinct parts of the causal chain.

The Dukalskis framework categorized mechanisms based on whether they target 'diffuse' or 'specific' groups. Diffuse groups are broad foreign publics, specific groups are policy makers, elites, or influential groups" (Dukalskis 2021, 34). The Narrative Control Mechanism model does not categorize based on the target audience because it is only concerned with unearthing the pathways that link the Saudi state's actions to changing the opinion of a diffuse audience of Western publics. Since the model is not concerned with unpacking what the Saudi State is doing to influence specific groups, like elites, there was no need to categorize based on target audience.

The Narrative Control Mechanism model, like the Dukalskis framework, considers the intent of the state's image management action, be it promotion or obstruction of a certain narrative. However, the intent is not a criterion for categorization. The first two actions in the Narrative Control model are examples of the actions that Dukalskis calls promotional, i.e. actions involving "disseminating content that is favorable to the government" (Dukalskis 2021, 34). The third action is an example of the obstruction tactic, whereby the state seeks "to eradicate or undercut unfavorable ideas disseminated by other actors" (Dukalskis 2021, 34).

The Narrative Control Model categorizes the actions based on their contribution to explaining a distinct part of the overall process of an integrated causal chain. Derek Beach advocates for striving for 'productive continuity' when theorizing the parts of a causal mechanism. This means that in the causal story linking the initial causal condition X and the outcome Y, each part of the mechanisms will logically lead to the next part" and there are "no logical holes leaving explanatory gaps in the mechanism" (Beach 2016, 465-466). In the Narrative Control model, each of the three actions is important to the overall functioning of the process of narrative control. Each is one part "in a system of interlocking parts that transmits causal forces between the cause and the outcome" (Beach 2016, 465). At the same time, each piece is not viable on its own to explain the entire process.

Gudmund Hernes explains this in his definition of a mechanism as: "a set of interacting parts, an assembly of elements producing an effect not inherent in any one of them" (Hernes 1998, 74). In the Narrative Control model, the third action cannot happen if the second and first actions did not take place earlier. A negative narrative cannot be discredited if an alternative narrative was not introduced first. Similarly, a negative narrative cannot be drowned in an alternative narrative if the new positive narrative had not been propagated widely and aggressively. Likewise, the second action cannot exist without the first action happening, as it is not possible to disseminate a new alternative narrative without developing and introducing that new narrative first.

Each of these actions are introduced by an actor (the Saudi state or its agent). They are not causes for each other, but their introduction by actors in a specific order leads to the creation of a causal pathway that leads from X to Y. Derek Beach recommends that causal mechanisms "are explicitly fleshed out by unpacking causal processes linking X and Y into a series of interlocking parties composed of entities engaging in activities that transmit causal forces from cause to outcome" (Beach 2016, 464). Below, I borrow Beach's method of depicting a mechanism, whereby actors are depicted as letters (A, B, C) and activities as arrows (→) (Beach 2016, 465). X is "an initial causal condition", and Y is "the outcome"

The below is a depiction of the proposed model of Narrative Control Mechanism, whereby the Saudi state controls the quality (content) and quantity of narrative circulating about in the West through activating three actions: 1) introducing a new narrative, 2) propagating that new narrative, 3) and minimizing the negative narrative, to move from an initial condition of a negative narrative circulating about the KSA to an outcome of a changed image of the Saudi state among Western publics: X[→ A→B→C→] Y, whereby:
X "an initial causal condition" of a negative narrative circulating about the KSA
The first arrow → is a public diplomacy action applied [Nation branding, Image restoration, or Tourism policy]
A is the state or its agent
The second arrow → introducing a new alternative narrative
B is the state agent
The third arrow → propagating the new alternative narrative [using advertising, events, wide viewership, public relations activities, etc.]
C is the state or its agent
The fourth arrow → discredit the original narrative or drown it
Y is "the outcome" of a changed image of the Saudi state among Western publics

The dissertation presents a figure that summarizes the process using shapes, whereby the relative size of the circle indicates the quantity of narrative; and the sign within the circle indicates whether it is advantageous to the state's image among Western audiences (+ve sign), or damaging to the state's image abroad (-ve).

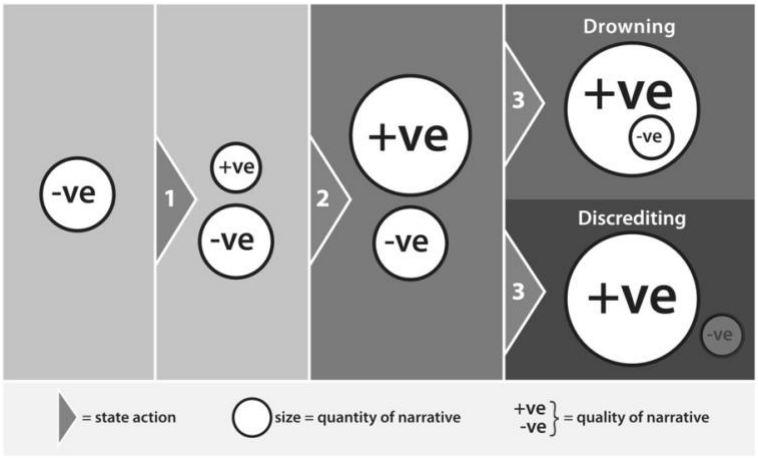

Figure 3- Illustration of the Narrative Control Mechanism Model [5]

The Narrative Control mechanism is mainly discussed in Chapter 6, in relation to Nation Branding, Image Restoration Theory and Tourism Policy. The mechanism is used to explain the relationship between public diplomacy (including tourism policy) and altering the image of the Saudi State abroad, as it opens up the "black box" of the relationship "in order to answer the question: how does it work?".

[5] Developed by the author; designed by Ms. Abeer Malhas.

Tourism and Politics

"Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure" (UNWTO, n.d.). Tourism is a product that contributes to more than a state's economic sector, and as such is significant to different fields of knowledge. According to Noel Scott, tourism policy is "an interesting context in which to apply theories and concepts from other disciplines" (Scott 2011, 4).

The Relationship between Tourism and Foreign Policy

Tourism has been linked to various aspects of International Relations (Burns and Novelli 2006). Scholars have discussed tourism from the lenses of Democratic Peace Theory, Critical Theory, and Diplomacy for example. David Edgell's analysis linked tourism promotion to the maintenance of peace, as indicated in the graph below. Edgell explained the link between tourism, global gross domestic product [GDP] and peace:

> "International tourism is the world's largest export earner, making it vital to global trade. Tourism growth is also positively correlated to growth in global GDP. As global economies grow, disposable income typically also rises. The growth of international tourism arrivals generally outpaces GDP. However, because of the elasticity of demand for travel, if the economic situation tightens, spending on tourism will also typically decline. The absence of peace disrupts global trade and investment. And when global trade is disrupted, travel declines, which compounds the decline in global GDP. Therefore, tourism benefits from peace and the global economy benefits from tourism development" (Edgell et al. 2008, 159).

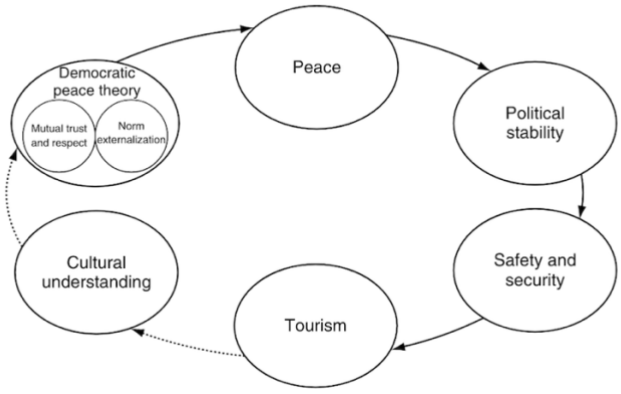

Figure 4- The Relationship Between Tourism and Peace (Edgell et al. 2008, 164)

The relationship between politics and different aspects of tourism have been examined by critical theorists. For example, at the intersection of politics, narrative and tourism, some post-structural scholars examined museum installations or other tourism displays to expose the discourses, metaphors, symbols and narratives used to constitute particular subject positions as the 'natural ones' (Porter 1995; Ott, Blair, and Dickinson 2010). Others have looked at the museum as "spatial, cultural and social expression of empire" (Flynn 1997). States' use of museum diplomacy to achieve different geopolitical goals has been explored, as has been the use of contemporary museums or art as vehicles of diplomacy (Grincheva 2013; Heyman and Heyman 2019).

Tourism as Diplomacy

Analysts have looked at the ability of tourism to act as a foreign policy tool by being a vehicle of different forms of diplomacy and by contributing to nation branding. In both these capacities, its ability to "generate a positive reputation and image of a place" serves to "advance foreign policy goals" and "plays an important part in soft power" (Casado Claro, Pastrana Huguet, and Saavedra-Serrano 2023, 66).

The state's ability to decide or influence the choice of destinations that its outbound tourists go to, makes tourism a diplomatic and negotiating tool in the hands of states. This is especially salient when the numbers of outbound tourists are high and yield a significant economic effect on the receiving destination. Jinsheng Zhu explains that Chinese outbound tourism "has become one of China's diplomatic resources" as it uses outbound tourism to wield influence, sanction, reward, and minimize hostility with other nations (Zhu et al. 2022). Given that the economic well-being of tourism destinations can be affected by the influx or restriction of the large numbers of tourists from the Chinese source market, Tony Tse argues that China's ability to control and influence the direction of outbound tourism development "in line with the country's political agenda' renders its tourism diplomacy "a manifestation of soft power' (Tse 2013, 149). The use of travel warnings and advisories by Western nations as a form of trade embargo against nations that rely heavily on tourism has been studied by political scientists (Larsen 2016). In his exploration of the use of tourism as a political bargaining tool, Richard Sharpley researched the case of the United Kingdom's use of travel advisories to force the Gambian government into democratic reform (Sharpley, Sharpley, and Adams 1996).

Scholars have looked at the potential of tourism to achieve diplomatic goals by agents other than the state, and beyond state-to-state interactions. Fabio Carbone argued that international tourism has the potential to promote world peace as a powerful vehicle of cultural diplomacy, where cultural diplomacy is the "exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their people to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings 2019; Carbone 2017, 61-74). Fabione proposed a model for international tourism to do so through unifying the goals and efforts of the private sector, civil society and governments (Carbone 2017, 61-74). Luis René Fernández Tabío, Cynthia Wright and Lana Wylie dubbed tourism "a prime site for the

negotiation of other diplomacies" (Tabio, Wright, and Wylie 2018, 19), whereby other diplomacies are "everyday activities of societal non-state actors that have a diplomatic character" (Tabio, Wright, and Wylie 2018, 15). Scholars have also looked at the use of tourism advertising as a form of mediated public diplomacy, that could be used by governments to engage international audiences (Fullerton and Kendrick 2013).

International relations literature on sports events has been concerned with issues of sportswashing[6], and with the use of mega sports events as tools for legitimation or reframing narratives (Grix, Dinsmore, and Brannagan 2023; Black 2007). It has also looked at the contribution of sports events and sports tourism to a country's soft power and as a tool of diplomacy (Black and Peacock 2013; Grix, Brannagan, and Houlihan 2015; Grix and Lee 2013); In this dissertation, Sports Mega events are treated as part of tourism policy, particularly as part of the components of 'events' and 'promotion'.

This dissertation explores the use of tourism policy as a tool of public diplomacy. It goes beyond looking at the effect of tourism as movement of people to exploring the entire tourism policy, including instruments such as promotion, legislation, human resources; events; and tourism products. Tourism policy's role as a tool of public diplomacy is explored primarily in chapters 6 and 7.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework adopted by this dissertation utilizes "eclectic combinations", "where parts of different theories are seen as Lego bricks that can be mixed and matched in order to account for an outcome" (Beach 2012, 11; Sil and Katzenstein 2010). It also borrows the concept of causal mechanisms and uses it to develop the Narrative Control Mechanism. This mechanism is linked to Nation Branding, Image Restoration and Tourism Policy, to explain how public diplomacy strives to achieve the foreign policy goal of altering a state's image among foreign publics.

The next chapter discusses the epistemology of the dissertation. The methods used to collect the data and to analyze the information are explored, providing examples from different chapters to illustrate the methodology.

[6] Sportswashing is defined as "the deliberate attempt by an entity to exploit a sports property to counteract negative information" (Bergkvist and Skeiseid 2024).

Chapter 3: Methodological Approach

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the dissertation's methodological approach used to achieve the research aims.

The chapter begins with a clarification of the dissertation's research problem, aims, and question. It proceeds to introduce the philosophy that governed the dissertation research, before discussing the research design and strategy utilized to collect and interpret data. The sampling strategies and techniques used to collect data are explored, as well as the methods used to analyze the data. Finally, some of the dissertation's chapters are visited to provide examples of how the research design was applied within the dissertation

Research Problem

Literature on foreign policy has neglected to examine the purposeful use of tourism policy by states as a tool to help achieve the foreign policy goal of changing a state's image abroad. Literature examining the modern use of tourism as a tool of foreign policy, specifically as an instrument of public diplomacy aimed at changing a country's image has looked at different components of tourism, but not at tourism policy. For example, it has looked at sportswashing (Grix, Dinsmore, and Brannagan 2023), or at 'Other Diplomacies' (Beier and Wylie 2009; Young and Henders 2016), or at museum diplomacy including narrative / image manipulation through curation of museum displays (Grincheva 2019), and tourism as a tool of soft power (Casado Claro, Pastrana Huguet, and Saavedra-Serrano 2023; Baranowski et al. 2019)

Research Aims

This dissertation aims to prove that the Saudi state uses tourism policy as a public diplomacy tool to change its negative image among Western publics. Adopting an interpretivist research methodology, and using the case study research design, a qualitative research approach is adopted to support this claim.

Research Question

How does the Saudi state use tourism policy to serve its goal of altering its negative image among Western public audiences?

Research Philosophy

The research for this dissertation, including data collection and analysis was governed by an interpretive philosophy. According to Mark Bevir and R. Rhodes "Interpretive political science

focuses on the meanings that shape actions and institutions, and the ways in which they do so" (Bevir and Rhodes 2016, i). Interpretive research studies human action acknowledging that it is located with a particular context, culture and history. As such, it does not search for generalizable laws (Quinlan 2017, 1).

An interpretive philosophy differs from a positivist philosophy which argues that social research should be objective, scientific, observed 'externally', and value free. Instead, an interpretive philosophy to knowledge creation argues that "social research is at least as humanistic as it is scientific" (Del Balso and Lewis 2005, 31). This research looks at the unique and the singular, not only at what can be generalized. Careful descriptions are utilized to provide rich and complex analysis of the objects being studied. This philosophy does not abandon logical and causal methods of investigation and modes of explanation. However, it does take into consideration thoughts, feelings, understandings, intentions as well as historical, cultural, social, and/or psychological contexts. Explanations "have to be framed in terms of human motives and meanings, rather than focusing on the impersonal, mechanical causality favored by natural science" (Del Balso and Lewis 2005, 31). The table in the Appendix to Chapter 3, developed by Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, compares interpretivist methodology to positivist methodology in terms of research and its design (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011, 113).

According to Donatella Della Porta, "interpretive analysis keeps a holistic focus, emphasizing cases as complex entities and stressing the importance of context. Concepts are orientated and can be improved during the research. The presentation of the data is usually in the form of thick narratives, with excerpts from texts ([…], interviews, documents) presented as illustration. The assumption of mutual influence among the many factors at work in any case discourages any attempt to reason about causes and effects or to generalize." (Della Porta and Keating 2008, 30). Della Porta further explains that, unlike the positivist approach which focuses on "discovering laws about causal relationships between variables", the focus of an interpretivist research philosophy is on "motivations that lie behind human behavior, a matter that cannot be reduced to any predefined element but must be placed within a cultural perspective" (Della Porta and Keating 2008, 26-27). The interpretation of people's motivations for their actions generates explanations for social outcomes in an interpretivist research philosophy. It does not seek explanations for these outcomes from universal rules or from pointing to the causes of actions as does the positivist approach. The interpretivist approach looks for internalist explanations, showing how actions are best from the agent's perspective (Della Porta and Keating 2008, 26-27).

Central characteristics of interpretive research are focus on meaning; insistence on the meaning's contextuality or situatedness; and acknowledging the situatedness of those claiming knowledge of the issue being researched (including the researchers and those being interviewed or researched) (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011, 28). For interpretive theory "meanings are constitutive of actions" (Bevir and Rhodes 2016, 3). According to Bevir and Rhodes, it is necessary to evoke the intentionality of the actors in order to discuss actions and institutions properly. Actors' beliefs and desires are needed to understand and explain their actions. These beliefs and desires are influenced by meanings, discourses, and language. Moreover, interpretivist social science focuses on specific, situated meanings and meaning making practices

of actors in a given context (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011, 28). The concept of a situated actor implies that actors are not autonomous and cannot form beliefs and act on pure experiences or a pure reason. Yet they can have agency, whereby their reasoning and experiences are formed within webs of beliefs in a historical background and prior views. The actors reasoning is local, meaning "it occurs in the context of agents' existing webs of belief" (Bevir and Rhodes 2016, 27).

The interpretive philosophy tries to explain beliefs and actions through narratives pointing to historical causes. Relationships between actions, desires, and the beliefs behind them are reflected in these narratives. They also situate the beliefs and desires in historical contexts. According to Bevir et al "these conditional connections are neither necessary nor arbitrary" (Bevir and Rhodes 2016, 17), meaning they are not universal laws, yet they explain intentional actions and practices.

Interpretivist research favors abductive logic of inquiry, rather than deductive or inductive logic of research. Abductive reasoning "begins with a puzzle, a surprise, or a tension, and then seeks to explicate it by identifying the conditions that would make that puzzle less perplexing and more of a "normal" or "natural" event", rather than deducing the particular from the universal as does deductive logic of inquiry, or inducing the universal from the particular as does inductive logic (Della Porta and Keating 2008, 26-27). The abductive logic of inquiry and reasoning requires an iterative– recursive process of inquiry until an explanation is found that makes the puzzle normal. Abductive logic is applied during data generation, collection and analysis, so that plausible explanations are built based on their findings (Wiesner 2022, 4).

Interpretive philosophy assumes that the researcher is also situated within a certain web of beliefs and that their research is affected by factors like meanings, motivations, culture and history. Although interpretivist epistemology gives greater weight to the insider perspective of actors than the outsider perspective of the researcher, it still emphasizes that research is entangled with "views of the researcher, the discipline, and culture" (Quinlan 2017, 1). That is why interpretivist researchers are encouraged to practice reflexivity. The researchers are expected to clarify their position "towards the research topic and the material, as well as the results of analysis" and to explain how they were "influenced by the social position of the researcher and the connection he or she has to the field in question" (Wiesner 2022, 4). Researchers are allowed to make a normative judgement at the end of the analysis, although they are not required to (Quinlan 2017).

The application of the interpretive philosophy in this dissertation is evident from the rich, complex and thick descriptions provided of the Saudi context (chapters 1, 4, 5, 6). The first chapter provided a description of the historical context governing the development of Saudi Arabia's tourism policy. Textual analysis revealed the context and history of the impressions held by Western publics of the Kingdom in Chapter 4, with excerpts from texts presented as illustration. Analysis of the discourse of Saudi officials as well as textual analysis of official declarations of the state and analyses of foreign policy experts revealed the intentions of Saudi Arabian foreign policy priorities in Chapter 5. Discourse analysis and image analysis revealed the image building efforts of the Saudi state based on its beliefs and motivations in Chapter 6,

based on the actors' intentions as revealed in Chapters 4 and 5. These chapters demonstrate the interpretivist approach of looking for internalist explanations. Outcomes are explained from interpretation of the actors' motivations. Actors' intentionality is demonstrated, as are the current conditions in which they are situated. In chapter 1, the researcher shares her positionality and reasons for choosing this case study based on her own history, geographical situatedness, life experiences and motivations. This is an example of the reflexivity that interpretivist researchers are encouraged to share and acknowledge.

Research Design

The research design provides a framework to define the structure of the research, allowing the researcher to decide what data needs to be collected to answer the research question as convincingly and unambiguously as possible (De Vaus 2005). According to Robert Yin, "a research design is the logic that links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to the initial questions of study" (Yin 2003, 18). Its role has been described as "making choices and articulating a rationale for the choices one has made" (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011, 2).

This dissertation uses a qualitative research design. According to Michael Del Balso and Alan D. Lewis, the focus in qualitative research is on broader and interconnected factors, not on key variables as is the case with quantitative research. Operationalization is done through identifying ranges of relevant qualitative data, open to modification as the research continues. This design usually uses non-random sampling techniques. The researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research design, as they undertake actions like observation and interviews. Unlike the structured instruments in quantitative design, qualitative instruments such as interpretation of documents and open ended interviews are flexible. Data analysis in qualitative research design involves interpretation by the researcher. It informs data gathering, and vice versa. This is very different from positivist research, where data gathering is separate from analysis and interpretation and precedes both (Del Balso and Lewis 2005, 39).

Research Strategy

This dissertation has used the case study design as its research strategy. Case studies are useful in different aspects of theory development. According to George and Bennett, case studies can have the epistemic goals of testing existing hypothesis; the generation/ formation of new hypotheses, the choice of new questions to study (George and Bennett 2005, 12); and the development of differentiated and more closely focused concepts (Bennett and Elman 2007, 178). The dissertation uses the case study design to achieve the epistemic goal of generating/ formatting a new hypothesis whereby it investigates how tourism policy can be used as a public diplomacy tool intended to alter a state's image abroad.

According to Robert K. Yin, a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. It is where the boundaries between the phenomena and the context are not clearly evident" (Glenn Parry 2023). Hourani et al (2019) are referenced by Kadir Çakar and Şehmus Aykol as describing the case study as "a method that

uses multiple data sources to develop a contextualized understanding of the phenomenon with the intention of confronting theory by comparing it with empirical data" (Çakar and Aykol 2021, 21). They also reference Dooley in saying that this research strategy "emphasizes detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships" (Çakar and Aykol 2021, 21). The case study method simultaneously tackles data collection tactics, as well as the logic of design and design features, while necessitating a specific approach to data analysis. This makes it, according to Yin "an all-encompassing method" and "a comprehensive research strategy" (Yin 2003, 14).

The research question I posed determined the choice of the research strategy, in choosing between the case study method and other methods. According to Yin, "in general, case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with some real life context" (Yin 2003, 1). My research question asks, "How does the Saudi state use tourism policy to serve its goal of altering its negative image among Western public audiences?". The form of the research question, in this case a "How" question, is significant. "This is because such questions [how questions] deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidents" (Yin 2003, 7). This excludes surveys as a strategy. The dissertation is looking at an operational link between the use of tourism policy and the Kingdom's foreign policy goal of altering its image abroad. Saudi Arabia's launch of its tourism strategy only happened in 2019 (Saudi Ministry of Tourism, n.d.), and the dissertation in general has looked at the foreign policies of the KSA since the accension of King Salman in 2015. As such, it is a contemporary phenomenon. This focus on contemporary, as opposed to historical events, excludes the use of histories as a research strategy for this dissertation. Finally, as an investigator, the author of this dissertation has no control over the events being studied. Therefore, this excludes experiments, a research strategy that, according to Yin, requires control and manipulation of events directly, precisely, and systematically.

Sampling Strategy

Sources of data were selected using non-probability sampling. Random sampling was not used in this research "because the purpose is not statistical generalization to larger populations" (Warren and Xavia Karner 2010, 212). Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select interviewees. Purposive sampling involved selecting the interviewee who has the knowledge that meets the purpose of the study. This sampling is useful when the aim of the research is to test a theory or gain insight or further understanding of something (Del Balso and Lewis 2005, 90). Snowball sampling involves selecting people who have characteristics that meet the requirements of the study to be interviewed, and then asking them for further contacts (Del Balso and Lewis 2005, 94). This process helped the author gain access to new contacts and gain credibility with them. Convenience and snowball sampling were used to select documentary evidence. Convenience sampling involved selecting for the sample based on ease of access (Golzar, Tajik, and Noor 2022, 72) and expedience (Brewis 2014, 850). The results obtained from a convenient sample pertain only to the sample itself. Convenience and snowball sampling are used in advancing understanding of particular issues (Del Balso and Lewis 2005, 91-92).

They may have low external validity or generalizability, but are extremely useful in exploratory studies (Roberts 2014, 4). Scholars have noted that this sampling technique is particularly useful to obtain people's perceptions and attitudes and to produce hypotheses (Golzar, Tajik, and Noor 2022, 73). Its disadvantages may include sampling biases and systematic errors, including non-coverage and self-selection, and the negative effect on the generalizability of the research findings beyond the sample (Golzar, Tajik, and Noor 2022, 74).

Data Collection Techniques

Evidence for this case study was collected from multiple sources, through observational and communicative means. Documents, direct observation/ field observations, and interviews have constituted the main data sources for the dissertation research.

Documentation
Documentary sources used in this research have included proposals, formal studies or evaluations, newspaper clippings, blog posts, statements by officials, official websites, government documents and interviews with officials published in traditional and social media. They have also included marketing materials and advertisements. Academic articles and books have also been used extensively in data generation and analysis.

There are several advantages to using documentation as a source of evidence, in comparison with other sources. As indicated by Yin, documents are stable, they can be reviewed repeatedly; they are unobtrusive, as they are not created as a result of the case study; documents are exact, containing exact names, references, and details of an event; and they offer broad coverage, covering a long span of time, many events, and many settings (Yin 2003, 86). Carol Warren and Tracy Karner note that advertisements, marketing and media-linked sources are useful because they "are an easy to access source of data in a research era in which regulations on human subjects can hamper-face to face forms of qualitative research". They also note that "they are a rich source of data that provides a window into changing social attitudes" (Warren and Xavia Karner 2010, 179).

However, researchers need to be aware that using documentary sources of evidence can pose some risks. These include the possibility of low retrievability; base selectivity, if collection is incomplete; reporting bias, reflecting unknown biases of authors of the document; and access which may be deliberately blocked (Yin 2003, 86). Yin suggests that in the case study method, documents be used to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources. He also reminds that "every document was written for some specific purpose and some specific audience other than those of the case study being done. In this sense, the case study investigator is a vicarious observer, and the documentary evidence reflects a communication among other parties attempting to achieve some other objectives" (Yin 2003, 87-88). He advises the researcher to be diligent in trying to identify these objectives and to be critical in interpreting the contents of documentary evidence.

Interviews

Since this research plan included interviewing human subjects, the research protocol for the dissertation was submitted to the McMaster Ethics Board. In regard to interviews, the protocol clearly specified a rationale for the choice of the number of participants to be interviewed; their salient characteristics; how they would be recruited; the scripts of the emails that will be sent to potential interviewees to be recruited, as well as that of the reminder emails. The research ethics application also delineated the risks and benefits inherent in the research and required the a) description of the potential physical, psychological, and social risk(s) to participants, b) explanation of how the risk(s) will be managed or minimized, c) explanation of why alternative approaches with less risk could not be used instead. The application also contained detailed description of how I will protect the confidentiality and anonymity promised to participants during different stages in the life cycle of the research. Moreover, the protocol detailed the process that would be used to obtain informed consent from participants; as well as the process to allow participants to withdraw during or after data collection. The protocol was cleared by the McMaster University Ethics Board.

I used semi-structured and open ended interviews. These interviews allowed me to ask the respondents about their opinion, and the facts of the issue being investigated from their perspectives. Respondents were sometimes asked to offer their own insights that would help further investigations (Yin 2003, 89-92). I have also used focused interviews, which are short interviews that "are more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol" (Yin 2003, 89-92). These also generally were semi structured. Interviews provided data that helped me refine my research questions in the early stages of my research. Later, they provided evidence that supported the investigation. Some also provided codes for the thematic analysis. Many interviews provided important analyses from the point of view of the respondents, as they were conducted with professionals in the field. Some helped clarify the practical processes and theoretical models; while others provided rich descriptions of the cultural and political contexts of the case study.

These are the interviews I conducted after receiving the ethics approval. The findings from these interviews were included in the dissertation:
Interviewee #1, Western diplomat based in Riyadh
Interviewee #2, Strategic image consultant
Interviewee #3, Former Jordanian Minister of Tourism
Interviewee #4, Dr. Gregory Gause III, foreign policy analyst
Interviewee #5, Vice President for Studies for an American think tank
Interviewee #6, Former Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs
Interviewee #7, International branding expert
Interviewee #8, Tourism development expert based in Saudi Arabia
Interviewee #9, Retired American diplomat
Interviewee #10, Former Jordanian Minister of Economic Affairs

In the early stages of the project, I conducted four interviews that helped me increase my knowledge of the case study and hone my research question. However, as the interviews were conducted before the ethics clearance was obtained, the information received from these

participants is not quoted in the dissertation. One was with a senior member of the Saudi Ministry of Tourism; the second was with a consultant for the Saudi government, the third was with a tourism consultant working with one of the mega tourism projects in Saudi Arabia, and the fourth with a cultural consultant and museum curator. I also attended a closed session held by a Jordanian think tank about the Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia. Attending the meeting allowed me to hear very useful analysis about Saudi Arabia's policies from foreign policy experts and journalists, and to ask questions to clarify my understanding.

The interview as a data collection method has strengths and weaknesses. Strengths include that it is targeted, thereby focusing directly on the case study topic. It is also insightful, providing perceived causal links. Its weaknesses include bias due to poorly constructed questions; response bias, whereby respondents have a tendency to respond inaccurately or falsely to questions; inaccuracies due to poor recall; and reflexivity whereby the interviewee gives what he or she believes the interviewer wants to hear (Yin 2003, 86).

Field Visits

In March 2022, I travelled to the United Arab Emirates to visit and observe the Saudi pavilion at the Dubai Expo. I also visited other pavilions to investigate how the Saudi message was relayed in comparison with the messages of other countries. Yin comments that "by making a field visit to the case study site, you are creating the opportunity for direct observations […] Such observations serve as yet another source of evidence in a case study. The observations can range from formal to casual data collection activities" (Yin 2003, 92).

I visited Saudi Arabia in December 2022 for several purposes: to make direct observations; conduct interviews, and gather documents. I visited the World Tourism Organization's Middle East hub which had opened in Saudi Arabia only a few years before, and acquired literature about Saudi Tourism from there. I also visited the Saudi Ministry of Tourism and had a discussion with officials about the ministry's goals and aspects of its operation. I also conducted interviews with a tourism expert and with a western diplomat working in Saudi Arabia.

The field visit created opportunities to observe how tourism and liberal opening had started changing the social dynamics within Saudi society. Women were now working in the tourism industry for example. I noticed how women, who used to be segregated from men in the workplace in the pre- King Salman era, were now working as baristas in Starbucks cafes, or receptionists in hotels or as customs agents in the airport. They were doing so while dressed in their traditional black long robes and with their faces covered. Some of the women working at the newly established Ministry of Tourism did not cover their hair, and some were wearing trousers and donned colorful open abayas above their clothes. While having lunch at a restaurant in the diplomatic neighborhood, I noted that Saudi men and women, who looked like work colleagues on their lunch hour, interacted with ease and without segregation in the restaurant.

Yin recommends having more than one observer during field research to "increase the reliability of observational evidence" (Yin 2003, 92). Unfortunately, given the limitations of funding and

the scope of the dissertation research, a second observer was not included in the process of the field research.

International Surveys

Several country surveys studying issues discussed in the dissertation have been consulted. Robert K. Yin recommends triangulation as a principle of data collection (Yin 2003, 97). When possible, the results of large-n surveys have been included, as an additional source of evidence. These sources have included the 'Anholt- Ipsos Nation Brand Index' [NBI], Gallup's 'Perceptions of Foreign countries', and the World Economic Forum's [WEF] Gender Gap Index. All three were referenced in Chapter 4. Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report was referenced in Chapter 8.

The Nation Brand Index is a collaboration between Simon Anholt, the British scholar and branding consultant who coined the term nation brand, and the global research company Ipsos. Ipsos conducts online surveys of 60,000 adults aged 18 and over in 20 countries, with samples being weighted to reflect the key demographic characteristics including age and gender. The results are reflected in the Nation Brands Index, updated annually. To obtain the country brand rankings of the KSA on the Nation Brands Index, I consulted the press releases and presentations released by IPSOS for the past few years.

This index is relied upon by a number of governments as part of their efforts to gauge their reputations internationally. For example, the Northern Ireland Executive Office's website indicates that "the Anholt Ipsos Nation Brands Index is used to assess and monitor Northern Ireland's international reputation" (The Executive Office 2018). Similarly, Scotland's government has used the NBI since 2008 to "monitor and assess its reputation around the world" (Scottish Government, n.d.).

I also consulted Gallup's "Perceptions of Foreign Countries" to capture the quality of the American public's opinion of Saudi Arabia over time, while trying to identify whether shifts in perception occurred after King Salman's ascension to power (Gallup Inc, n.d.). Opinions about Saudi Arabia have been collected by Gallup since 2001. The report even shows data for one year at the beginning of the 1990s. The Gallup Poll Social Series [GFSS] gauges "Americans' opinions on and perceptions of pressing political and economic issues and current events. A minimum of 1000 US adults aged 18 or older living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia are interviewed for each GPSS survey by phone (Gallup Methodology, n.d.).

The analysis presented in the WEF's Global Gender Gap Report 2022 is based on a methodology integrating the latest statistics from international organizations [ILO, UNICEF, Inter Parliamentary Union, WB, WHO, and WEF] and a survey of executives (WEF 2022, 2, 54).

Freedom House's Freedom in the World rankings are available publicly through its website. Its Freedom in the World Report assesses the real-world rights and freedoms enjoyed by individuals. It is published annually and is available free of charge. I used the website and the report to construct the comparison tables and to capture the Saudi Kingdom's status regarding

political and internet freedoms. Freedom in the World 2024 evaluated the state of freedom in almost 200 states (195 countries and 15 territories during calendar year 2022) (Freedom House, n.d.-b).

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic Analysis

The predominant research analysis method used in this dissertation is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis technique that identifies patterns in the data, abstracts the patterns into themes, and uses the set of themes "to address the research or say something about an issue" **(**Maguire and Delahunt 2017, 3). Azza Al-Busaidi references Richard E. Boyatzis (1998) in describing thematic analysis as "an effective and systematic way to evaluate large volumes of qualitative data while also providing the additional benefit of the process itself lending to greater sense-making" (Al-Busaidi 2019, 91). In addition to summarizing the data and interpreting or making sense of the data (Maguire and Delahunt 2017, 3), it serves in explaining the themes posited, their relationship, and their meaning (Fugard and W. Potts 2019).

The process of thematic analysis is iterative and not necessarily linear. Thematic analysis involves, firstly, constructing themes using the available data and the researcher's understanding, intuition, and theory. Then it involves coding the data with respect to those themes (Fugard and W. Potts 2019). Moira Maguire and Brid Delahunt recommend using Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis. They remind that the researcher may find themself moving back and forth between phases, possibly many times, especially when dealing with a large volume of complex data (Maguire and Delahunt 2017, 4). These steps are: 1) becoming familiar with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining themes, 6) and write-up.

There are four approaches to doing thematic analysis: inductive, deductive, semantic and latent. Jenna Crosley explains these four options to new researchers: The inductive approach allows themes to emerge from the data without any preconceptions of what codes or themes will emerge. When there is little existing research on the topic being analyzed, or when the research aims and questions are exploratory, researchers usually adopt an inductive thematic analysis approach. On the other hand, when there is a significant amount of research on the topic, or where the aim or the research is confirmatory, researchers will most likely choose a deductive thematic analysis approach. This involves using prior knowledge, an existing theory, or past research to approach analysis with a pre-determined set of codes. When researchers choose to only consider the face value of data, they adopt a semantic level of content. On the other hand, if they choose to interpret data and theorize meaning, then their analysis focuses on a latent level (Crosley 2021).

Process Tracing

The second qualitative analysis methodology I used in the dissertation is process tracing.

David Collier defines it "as the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator. Process tracing can contribute decisively both to describing political and social phenomena and to evaluating causal claims" (Collier 2011). The case-study methodology of process tracing involves "tracing causal mechanisms that link causes (X) with their effects (i.e. outcomes) (Y)" (Beach 2016, 463). Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel explain that the term process tracing "refers to the examination of intermediate steps in a process to make inferences about hypotheses on how that process took place and whether and how it generated the outcome of interest" (Bennett and Checkel 2014, 8). I have opted to use process tracing because it is a useful methodology to answer 'how' questions (Beach 2022). I have used evidence from documents and interviews, to unearth the plausible pathways between certain public diplomacy actions and the altering of the state's image abroad. I named this model the Narrative Control Mechanism, and it summarized actions taken by the Saudi state to control the content of the narrative circulating about it in the West, and the extent of its circulation.

Application of the Research Methodology

The application of the research methodology in the process of researching and writing this dissertation is illustrated in this section. Examples are provided from chapters 4, 5, and 6 to show how the data was collected and analyzed.

Application of the Research Methodology to Chapter 4: The Negative Image of Saudi Arabia in the Western World

This chapter aimed to clarify the part of the research question which refers to the negative image of Saudi Arabia among Western publics. Multiple sources were used to collect evidence for this research: human right groups' websites; international indexes; and international media outlets. Purposive sampling was utilized to identify the source. An iterative process of thematic analysis was used prior to writing the chapter in a way that identified the categories of negative issues that usually emerge when the KSA is portrayed in media that targets Western audiences. I also consulted specialized reports like Freedom in the World Report and the World Economic Forum's [WEF] Global Gender Gap Report (WEF 2022, 9) that published ratings on specific areas relevant to my research.

I consulted the websites of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, examining press releases, calls for action, and Saudi Arabia's country profile. A key word search for 'Saudi Arabia' generated these documents. An inductive approach to thematic analysis was used to generate codes of the issues that were emphasized by these human rights groups in reference to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This was equivalent to phases 2 & 3 in Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis. I identified these issues/themes and then used them as key words when looking for global media coverage of Saudi Arabia. The dates of this coverage were generally after the ascension of King Salman to the throne in 2015. This process was allowed by one of the features of thematic analysis, that "it is common for thematic analysis

to start while data collection is ongoing and to influence future data collection" (Fugard and W. Potts 2019).

The second source of data was Western media. I relied on my own knowledge of key incidents covered in the media in the past few years and looked for coverage of these topics. This was augmented by conducting an internet (Google Chrome) search of key words or phrases like: 'protests in front of Saudi embassy', 'boycott Saudi Arabia', and 'criticism Saudi Arabia'. I then looked for examples of coverage in western media of the themes identified in the previous phase. I used a purposive sampling technique, to locate those sources that "epitomize the broad themes […] identified" (Dawson 2019, 42; Warren and Xavia Karner 2010, 213). Snowball sampling was also used, whereby one news item would contain references to another relevant topic that I would pursue or to another news source that I would consult. This has also directed the research to online videos of interviews that were conducted with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs/ Environment Envoy. The media that was studied was generally western media, with a focus on well-known international outlets like BBC, CNBC, CNN, *Le Monde* newspaper, and France 24. Some Arabic new sources like Al-Jazeera, MBC and *AlSharq AlAwsat* newspaper were also consulted.

I consulted Gallup's Perceptions of Foreign Countries, the Nation Brand Index, and the Freedom in the World Report to capture the quality of the public's opinion of Saudi Arabia, while trying to identify whether shifts in perception occurred following the ascension of King Salman to the throne (Gallup Inc, n.d.).

In the analysis phase, I applied steps 3, 4, and 5 of Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis: searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining themes. The inductive approach to thematic analysis used in the chapter, allowed the capturing of overarching themes of the KSA's image, as reflected in these sources. The use of thematic analysis was appropriate in this chapter because this technique is very useful "for finding out about people's experiences, views, and opinions" (Warren 2020). Finally, I completed the write up, phase 6 of Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis framework. In the analysis section, from the combination of these sources, I created headings that reflect themes that were closely related, like 'treatment of women', or 'unusual punishments'. Under these, I introduced selected examples for the reader to illustrate my findings.

Thematic analysis was also used in this chapter to identify the personality traits that were associated with Saudi Arabia in the minds of Westerners. The results were used in Chapter 4 to complement the analysis of the image of the Saudi state abroad. The results were also used to provide context for Chapters 6 and 7 when discussing the actions taken by the Kingdom to change its persona domestically and in the minds of the target audience. First, different descriptions made of the country were collected from multiple sources including websites, interviews, and surveys. Then, these were categorized based on their themes. The themes were selected from the list of 'Personality Traits Applicable to Countries' developed by Jose Rojas-Mendez (Rojas-Mendez, Papadopoulos, and Murphy 2013). Similar themes were consolidated into one description for ease of reference.

Application of the Research Methodology to Chapter 5: The Foreign Policy Goals of the KSA's Under King Salman and MBS

This chapter was designed to find out what Saudi Arabia's foreign policy priorities are, and whether image management was one of them. Preliminary research for this chapter in books and foreign policy articles generated several codes (Demmelhuber,109; Myers 1991; Nolte 2010; Karim, 2017). These were then used deductively to inform the search for evidence in the second, more detailed phase of research. The third iteration of work on this chapter followed a decision to use foreign policy analysis as one of the dissertation's theoretical frameworks. This deductively informed the third round of research. The theory had revealed the presence of both domestic and international pressures affecting the priorities of foreign policymaking (David 1991, 235; Morin & Paquin 2018; Beach 2012). Research sought to identify what these sources were. Once the data was collected, a table was constructed mapping policy goals in response to international pressures, and the types of foreign policy actions the Saudi state undertook in response. These were categorized under diplomacy, economic statecraft and security policy (Beach 2012). A table with the same groupings was created to categorize the Saudi foreign policy goals and tactics shaped in response to domestic pressures. The writing phase used the tables to categorize the findings and supported them with examples and evidence from the research. The different pressures were presented under the overarching labels of external pressure or domestic pressure. Underneath each identified pressure, the challenge it posed to the Saudi state was explained; and the resulting foreign policy goals or strategy that emerged out of that challenge were presented. Analysis revealed that the improvement of Saudi Arabia's image in the eyes of western publics was a foreign policy goal for the Kingdom.

Application of the Research Methodology to Chapter 6: Image Altering Public Diplomacy Strategies and the Activation of the Narrative Control Mechanism

Multiple sources were consulted to identify examples of the strategies and tactics of response used by the Saudi state in response to negative publicity in the West. Desk research was supplemented with field visits and interviews. Data collection involved searching for official Saudi statements in media, as found on YouTube and on online news channels. The absence of official responses by Saudi officials to certain Western criticisms was also noted as part of the findings. I also consulted the information gathered from open-ended interviews with foreign policy, media and economics experts. Moreover, a field visit to Expo Dubai 2020 allowed firsthand examination of the Saudi pavilion, documentation of the state-sponsored narrative presented at that pavilion and comparison with messages disbursed by pavilions of other countries. Saudi Arabia's introduction of an alternative narrative/ image was identified through analyzing official Saudi websites of projects like Neom and Al-Ula, Saudi state company SABEC, as well as examining the official website of Vision 2030. Coverage of western and non-western media of the Saudi state's actions during the period under study was also monitored. Websites specialized in monitoring worldwide public relations and advertising activities, like 'PR Week' and 'Campaign Asia', were consulted for news about activities of firms contracted by the Saudi state. UN websites provided information about the interactions of the Saudi state with the international organization. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism and Politico provided useful content on Saudi Arabia's use of PR and lobbying agencies, as was Alexander Dukalskis

2018 book. Foreign policy magazine, as well as the website of the US Department of State were sources for foreign policy related content that informed the analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to categorize and organize my analysis of how the Saudi state responded to negative portrayal abroad. The search for public diplomacy models that captured the patterns of action of the Saudi state proved the usefulness of the Theory of Image Restoration. The theory captured well many of the actions taken by the Saudi state to change the narrative circulating about it following a crisis. However, the theory did not explain Saudi's decision not to take any action in response to some reputational attacks; it also did not explain the longer term actions of the Saudi state. I added another conceptual model, Nation Branding, to try to capture the state's actions to alter its image among Western publics.

Few resources provided a clear model to explain the process of nation branding. So, I interviewed a branding expert to understand the process. The interview was focused on understanding the nation branding model, and did not particularly focus on tourism or on the case of Saudi Arabia. Once I understood the process, I used the data collected earlier to determine whether Nation Branding was being used by the Saudi state. This eclectic approach allowed me to identify the presence of different long and short term strategies of response. However, like Image Restoration Theory, Nation Branding remained unable to explain all of the responses of the Saudi state to negative publicity. The analysis of how both models worked revealed a mechanism used by the state to control the narrative circulating about it abroad. When analyzing the use of tourism as a tool of public diplomacy, I showed in the chapter how that same mechanism summarized the way tourism policy may have been used by the Saudi state to alter its image abroad. Further analysis showed the usefulness of tourism policy in delivering public diplomacy goals.

In this chapter, the case study method has shown its effectiveness as a tool that uses multiple data sources to develop a contextualized understanding of the phenomenon to "confront theory by comparing it with empirical data" (Çakar and Aykol 2021, 21). Thematic analysis also proved very useful in the discussion of Saudi Arabia's nation branding process. In the section about creating a new persona, inductive semantic thematic analysis was used to arrive at the new positive personality traits that the Saudi state wanted to project about itself. To arrive at the prevailing negative personality traits in the previous chapter, a latent thematic analysis approach was used to match the different ways the state was described in western media to personality traits applicable to countries. Both the positive and negative traits were derived from the research on measuring nation brand personality, done by Jose Rojas -Mendez et al (Rojas-Mendez, Papadopoulos, and Murphy 2013, 56). In both cases, descriptions of Saudi Arabia in media, interviews, official documents and websites were mapped to personalities of countries after being categorized using thematic analysis.

Conclusion

This dissertation makes use of the opportunities afforded by the case study method. An in depth exploration of the context of the case study was enabled using qualitative research methods. Desk research, interviews, textual analysis and image analysis provided the content that was later

analyzed using content analysis and process tracing. The result is thick and rich descriptions of different aspects of the Saudi Arabian context, allowing the reader to understand the Saudi foreign policy goals, challenges relating to the Kingdom's perception in the West, and the tools used by the Saudi state to alter its image internationally.

This chapter explained the different methodological tools that helped answer the research question and addressed the philosophy that guided the research approach. The chapter commenced by restating the research problem, aims and question. It then proceeded to discuss the interpretive philosophy that governed the dissertation research. The advantages of the research's qualitative design were then discussed, before proceeding to a discussion of the advantages of the dissertation's 'case study' research strategy. The advantages and disadvantages of the sampling strategies and the techniques used to collect data were presented, before introducing the 'Thematic Analysis' method used to analyze the data. Explanation of the iterative processes of data collection and data analysis typical of the case study strategy and the qualitative research design were provided using examples from the substantive chapters of the dissertation.

The next chapter starts the process of answering the research question by exploring the challenge the Saudi state finds itself in as it relates to its image in the West.

Appendix of Chapter 3

Table 5- Comparison between Interpretivist and Positivist Methodologies (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011, 113)

	Interpretive Methodology	*Positivist Methodology*
Research orientation	• meaning-making • contextuality (in re. knowledge) • hermeneutic–phenomenological sensibility: explanatory description (answering "why?") • constitutive causality	• measurement • generalizability (in re. knowledge) • prediction tied to causal laws (answering "wherefore?") • mechanical causality
Design attitude	• abductive logic of inquiry: iterative, recursive, starting from surprise/ puzzle/tension deriving from expectations vs. lived experiences • prior knowledge, expectations (experiential, theoretical) • dynamic flexibility in implementation of design as learning occurs • participants = agents with valued local knowledge; researchers as experts in processes of inquiry • research as "world-making"	• deductive logic of inquiry; inductive logic as precursor to deductive inquiry • clarity of model; prior experiential knowledge deemed irrelevant or potentially biasing • fixed, a priori design; control • participants = subjects, informants; researchers as subject-matter experts • objective description
Getting going	• educated provisional sense-making; start with prior knowledge > the hermeneutic circle-spiral • investigating • access questions; choices: of settings, actors, archives, documents, . . . (relational turn in field research; ethical and power dimensions; active learning in the field)	• theories > concepts > hypotheses > variables • testing • case selection; researcher in control (access is subordinated to selection)
In the field or archives	• mapping for exposure and intertextuality • bottom-up, *in situ* concept development (learning) • exploration of concepts in ordinary language, local knowledge terms • revise design as needed	• sampling • a priori concept formation (separated from operationalization) • operationalization of concepts • changed research question requires research re-design and re-start
Analysis of evidence	• hermeneutic sensibility: coherence, logic of argumentation, . . .	• falsifiability
Evaluative standards	• trustworthiness • systematicity • reflexivity, transparency; engagement with positionality	• validity, reliability, replicability • rigor • objectivity

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Chapter 4: The Negative Image of Saudi Arabia in the Western World

Introduction

This chapter provides a snapshot of the negative image of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in the West. It contributes to the overall dissertation by clarifying the parts of the research question, thesis statement and hypothesis which refer to the negative image of the Kingdom among Western public audiences, where the Research question asks: "How does the Saudi state use tourism policy to serve its goal of altering its negative image among Western public audiences?", and the thesis statement declares that: "Tourism policy is used by the Saudi state as a tool of public diplomacy to alter its image among Western publics" [7]. The chapter also contributes to the dissertation by providing the necessary context needed to understand both how this image affects the attainment of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy goals (discussed in Chapter 5) and the actions taken by the Saudi state to improve its image abroad (discussed in Chapters 6 and 7).

The negative image of Saudi Arabia in the West has domestic and external sources. Its human rights violations against its own citizens and residents within the country and abroad has negatively affected its image among Western publics. At other times, these impressions were a result of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. Not all projections of the Kingdom's image, however, emerge from its own actions. Caricatures of the Saudi citizen and state in Western pop culture have done much to create and perpetuate a negative stereotype about the Kingdom and its inhabitants (Khatib and Maziad 2019). The effect of this unfavorable coverage has been the reproduction of a negative reputation and persona of Saudi Arabia among Western publics. A thematic analysis I conducted of the image of the Kingdom has unearthed several negative personality traits associated with it in the minds of Western audiences. The KSA's ranking on the Nation Brand Index since 2020 also indicate that its image continues to suffer as a result of past damage.

The first section of this chapter contains the introduction, which outlines the main contents of the chapter and its relevance to the research question and the thesis statement and hypotheses. The second section outlines thematic groupings of actions habitually taken by the Saudi state and criticisms of these actions in the West, with examples from Human Rights reports, International Organizations and bodies, as well as Western news media. The third section gives an insight into the effect of negative media coverage on the reputation and image of the Saudi state in the West. Finally, the conclusion of the chapter summarizes these points and leads the reader to the succeeding chapters.

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[7] Research question "How does the Saudi state use tourism policy to serve its foreign policy goal of altering its negative image among Western public audiences?"
Thesis Statement: Tourism policy is used by the Saudi state as a tool of public diplomacy to alter its image in the West by activating the narrative control mechanism.
H1: Saudi tourism policy addresses a foreign policy goal and need
H2: Outward targeting elements of Saudi tourism policy can influence the state's image abroad using the same mechanism employed by several Saudi public diplomacy tools
H3: Saudi tourism policy meets the definition of public diplomacy and delivers the goals of public diplomacy

Saudi State Behaviors that Affect Its Image Among Western Publics

Saudi State behaviors that affect its image among Western publics were categorized in this section using a thematic analysis of the research findings (as discussed in Chapter 3). The main themes were found to be: breaking international norms; treatment of detainees; unusual punishments; due process violations, violation of women's rights; religious intolerance; and low tolerance for dissent. Two areas not relating to dissidence which have also received negative Western media and civil society attention were the Saudi led coalition in Yemen and fossil fuel production. Sources for this research have included western media, social media, media experts, human rights organizations, analyses made by media experts, indexes, dissident statements, as well as statements from governments and international organizations.

Breaking International Norms

Conducting assassinations on foreign soil breaks international norms and reflects poorly on the perpetrating country's image if discovered. One year after MBS was named Crown Prince, the extra judicial execution of *Washington Post*'s journalist Jamal Khashoggi in a Saudi consulate in Türkiye did tremendous damage to the image of Saudi Arabia in the West. The world waited for days to hear news of the missing Saudi dissident, with major news agencies covering the disappearance and the Turkish accusations that the journalist was murdered (BBC News 2018b; Wamsley 2018). A demonstration outside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul was widely covered by international media (Underwood 2018) and the disappearance was even commented on by US president Trump and Vice President Mike Pence (CBS News 2018). Media later revealed that Khashoggi was assassinated and dismembered by Saudi officials inside the consulate (BBC News 2018a; 2018b). Not only was the story covered in media around the time it happened in October 2018 (BBC News 2018a**)**, but documentaries and reports continued to be made about it in following years (DW 2020b). A CIA report concluded that the Crown Prince himself was behind the assassination (Barnes 2018). The story reinforced the negative image of Saudi Arabia as a state that violated human rights, perpetrated violence against its own citizens and broke international norms (The Independent 2018).

The Saudi state's "transnational repression" was criticized by Western news media, as the Saudi state was reported to target dissidents in person, digitally, and by proxy. An Associated Press report said that the FBI has uncovered that at least since 2017, critics of the Saudi regime in the US have been "monitored, harassed and threatened" through in-person and digital means. Saudis living abroad have been beleaguered through intimidation, online harassment, surveillance, spying, trying to compel them to return to the KSA, and targeting of their friends and family members in Saudi Arabia (Da Silva and Smith 2022; Simon 2022; Knickmeyer 2022; Debre 2022). Amnesty International and University of Toronto's Citizen Lab have accused Saudi Arabia of targeting Saudi activist and permanent resident Omar Abdulaziz in Canada with the intention of infecting his phone with the Pegasus spyware (Marczak et al. 2018; Amnesty International 2018). Freedom House accused the Kingdom of taking action against critics in 14 countries including the USA and Canada" (Knickmeyer 2022).

A highly publicized incident of the Kingdom undertaking illegal activities outside of its national borders was the case of Twitter espionage. According to the FBI "this case exposes attempts by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to illegally obtain personally identifiable information in order to target critics and dissidents" (U.S. Department of Justice 2022). Media reported that Saudi agents courted three Twitter employees and provided them with financial incentives. One of these employees "began secretly accessing accounts of users who were critical of the Saudi government and sharing their email addresses and phone numbers with the [Saudi] government agent" (Collier 2022). The scheme had happened in 2015, before King Salman ascended the throne. However, the sentencing of one of the perpetrators, Ahmad Abuammo, by the US courts in December 2022 brought new negative visibility for the KSA. Another former Twitter employee, Ali Al-Zabarah, is believed to have accessed thousands of Twitter accounts on behalf of Saudi Arabia (Reuters 2022). French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that these two former employees took advantage of their employment at Twitter "to access confidential Twitter data about users, their email addresses, phone numbers and IP addresses, the latter of which to be used to identify a user's location" (Le Monde 2022). *The Guardian* reported that this Twitter breach allowed the Saudi government to detect the identities of those who had been criticizing it from anonymous Twitter accounts. Moreover, it is suspected that the sentencing of an aid worker named Abdulrahman al-Sadhan to 20 years in prison is connected to this infiltration, as he had been accused of "[using] a popular anonymous parody account to mock the Saudi government" (Kirchgaessner 2022b).

Low Tolerance for Dissent

The Saudi state's tolerance for criticism or calls for reform has been low under King Salman and MBS with severe punishments to those who spoke against the policies of the state. The world expected that would change under MBS given his interest in enacting social and economic reforms like reducing restrictions on women and opening the country up for tourism and events. However, he showed soon after assuming power that criticism by any individual of any faction of society would be severely punished. Those who have been punished have included liberals, conservatives, commoners, royalty, men, women, older persons, minors, nationals and dual citizens. Jamal Khashoggi is one of the most known victims of this no tolerance policy. Holding an American citizenship did not spare him from the Saudi state's disciplining arm. Saad Al-Madi, 72-year-old Saudi American was captured and sentenced to 19 years in prison during a visit to Saudi Arabia for tweets he had posted from the USA. He was released after one year but is currently banned from leaving the Kingdom (Khan 2023; Moloney 2023; Knickmeyer 2022; Simon 2022).

Nawaf Talal Rasheed, a prince from the Al-Rashid dynasty, a Qatari and Saudi Arabian national, is believed by the United Nations (UN) to be detained arbitrarily, since he disappeared in May of 2018, prompting the UN to call for ensuring "his right to physical and psychological integrity as well as due process" (OHCHR 2018). Religious clerics who have spoken against the government's liberalization policies have been punished as well. In 2018, Saudi prosecutors called for the execution of Sunni scholars Salman al Odah, Ali Al-Omari, and Awad al Qarni (Amon and Said 2018). One year before that, Human Rights Watch reported that

the government had conducted a wave of arrests of clerics "in what appeared to be a coordinated crackdown on dissent" (Human Rights Watch 2018). Human Rights Watch reported in March 2022 that the Saudi state reneged on its own promises to stop capital punishment against minors and ignored an international ban on the child death penalty. Abdullah al-Huwaiti was 14 when he committed his alleged crime and was imprisoned the six years already. After his previous death penalty conviction was overturned by the Saudi Supreme Court, he was sentenced to death again on new charges by a lower criminal court (Human Rights Watch 2022).

The incarceration of female activists in Saudi Arabia captured the interest of international media. The Associated press in 2018, for example, published a piece titled "A closer look at 10 arrested Saudi women's rights activists" (Batrawi 2018). Reports by human rights group regularly provide updates on the maltreatment of women activists by the KSA. Amnesty international reported in 2020 that more than a dozen women's rights activists remain on trial in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia because of their activism. Eight of them were released, after what Amnesty called "arbitrary detention and torture" (Amnesty International 2019) because of "peacefully calling for women's rights and expressing their views" and for defending human rights. Although released, Iman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Amal al-Harbi, Ruqayyah al-Mharib, Shadan Al-Anezi, Abir Namankni, Hatoon al-Fassi, and an anonymous activist "remain at risk of being sentenced to prison under anti-cybercrime legislation" (Amnesty International 2020a).

Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Nassima al-Sada, Nouf Abdulaziz and Maya'a al-Zahrani remain in detention. Amnesty International reports that several of these activists spent months in jail, including spells of solitary confinement (Amnesty International 2019), and that at least ten of them have been denied access to their families or lawyers during their first three months of detention, and endured human rights violations that sometimes-included torture and sexual abuse (Amnesty International 2020a). The *Washington Post* reported that Salma Al-Shihab was sentenced to 34 years in prison, to be followed by 34 years travel ban, for "demanding the abolition of the country's guardianship system, which gives men legal control over certain aspects of female relatives' lives" and for calling "for the freeing of Saudi prisoners of conscience" (Dadouch and Timsit 2022). *The Guardian* reported that the Saudi state sentenced Noura Al-Qahtani to 45 years for crimes that included "using the internet and social media accounts to "spread lies through tweets" and that the state did not mention what the other crimes were (Kirchgaessner 2022a).

Unusual Punishments

The Kingdom's occasional practice of performing these capital punishments en masse further exacerbates its negative image in the West (Nabd 2022). In March of 2022, the High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet decried the mass execution of 81 persons in Saudi Arabia, as well as the country's execution of 37 men in 2019 (UN News 2022). Similarly, the action was condemned by the European Union. The EU's High Representative released a statement indicating the EU's strong opposition to the death penalty, declaring it "a cruel and inhumane punishment, which fails to act as a deterrent to crime and represents an unacceptable denial of human dignity and integrity" (EEAS 2022). The 2022 mass execution was widely reported by international media, including Aljazeera (Gambrell 2022), BBC (BBC News 2023a),

CBS news (CBS News 2022), NBC News (NBC News 2022), Reuters (Yaakoubi 2022), NPR (The Associated Press 2022a), and CBC (Gambrell 2022).

Saudi Arabia is one of 55 countries in the world that continue to retain the death penalty, according to an Amnesty International 2022 report (Amnesty International 2022a). As of April 2020, 800 executions were conducted under the reign of King Salman. According to two human rights organizations, Reprieve and the European Saudi Organization for Human Rights, executions increased by 82% under King Salman and Crown Prince MBS in comparison to the period 2010-2014, averaging 129 executions every year (Chulov 2023)[8]. A more recent report raises the average to 140 per year, double of that under previous monarchs. The report indicates that the total number of persons executed between 2015 and the end of 2023 has reached 1,275 (Purcell 2024). A report by Death Penalty Information Center placed the KSA as the country with the world's 4th highest number of confirmed executions after China, Iran, and Egypt for the year 2021 (Death Penalty Information Center 2022), and the country with the second highest number of confirmed executions after Iran in 2023 (Death Penalty Information Center 2022).

Many countries around the world moved away from the use of judicial corporal punishment in the last century. Saudi's continued use of it allows critics to paint a savage picture of the state and of its reliance on religious Sharia law. As recently as 2016, the UN Committee Against Torture "expressed grave concern with regards to the use of corporal punishment in Saudi Arabia, including flogging, stoning and amputations" (OHCHR 2016). Before King Salman assumed rule, Saudi's corporal punishment of flogging received wide coverage when a Saudi blogger was sentenced to 1000 lashes, and the first 50 floggings were administered in 2015. The coverage of the punishment in Western media like France24, BBC news, the Guardian (France 24 2022a; BBC News 2015; The Guardian 2015), and videos of the administration of the punishment shown on CNN (Pearson 2015) and other media outlets prompted demonstrations in Canada, France and Germany (France 24 2015a; Amnesty International Deutschland 2015). This global coverage may have contributed to the state's decision to prohibit flogging in 2020 (BBC News 2015).

The Saudi state is accused of punishing family members of dissidents when it is unable to reach the dissidents themselves. Saudi activist Omar Abdul Azeez, who is a political refugee in Canada, accused the Saudi state of threatening and incarcerating two of his siblings and several of his friends in Saudi Arabia when he refused to go back to the Kingdom (عمر بن عبدالعزيز الزهراني, n.d.; عمر بن عبدالعزيز 2023 ; Marczak et al. 2018; Perper, n.d.).

Due Process Violations

A recurrent negative point raised against Saudi Arabia in the West is its legal process. This applies to political dissidents as well as to those investigated under criminal charges. The High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet noted that there are allegations that confessions of some of those who were mass executed in 2019 were obtained through torture (Haas 2019). She also voiced concern "over a lack of due process and fair trial guarantees" (Haas 2019). Amnesty International also accused Saudi Arabia of imposing death penalties "after

[8] Compare this to the Unites States' five-year average of 26.6 per year (Death Penalty Information Center 2022).

proceedings that did not meet international fair trial standards" (Amnesty International 2022a). In a press release about women's rights activist Loujain Al-Hathloul's trial, Amnesty International reported that "all of her court sessions have been closed, with diplomats and journalists prevented from attending" (Amnesty International 2020b).

The UN expressed concern over the treatment of several Saudi dissidents. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a statement in 2018 expressing concern over the detention of six women and three men whose whereabouts were unknown at the time of the issue of the statement, one of them not being allowed to contact her family, and the potential of the detainees being issued draconian sentences. The OHCHR called on the Kingdom "to reveal their locations, and ensure their rights to due process guarantees […] the right to legal representation, the right to know the reason for their arrests, the nature of the charges against them, the right to have access to their families, the right to challenge the legality of their detention before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal and if charged with an offense, the right to be brought to trial within a reasonable period of time" (OHCHR 2018).

The Saudi state has been receiving criticisms from the West regarding a number of its laws and legal structures. For example, the European parliament criticized the Saudi Anti-Terrorist Law, the Anti-Cybercrime Law and the Press and Publications Law, for being used repeatedly to prosecute human rights defenders (European Parliament 2018). The State's creation of a "Specialized Criminal Court" in 2014 to try terrorism related offenses was interpreted as a way to prosecute dissidents. The sentences made by this court were notably long and harsh. Human rights groups accused the Kingdom of using that court "to suppress political expression and dissent" as the state tried citizens Essam Koshak and Issa al-Nukheifi "on charges solely related to their human rights work" (Human Rights Watch 2018). Several activists who were sentenced by the Court before the ascension of King Salman continue to serve long detention sentences. For example, activist Raif Badawi is serving a 10-year sentence, while his lawyer Waleed Abu Al-Khair was sentenced to 15 years in prison (Human Rights Watch 2018). An appeals court, in 2018, upheld an eight-year sentence against Abd al-Aziz al-Shubaily, an activist member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) which the Kingdom had banned (Human Rights Watch 2018).

Human Rights Watch also criticized the country for "due process violations in the court and criminal justice system against defendants in criminal cases" (Human Rights Watch 2022). It claimed that it has documented violations that include long periods of arrest without charge or trial, a lack of legal assistance, pressure on the accused to sign confessions and accept predetermined prison sentences to avoid prolonged arbitrary detention, and ineffective or malicious translation services for defendants. Human Rights Watch reported the case of a Jordanian who was executed on drug charges after an "unfair trial" (Human Rights Watch 2023).

Women's Rights Violations

Women do not share equal status to men in Saudi Arabia in several areas of life. This has been a source of continued criticism for the Kingdom in the West. The scores on the World Economic Forum's [WEF] Global Gender Report reflected the level of access women had to resources and

opportunities relative to men across four subindexes within the country: Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, Political Empowerment, and Economic Participation and Opportunity (Vizzuality, n.d.). The report indicates that women have almost equal opportunities in 'Educational Attainment' and 'Health and Survival' in the Saudi state. This is consistent with the UN's 'Gender Data Gaps and Country Performance' Index. It showed very high literacy rates among females and males, 95.3% and 92.7% respectively, with low rates of out of school children in both the primary and lower secondary education, at 3.8% for girls, and 2.8% for boys (UN Women, n.d.).

However, Saudi Arabia's gender gap scores in the WEF report are severally impacted by the gender inequality present in 'Political Empowerment' and 'Economic Participation and Opportunity' (WEF, n.d.). In the eight years since King Salman ascended the throne the gap in participation has shrunk. However, its overall rank and overall gap scores continued to show poor conditions for Saudi women in comparison to men. In comparison to the rest of the world, the Kingdom ranked very low in terms of equality, placing 131st among 146 countries studied.

UN Women ranked the Kingdom as low performance on the 'gender data gaps and country performance' index, based on 72 gender specific sustainable development goals [SDGs] indicators in the Women Count Data Hub's SDG Dashboard. The UN Women's report showed that 19.9% of seats in the Saudi parliament were held by women, while the proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government was 1.2%. It also indicated that the proportion of women in managerial positions was only 6.8%, while women's unemployment rate was 22.6% compared to men's unemployment rate of 2.9% (UN Women, n.d.).

Table 6- Saudi Arabia's Rank on the WEF Global Gender Gap Report (WEF 2015; WEF 2023)

Year	Global Rankings Overall Global Rank	Global Rankings Overall Gender Gap	Economic Participation & Opportunity Gender Gap	Educational Attainment Gender Gap	Health and Survival Gender Gap	Political Empowerment Gender Gap
2015	134 out of 145	0.605	0.387 Ranking 138	0.988 Ranking 82	0.966 Ranking 129	0.077 Ranking 121
2023	131 out of 146	0.637	0.521 Ranking 130	0.986 Ranking 87	0.964 Ranking 114	0.077 Ranking 131
		1= full equality between women and men 0 = full inequality between women and men				

Media stories of women fleeing the country and the attempt of their families or the state itself to bring them back drew negative attention to the Kingdom. Saudi teen Rahaf Mohammad, spoke of injustices, abuse and control perpetrated by families against female members, aided by the male guardianship system enforced by the state (CBC News: The National 2019). Human Rights Watch described the system as "the most significant impediment to women's rights in the country" because it treats women as legally minor throughout their lives" (Human Rights Watch 2019), where key decisions need to be taken by a male relative like a father or husband, but

sometimes a brother or a son. In 2018, *The National Post* reported that "the guardianship system is not written law but has been customary in the region for hundreds of years" and that it was equated by critics to slavery "with the woman's ownership being passed from one man to another" (The National Post 2018). The EU parliament expressed concern over the prevalence of gender-based violence in Saudi Arabia and urged the Saudi authorities "to adopt comprehensive legislation to specifically define and criminalize all forms of gender-based violence against women" (European Parliament 2018). It also called the Saudi political and social systems discriminatory, making women second-class citizens (European Parliament 2018).

In 2019, Amnesty International applauded the Kingdom's elimination of some of the restrictions imposed through the male guardianship system. These included removing the requirement for the approval of a guardian to allow women aged over 21 years the right to obtain a passport or travel. Another was allowing women to register the birth of a baby, the death of a relative, as well as marriage and divorce if they were over 18 years old. However, it concluded by declaring that "the authorities' failure to abolish the male guardianship system in its entirety and instead codifying it in law risk undermining these modest gains" (Amnesty International 2022b). The codification of some parts of the system in 2021 in the Personal Status Regulation was announced by Saudi Arabia as a social reform project, but human rights groups emphasized that it continued to contain many elements that allow the control of women by male relatives.

Amnesty International, for example, stated that it "fails to adequately protect women from domestic violence, and entrenches a system of gender-based discrimination in marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance" (Amnesty International 2022). Amnesty International further declared that it "perpetuates the male guardianship system and codifies discrimination against women in most aspects of family life". An example is article 42 of the regulation which states that the obligations of the husband are to financially provide for his wife, while the obligations of the wife are to obey her husband and to nurse their children (BOE 2022). The new law's failure to address recurring issues is highlighted in human rights' groups analyses. This includes the need for a male guardian to approve women's exit from jail and sometimes from shelters, when they had possibly been in those shelters because of the guardian's abuse (Salem 2021).

Religious Intolerance

The Saudi state has been accused by Western media of religious oppression, especially in relation to treatment of its Shiite minority (Belot 2016; BBC News 2016). When covering the 2019 mass executions, NBC News reported that most of the citizens beheaded in 2019 were Shiites (NBC News 2022). CBS News noted that most of the 37 Saudi citizens who were executed by the Saudi state in 2016 for alleged terrorism crimes were also minority Shiites (CBS News 2022). Similarly, *The Washington Post* reminded readers when covering the story of Salma Al-Shehab that she was Shiite, and referenced Human Rights Watch's annual report mentioning "continued oppression of Muslim religious minorities including Shiites" (Dadouch and Timsit 2022). University of Toronto's Citizen lab published a report in 2014 exposing hacking software used against Shia minorities in Saudi Arabia through a backdoored copy of a legitimate Android news app (Singh 2015).

The country also receives negative publicity in the media because of the lack of religious freedom experienced by non-Muslims. On a visit by the head of the Vatican's Council for Inter-religious Dialogue to Saudi Arabia, cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran called for non-Muslims to be treated equally in the KSA. The news agency reporting on the visit reminded that non-Muslim worship or practices are prohibited in the Kingdom (Pullella 2018). To date, other than mosques, houses of worship are not allowed in Saudi Arabia (USCIRF 2023; Evason 2019; Fahmy 2018). CNN conveyed that the US State Department's Report on Religious Freedoms, presented to the Congress in 2018, stated that the Kingdom continues "to be one of the worst actors in the world on religious persecution" (Hansler 2019). CNN also mentioned that the report criticized the Saudi laws for criminalizing 'the promotion of atheistic ideologies in any form; any attempt to cast doubt on the fundamentals of Islam; publications that contradict the provisions of Islamic law; and conversion by a Muslim to another religion; and proselytizing by a non-Muslim" (Hansler 2019).

The Saudi state's hostility towards homosexuality leads to negative publicity in the West. BBC reported that "under the country's interpretation of Islamic law, consensual same-sex sexual conduct is "punishable by death or flogging", depending on the perceived seriousness of the case (BBC News 2022). A local TV station showed a video on its website of rainbow-colored children's toys in the capital Riyadh being confiscated by the authorities because "they promoted homosexuality" (قناة الإخبارية [@alekhbariyatv] 2022). France 24 reported on Saudi and Yemeni influencers being jailed for defying society's morals, being openly gay, or defying gender roles. Those persecuted include Tala Safwan who is now imprisoned, Suhail al-Jameel who was released from prison in October 2022, and Mohamad al-Bokari who was deported to his home country of Yemen and has since sought and received asylum in a European country (The Observers 2022). Human Rights Watch reported that out of 35 Pakistani citizens arrested in February 2017 by the Saudi police, several were transgender women. One of these women died in detention, and according to family, her body bore signs of torture (Human Rights Watch 2018).

Abuses of Migrant and Domestic Workers' Rights

Human rights organizations have brought to light the plight of migrant workers, whose abuse had been facilitated for decades by the kefala system, which restricted their ability to change employers or to travel outside Saudi Arabia without the approval of their sponsor (Bouri 2023). Migrants who are of non-Muslim faiths are not allowed to practice their religion openly (U. S. Mission Saudi Arabia 2023). Poor living conditions, low salaries, and inhumane treatment of unskilled workers in the KSA have been recurring themes in human rights reports. The most vulnerable of the foreign workers group have been domestic workers who are not covered by many of the regulations that protect other migrant workers. The Saudi sate has enacted new legislations since the advent of King Salman that have somewhat improved the conditions of these categories of foreign workers, but many still suffer from passport confiscation, long work hours with no overtime compensation, and low safety conditions including emotional, physical and even sexual abuse (ADHRB 2024).

Saudi's Foreign Policy

The Saudi Led Attack on Houthis in Yemen[9]

Between September of 2014 and February of 2015, Houthi forces attacked and eventually ousted the Yemeni government. In March of 2015, Saudi Arabia led an Arab coalition of several countries in fighting the Houthis (Wintour 2023). This was a case of a proxy war between two competing powers in the region, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and two competing sects and political rivals- the Shiite Houthis supported by Iran, and the government of Yemen backed by the Sunni Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan, Sudan, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, and Qatar. By 2018, the coalition of the above mentioned countries expanded to include forces from Eritrea and Pakistan (Robinson 2023b). BBC reported that this war led by the Kingdom was a result of the latter's alarm at the "prospect of the Houthis taking control of Yemen, fearing it would become a satellite of Saudi Arabia's rival, Iran". Once the Saudi led intervention started, Houthis responded by attacking strategic targets in Saudi Arabia (Ammar, Pugmire, and Gambrell 2022; Debre 2022) via drones, sophisticated cruise and ballistic missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and other stand-off weapons (Jones et al. 2021).

At that time of the start of the campaign in Yemen, King Salman had only recently assumed the throne and MBS was the Minister of Defense. Intelligence and logistical support were provided by the USA, France and the UK (BBC News 2023b), who had hoped the Saudi-led attack would have a clear cut and fast win (Ottaway 2015). This proved difficult. The Saudi-led air campaign has hit many civilian targets, including weddings, a funeral hall, and detention facilities (Ottaway 2015; HRW 2022; Bazzi 2018; Craig 2022). Air strikes going for a second round, attacking those attempting to rescue the injured in the first strike also generated much negative publicity (BBC World Service, n.d.). The coalition imposed a Saudi led blockade on Houthi-controlled seaports and Sanaa airport (NBC News 2023), halting the entry of food and fuel supplies to the Houthi controlled areas. The civil war, blockade, and general internal security breakdown, resulted in a quick spiraling down of the conditions for Yemeni people throughout the country, resulting in famine, displacement of millions, and diseases like cholera spreading widely.

Harrowing human suffering has included the death of 377,000 persons because of war or hunger, lack of healthcare and unsafe water. By 2023, more than 11,000 children died or were injured (BBC News 2023b). As a party to this war and leader of the coalition, Saudi Arabia received much criticism. The extent of the human suffering, combined with the frequent civilian casualties of the coalition attacks have reflected negatively on Saudi's image in the West. Members of the public in the West protested the Saudi involvement in Yemen by demonstrating outside Saudi embassies (The Independent 2018). The Kingdom, along with its Houthi enemies, were placed on a list of shame by the UN for killing and maiming and attacks on schools and hospitals (SRSG-CAAC 2016). The list, a part of the UN Secretary General's Annual report on

[9] As of April 2023, Iran and Saudi Arabia have resumed diplomatic relations with the mediation brokered by China. Omani mediation between Houthis and the government of Yemen has led to an agreement on a long cease fire, and talks between the Saudis and Houthis have begun. Source: NBC News. "Saudi Arabia Meets with Iran-Backed Houthis in Effort to End Yemen War." *NBC News*, 10 Apr. 2023, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/yemen-saudi-arabia-houthis-iran-backed-war-rcna78893.

children and armed conflict said the Saudi-led coalition was responsible for 60% of child deaths and injuries in Yemen in 2015 (BBC 2016)[10]. The Kingdom was additionally negatively featured in the news when Secretary General Pan Ki Moon said that the UN was under pressure from Saudi Arabia, as it threatened to cut funding to UN agencies if it was not removed from that list (UN News 2016; Reuters 2016; BBC 2016). Four years later, a UN blacklist of those whose actions harm children found that 222 children were killed or injured in 2019 by the coalition. Again, the media reported shortly afterwards that the Kingdom was removed from the list by the UN, and human rights groups made statements protesting that removal (BBC News 2020).

Fossil Fuel Production

Saudi Aramco is reported to be one of the largest corporate greenhouse emitters (The Associated Press 2022b). The oil company is almost fully owned by the Saudi state, and in 2022 made profits of US$ 1616.1 billion, the most profit ever disclosed by a company in a single year to that date (Amnesty International 2023a). Amnesty International called on the Saudi government to use the profits to "fund a human rights-based transition to renewable energy" (Amnesty International 2023a). In response for calls for action to curb the increase in carbon emissions resulting from fossil fuels, Saudi Arabia announced, at the Kingdom's first-ever Saudi Green Initiative Forum, that it aims to reach "net zero" greenhouse gas emissions by 2060 (AlJazeera 2021). Aramco is planning to use new technologies to reduce and eventually eliminate the emissions produced during the extraction process. These technologies include carbon capture, utilization and storage; direct air capture; and production of new hydrogen and low carbon fuels (AlJazeera 2021).

Environmentalists accuse oil companies of green washing their polluting activities by using climate friendly pledges (The Associated Press 2022b). Environmental groups like Green Peace, accused Saudi Arabia of "enabling nations to continue burning fossil fuels by pushing carbon capture technology". It further stated that these "as-yet unproven technologies" would allow nations to emit more greenhouse gases on the optimistic assumption that they could draw them out of the atmosphere later" (AlJazeera 2021)". Aramco's announcement of the creation of a 1.5$ billion sustainability fund (The Associated Press 2022b) was seen as a way of extending the life of its fossil fuel business rather than fighting climate change (The Associated Press 2022b). Instead, scientists called on Saudi Arabia and Aramco for action to reduce emission generated by oil consumption, which are a much greater contributor to fossil fuel greenhouse gases (Walt 2022).

While Saudi Arabia's reputation was attacked by environmental agencies for producing too much fossil fuel, the country has also suffered from criticisms for not producing enough when requested to do so by the USA. The Western world has been sensitive to the extent of power Saudi Arabia holds as a result of its position as the owner of 17% of the world's oil reserves (OPEC, n.d.), and the competitor for the position of the world's largest oil producer against the USA and Russia (USA Today, n.d.). In July of 2022, the Kingdom was asked during a visit by US President Biden to increase oil production to offset the petrol costs caused by the Ukrainian crises (Bland 2022). Saudi Arabia refused to do so. In fact, OPEC+, which includes Russia

[10] The report mentioned that six times more children were killed and maimed in Yemen in 2016 compared to 2014.

among its members, announced in the following October that its oil production will be reduced. A further cut was announced in April of 2023. Saudi spokesperson's response has been that its priority was the stabilization of world markets (CNBC International TV 2022a; Associated Press 2023). But Western media saw it as creating an advantage for Putin as the new higher prices offset reduced demand from European countries (Bland 2022). It was also a hit to Biden and the Democratic party just before midterm elections (Bland 2022; Smith, Alexander, and Williams 2022). The Kingdom was also accused of contributing to inflation by pushing up petrol prices "at a time of economic turmoil" (Bland 2022). America's promise of retaliation fired up further negative coverage in international media, as President Biden promised "consequences" and several senators called for freezing arms sales to the Saudi state as punishment (Bland 2022; Blumenthal, Khanna, and Sonnenfeld 2022).

Depictions in Pop Culture

Saudi Arabia deals with a legacy of negative perceptions of it in the eyes of the West. The suspected involvement of the Kingdom in the terrorist attacks of 9/11 contributed to the hostility of Western publics towards it. The 1973 oil embargo positioned the Kingdom as a source of national security and economic threat among Western governments. Books and films about fleeing princesses, caricature depictions of rich royals, and accounts of suffering foreign workers positioned the Kingdom as a cultural 'other' that was on the far extreme of the West's ideals of human rights and women's empowerment (Library Thing 2016; Shaheen 2003). For example, a book review of a story of an Australian nurse working in Saudi Arabia said: "It's an account of slavery in a country that has appalling human rights especially in regard to the treatment of women, and the book is a dire warning to those who are considering working there (Good Reads 2022)". The legacy of this image remains today, and is augmented by islamophobia, which extends to affect Western foreign policy (Moore-Carrillo 2020; Hamid 2023; UN, n.d.; Sandlin and Simmons 2022).

Saudi Arabia's Reputation and Persona Among Western publics

Insights from global surveys

Gallup's Perceptions of Foreign Countries

Despite a general improvement in the perception of the Kingdom in 2024, Gallup's 'Perceptions of Foreign Countries' (Gallup Inc, n.d.) indicates that the image of Saudi Arabia in the eyes of Americans remains generally negative. Fifty three percent of Americans surveyed have an unfavorable view of the Kingdom, only 38 per cent have a favorable opinion, while 8 per cent have no opinion of the country (See Table 8 in Appendix of Chapter 4). The percentage of those having a very favorable view are very low, only at 7% in 2024, and only slightly better than the years before King Salman became ruler[11]. Similarly, the percentage of those who held mostly favorable views of the KSA at 31 percent was less than the 45 and 40 per cent respectively of the early 1990s and early 2000s. In fact, the slight improvements in American perception of Saudi

[11] With the exception of the years 1991, 2001, and 2013.

Arabia observed at the beginning of the Salman rule were reversed between 2019 and 2023. This is possibly correlated to the different human rights violations and foreign policy actions taken by Saudi Arabia domestically and abroad, and the continued negative portrayal of the Kingdom in Western media as highlighted in the earlier sections.

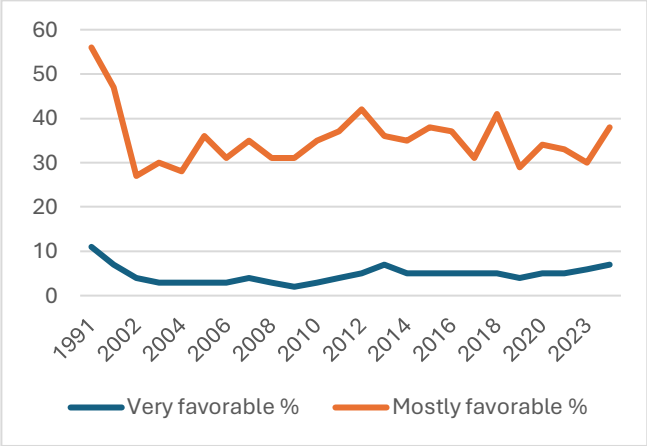


Figure 5- Favorable Views of the KSA among Americans According to the Gallup Survey of Perceptions of Foreign Countries 1991-2024[12]

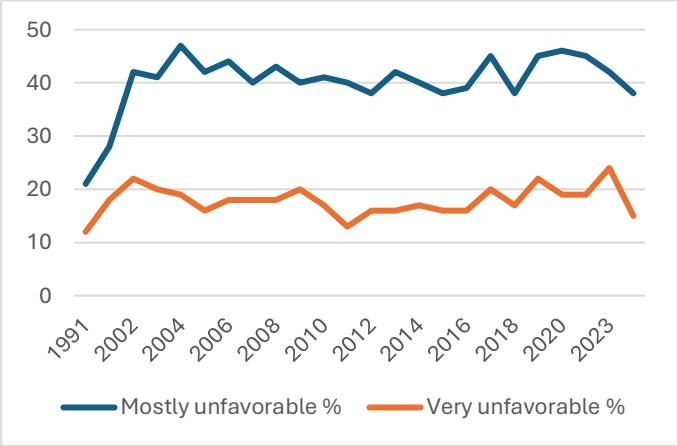


Figure 6-Unfavorable Views of the KSA among Americans According to the Gallup Survey of Perceptions of Foreign Countries 1991-2024[13]

The Nation Brand Index

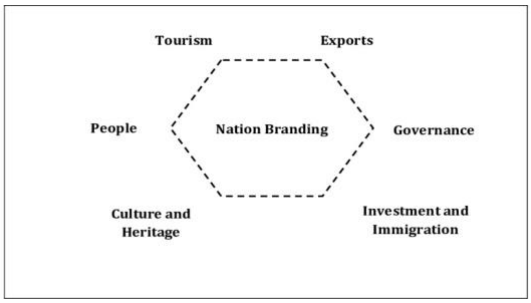
Since the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index started publishing measurements of the image of Saudi Arabia in 2020 in comparison to other nations, the Kingdom consistently ranked among the 10% of countries with the worst image. The index examines the global perceptions of the power and appeal of a country's brand image, by interviewing tens of thousands of adults in multiple countries[14]. The adults are surveyed about their perceptions of a country along six aspects of a nation's identity: immigration and investment, exports, governance, culture, people, and tourism (Ipsos 2023). Despite slight improvement in 2023, it still ranks low among the 60 nations on the Nation Brand Index[15] (Ipsos 2021; Ipsos 2022; Ipsos 2023)

[12] Created by the dissertation's author. Source: (Gallup Inc, n.d.)
[13] Created by the dissertation's author. Source: (Gallup Inc, n.d.)
[14] In 2023, around 60,000 adults were interviewed in 20 countries. https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-10/NBI_2023_Press_Release_Supplemental_Deck_WEB.pdf, p.6
[15] Rankings for Saudi earlier than the year 2020 are not available publicly.

Table 7- The KSA's Ranking on the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index 2020- 2023

Year	NBI Rank
2020	47 out of 50 countries
2021	55 out of 60 countries
2022	57 out of 60 countries
2023	54 out of 60 countries

Figure 7- The Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index Hexagon® (NBI 2022)



Persona

A thematic analysis of the way the Saudi state is described in different media revealed many unflattering perceptions of the Kingdom. The Saudi state's description can be summarized in the following words, expressed in terms of 'Personality Traits Applicable to Countries' as developed by Jose Rojas- Mendez (Rojas-Mendez, Papadopoulos, and Murphy 2013): closed, mysterious, violent, chauvinistic, racist, old fashioned, extremist, self-centered, traditionalist, narrow minded, and high-handed. As discussed in Chapter 3, these descriptions were arrived at using a process of thematic analysis of descriptions made by the dissertation's interviewees and in secondary sources consulted for this research, including news media and foreign policy podcasts. These sources identified different negative images that the Saudi state was trying to overcome. The KSA was described as anti-minorities (Interviewee #1 2022; Interviewee #2 2023); nurturing an extremist ideology (Arango 2018); being a place where women are oppressed and "are relegated to second-class status" (Arango 2018; Salam for Cultural Communication, n.d.); and appearing as an opaque and conservative kingdom (Arango 2018). The Saudi state was even described as scary (Cull and Anholt, n.d.; Dinnie 2009, 226-227), and "too rich with too much hard power" (Cull and Anholt, n.d.). Saudi Arabia was also perceived as a country of violence and cruelty and Saudis as extremists (Salam for Cultural Communication, n.d.; Interviewee #2 2023).

Conclusion

Western media and civil society organizations have long been critical of Saudi Arabia's human rights violations and its restriction of freedoms. High profile human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Freedom House and Human Rights Watch have publicized their accusations in global media and called on governments and publics to hold Saudi Arabia responsible (as discussed in Chapter 5). They have emphasized the Saudi kingdom's low tolerance for calls for political reform or for shows of dissidence. These organizations also have criticized the state's judicial processes, lack of transparency, poor conditions of incarceration

including torture and solitary confinement, and its resort to holding persons without trial or beyond their sentences, and for imposing unusually harsh punishments. Saudi's use of modes of punishment that have become unusual in modern times, like flogging and mass executions, has also been condemned by the UN, the media and human rights groups. Human rights organizations also criticized the use of vague laws and the setup of special courts to try defendants. Through these organizations' work, the names and stories of several Saudi detainees have received high media visibility in the West. The issue of the prosecution of women's human rights defenders has been given particular attention. Other gendered coverage has focused on the inequalities institutionalized in the male guardianship system, and on Saudi cultural norms. Religious intolerance and the treatment of low paid foreign workers have also been recurring negative themes in Western media. Saudi Arabia has also been portrayed negatively with regard to its leadership of the alliance fighting Houthis in Yemen. The high toll of civilian casualties of the war resulting from violence, famine and diseases has received significant coverage in Western media, and resulted in calls on Saudi Arabia and its allies to address the humanitarian crises the war has created. Finally, as one of the top producers of petrol in the World, Saudi Arabia has received negative coverage in the West from environmentalists and from political commentators in Western media.

This chapter provided an overview of the narrative that has circulated about Saudi Arabia in the West, particularly among Western public audiences. The next chapter will show the effect of this image on the achievement of the Saudi state's goals, and how that translates into making image management one of the foreign policy goals of the Kingdom. Subsequent chapters will show the alternative narrative presented by the Kingdom and the tools it has used to construct and disseminate that alternative narrative.

Appendix of Chapter 4

Table 8- Gallup's Perception of Foreign Countries: Saudi Arabia's Image in the Eyes of Americans 1991-2024 (Gallup Inc, n.d.)

Saudi Arabia's Image in eyes of Americans	Very favorable %	Mostly favorable %	Mostly unfavorable %	Very unfavorable %	No opinion %
2024 Feb 1-20	7	31	38	15	8
2023 Feb 1-23	6	24	42	24	3
2022 Feb 1-17	5	28	45	19	3
2020 Feb 3-16	5	29	46	19	1
2019 Feb 1-10	4	25	45	22	4
2018 Feb 1-10	5	36	38	17	5
2017 Feb 1-5	5	26	45	20	4
2016 Feb 3-7	5	32	39	16	8
2015 Feb 8-11	5	33	38	16	8
2014 Feb 6-9	5	30	40	17	8
2013 Feb 7-10	7	29	42	16	7
2012 Feb 2-5	5	37	38	16	5
2011 Feb 2-5	4	33	40	13	10
2010 Feb 1-3	3	32	41	17	7
2009 Feb 9-12	2	29	40	20	9
2008 Feb 11-14	3	28	43	18	8
2007 Feb 1-4	4	31	40	18	7
2006 Feb 6-9	3	28	44	18	7
2005 Feb 7-10	3	33	42	16	6
2004 Feb 9-12	3	25	47	19	6
2003 Feb 3-6	3	27	41	20	9
2002 Feb 4-6	4	23	42	22	9
2001 Feb 1-4 ^	7	40	28	18	7
1991 Aug 8-11	11	45	21	12	11

^ Asked of a half sample; * Less than 0.5%

Chapter 5: The Foreign Policy of the KSA Under King Salman and MBS

Introduction

This chapter explores the foreign policy goals of the Saudi Kingdom. Saudi foreign policy goals and strategies are an outcome of the state's efforts to address domestic and international pressures. Goals are used in this context to indicate "broad, long-term outcomes that are reasonable to achieve within a time frame and with available resources" [16]. Foreign policy strategy in this chapter means "the central guidelines for the country's foreign policy", describing how it "aims to safeguard its security, prosperity and independence as best as possible" (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA 2024).

Domestic pressures faced by the Saudi regime that influenced its foreign policy goals and strategies include, demographic challenges; calls for reform; fears regarding the sustainability of oil supply; and concern with regime survival. External pressures that have contributed to determining Saudi Arabia's foreign policy have included drops and fluctuations in oil prices; challenges to the regional balance of power; threats from neighboring Yemen; America's reduced interest in the Middle East; absence of peace and security in the region; and a negative image in the West.

Several foreign policy priorities have been identified by this research: Supporting the success of Vision 2030; continuing to cultivate a strong relationship with the US while maintaining autonomy to ensure meeting the Kingdom's best interests; stabilizing the energy market and keeping oil prices high; balancing against regional belligerent powers and restoring the status quo; weakening the Houthi threat; adopting a strategy of diversification in the state's relationship with great powers; reducing the disrupting effects of conflicts in the Middle East; and improving Saudi Arabia's image in the eyes of Western publics.

To identify the foreign policy priorities of Saudi Arabia, I conducted desk research, analyzed the actions of the Saudi state, undertook content analysis of statements of Saudi officials and official Saudi documents and media; and interviewed foreign policy experts, to try to answer two of the analytical question suggested by Derek Beach in "Analyzing Foreign Policy" (Beach 2012, 12-13) 'what do states want'? and 'what do states do?'. The sections below explore the current (and some past) domestic and external pressures faced by the Saudi state and regime, to answer the first question: 'what does the Saudi state want?'. The analysis is followed by an identification of the Saudi foreign policy priorities and strategies that emerged to mitigate these pressures, to answer the second question: 'What does the Saudi state do?'. I conclude with a summary of the findings.

This chapter adopts an eclectic approach to foreign policy analysis that considers both the domestic and the external structural factors affecting the foreign policy decisions of the state. It

[16] The Differences of Goals, Objectives, Strategies, & Tactics. *AchieveIt*, 7 Apr. 2022, https://www.achieveit.com/resources/blog/the-difference-between-goals-objectives-strategies-and-tactics/.

does not explore decision making at the individual level based on characteristics of the leader (Brummer 2021).

H1 states that the Saudi tourism policy addresses a foreign policy goal and need. Furthermore, the thesis statement, H2 and H3 assume that the Saudi tourism policy is a form of public diplomacy[17]. The dissertation adopts Derek Beach's approach whereby diplomacy is considered one of three ways states respond to foreign policy priorities, in addition to economic policy and security policy (Beach 2012, 12-13, 151). Therefore, it is important to identify what these Saudi foreign policy goals are that require a diplomatic response. The dissertation introduced the foreign policy goals of Saudi Arabia under the rule of King Salman and his son Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman [MBS] in this chapter, before proceeding to analyze, in following chapters, how tourism policy and other public diplomacy image altering instruments serve some of these foreign policy goals (discussed in Chapters 6 and 7).

The Domestic Pressures on the KSA and the Ensuing Foreign Policy Goals

Demographic Challenges

The Challenge

The KSA faces several demographic challenges. These include a large young population, with 63% of Saudis under the of age 30 (El Yaakoubi 2023). This youth bulge necessitates prioritizing the creation of new jobs, as the number of unemployed was estimated at more than two million persons in 2023 (Statista Market Forecast, n.d.). Another domestic challenge is dependency on expatriate workers. According to the 2022 census, 42% of Saudi Arabia's population of 32.2 million are foreign nationals (El Yaakoubi 2023). Dependency on expatriate workers in Saudi Arabia is, in part, due to a shortage among Saudi nationals in specializations desired by the private sector (Foulkes, n.d.). The state's response since 1999 has been the implementation of a Saudization program, whereby entities operating in the Kingdom are required to hire Saudi nationals according to set quotas (R Consultancy 2023). In addition to resorting to building the capabilities of its citizens through on-the-job-training and knowledge transfers within the workplace, the Saudi government also has been sending thousands of students annually, since the 1950s, to study abroad in a scholarship scheme aimed at "preparing and qualifying Saudi human resources" (NAFSA, n.d.; Taylor and Albasri 2014).

[17] Research question: "How does the Saudi state use tourism policy to serve its goal of altering its negative image among Western public audiences?"
Thesis Statement: Tourism policy is used by the Saudi state as a public diplomacy instrument to alter its image among Western publics.
My arguments to support the claim that Saudi Arabia's tourism policy is a public diplomacy instrument are the following:
H1: Saudi tourism policy addresses a foreign policy goal and need
H2: Outward targeting elements of Saudi tourism policy can influence the state's image abroad using the same mechanism employed by several Saudi public diplomacy tools
H3: Saudi tourism policy meets the definition of public diplomacy and delivers the goals of public diplomacy

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

One of the major goals of the Saudi foreign policy is to support the implementation of Vision 2030, a roadmap guiding the decisions of the Saudi bureaucracy to achieve "long-term economic success" for the Kingdom (The Embassy of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.). The Vision is designed to offer a domestic solution to the demographic challenges faced by the Saudi state. Vision 2030 responds to these demographic issues by promising "to lower the rate of unemployment from 11.6% to 7%" (Vision 2030 Overview, n.d.). Two of its overarching strategic goals are also linked to these challenges, "grow and diversify the economy" and "increase employment" (Grand and Wolff 2020a; Vision 2030, n.d.). Several Vision Realization Programs (VRP), cascading from the strategic objectives, also help address these demographic challenges, particularly the "Human Capital Development Program", the "National Character Enrichment Program", the "National Companies Promotion Program", the "National Industrial Development and Logistics Program", and the "National Transformation Program" (Grand and Wolff 2020a; Vision 2030, n.d.)[18].

Calls for Reform

The Challenge

Calls for reform emanating from within the Kingdom, particularly post the Arab Spring, pose another domestic challenge faced by the regime. These have included demanding more rights for women, minorities, and international workers.

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

The foreign policy goals resulting from this challenge is, again, supporting the implementation of Vision 2030. The Vision is designed to addresses these pressures by changing some of the unjust conditions causing the calls for reform, changing the quality of life of citizens, and building a new identity for the Kingdom's citizens. It pledged "to increase women's participation in the workforce from 22% to 30%" (Vision 2030 Overview, n.d.). The unemployment rate for Saudi females in the first quarter of 2023 stood at around 24.2% (General Authority for Statistics Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2023). In addition to granting women more civil rights, the government has sought to empower women economically by increasing their opportunities for economic participation[19].

Vision 2030 has promised to address human rights issues. It says: "As we build our own long-term future, we will remember our duty to respect these principles, which include […] being courteous to expatriates, and being conscientious of human rights" (Vision 2030 Overview, n.d., 72). The state aims to improve the quality of life of citizens to reduce frustration and opposition and change the mindset of the population to create more support for the regime and for the economic transformation process. These goals are addressed by the Vision's Realization

[18] See Appendix of Chapter 1, Table 3.

[19] See Appendix of Chapter 1, Table 3: Vision 2030 Targets, A Thriving Economy: "Increase women's participation in the workforce from 22% to 30%"

Programs of "National Character Enrichment Program", "National Transformation Program", "Quality of Life Program" and "Health Sector Transformation Program'", as well as the overarching strategic objectives of "strengthening Islamic and national identity" and "offering a fulfilling and healthy life" (Grand and Wolff 2020a; Vision 2030, n.d.)[20].

Fears Regarding the Sustainability of the Oil Supply

The Challenge

The Saudi state was shaken by warnings regarding the sustainability of its oil supply. In 2012, reports by Citi group warned that Saudi Arabia would no longer be able to export petrol by 2030, and that the Kingdom would need to start importing oil to meet its domestic demand (Daya and El Baltaji 2012; Bloomberg News 2012). Saudi Arabia has since discovered several new oil fields and improved extraction technology, pumping the life expectancy of its oil supplies by several decades (Rapier 2019). However, the end of the oil supply was a real concern for the state, as indicated in 2016 by then Foreign Minister Adel Al Jubeir: "Oil may or may not be around in 20 or 30 or 40 years. So, what do you do at that point, if you don't have an economy that is dynamic and self-sustainable and innovative?" (Surk 2016). In 2022, 80% of the Kingdom's export income came from international oil sales, 10% less than a decade earlier. These exports made up 40% of the state's GDP in 2022, 5% less than 2012. However, after Kuwait and Libya, the KSA remains the world's third most oil reliant country (MoheyEldin 2023).

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

These pressures have led the state to adopt a domestic goal of supporting Vision 2030, in order to diversify the economy (Interviewee #6 2023). Vision 2030 has set a target of raising the share of non-oil exports in non-oil GDP from 16% to 50%. It has also set targets for increasing Foreign Direct Investment's contribution to GDP from 3.8% to 5.7%, and strengthening domestic industries, including increasing the small & mediums enterprises' [SMEs] contribution to GDP from 20% to 35% (Chowdhury, n.d.; AlJazeera 2020).

Concerns About Regime Survival

The Challenge

Another driver of Saudi foreign policy has been regime security and concerns about regime survival. Not only did the current regime want to secure the reign of King Salman bin Abdul Azeez, but also to secure the position of his son Mohammad bin Salman [MBS] as Crown Prince (Lima 2023). As the 6th offspring of the 25th son of the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it was unlikely that MBS would one day rise to the position of the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, and its possible future King (Cao 2019). *The New York Times* said he had "charmed and plotted his way to the top of the kingdom's power structure" (Hubbard 2020a). Since the death of

[20] See Appendix of Chapter 1, Table 3.

the founder of the modern Saudi Kingdom, King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, in 1953, succession to the throne moved laterally among his children. The selection of King and Crown Prince was traditionally done by Hay'at al Bay'ah (Council of Allegiance), comprised of his sons, or their descendant representatives (Almarzoqi 2015). King Salman bin Abdul Aziz's decision was an unusual occurrence in Saudi Arabia , and "defied expectations and long-standing norms" by elevating his son over more senior rivals to appoint him as heir to the throne (Diwan 2021).

The ascension of MBS to the position of Crown Prince was sudden and its was believed to have happened by violent means. Western media has described the sudden removal of Prince Mohammed bin Nayef from the position of Crown Prince as a "coup", in which the former was forced to sign away his position by MBS and his associates (Chopra 2022). Prince Mohammad bin Nayef was later prohibited from leaving the country. Brookings Institute and Al-Jazeera reported that he was subsequently detained on charges of treason and accused of plotting a coup against the king and the crown prince (AlJazeera 2020; Riedel 2021). Western media also reported that he was additionally accused of diverting billions "through a network of front companies and private accounts while he was running Saudi counterterrorism programs at the Interior Ministry" (Ignatius 2020). According to analysts, the coup "destroyed the old succession model that prized seniority and consensus within the family" (Chopra 2022). Given that it disrupted the delicate balance of power-sharing among the different branches of the Saudi Royal family, it also "enabled MBS to amass more power than any previous ruler, even before he formally ascends the throne" (Chopra 2022).

MBS has resorted to other extreme measures to secure his position. Five months after he was appointed Crown Prince, his security forces rounded up several members of the royal family along with prominent business leaders and senior government officials and incarcerated them at the Ritz Carlton hotel. This was announced as an attack on corruption, and that narrative was supported by the state's announcement that 106-107 billion USD were recovered and deposited in state coffers (Chulov 2020; De Luce, Dilanian, and Windrem 2018). However, this action was also interpreted by analyts as "a way of eliminating opposition by intimidating challengers from the royal family, [and…] establishing dominance" (Dickey 2020). A senior U.S. official who was in office at the time declared the Ritz Carlton event as "… a shakedown […] and a power consolidation operation" (De Luce, Dilanian, and Windrem 2018). Power consolidation actions also include crackdown on dissidents, with punishments that range between harsh prison or death sentences, prohibition from leaving the country, and punishment of family members and friends, as described in Chapter 4. Within his own family, MBS is known to have also arrested his uncle Ahmad bin Abdul Aziz, accusing him of plotting a coup against King Salman with Prince Mohammad bin Nayef (Ignatius 2020). Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah, son of the late King Abdullah, was another close Royal who was arrested and stripped of all government duties (Cao 2019). MBS has also been rumored to arrange the crashing of a helicopter carrying his cousin Prince Mansour, son of former Crown Prince Muqrin (Cao 2019).

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

The resulting foreign policy to ensure regime security has been to continue to cultivate ties with America. Saudi state sought support for the King and the new Crown Prince from the American Administration. US National Affairs correspondent for "The Nation" magazine Heer Jeet

commented: "The Trumps took the existing American alliance with Saudi Arabia and pushed into a new level of personal devotion to MBS, whose position as crown prince was precarious and needed shoring up" (Heer 2023). President Trump endorsed the Ritz Carlton purge on his Twitter account (Trump 2017; Sokolsky 2017). Even after the killing of Khashoggi, Trump did not condemn Saudi Arabia. Author Bob Woodward claims that the President said to him in a book interview that he [Trump] protected Prince Mohammad after Khashoggi's murder. He said: "I saved his a**" "I was able to get Congress to leave him alone. I was able to get them to stop" (Aljazeera 2020). This happened despite the report by US Intelligence that the killers of Khashoggi were hired by MBS (Otten et al. 2022).

Saudi Arabia was the first stop on Trump's first international trip as president, signaling strong support for the monarchy and for King Salman and his son. Under Trump, US criticism to the Saudi state's cracking down on dissidents, human rights abuses and the humanitarian crises in Yemen caused by the Saudi military operation was muted (Heer 2023; Karni 2017).

The External Pressures on the KSA and the Ensuing Foreign Policy Goals

Decreases and Fluctuations in Oil Prices

The Challenge

Large decreases in oil prices have had significant negative short-term effects on Saudi Arabia. It is estimated that the drop in oil prices between 2014 and 2015 (see Figure 10) lowered the Saudi GDP by almost 13%, creating a public deficit in 2015 that is equivalent to 16% of GDP (Jawadi and Ftiti 2019). According to global accounting firm KPMG, this resulted in the Saudi state running budget deficits of USD 98 billion in 2015, and a further USD 79 billion in 2016, and caused a slowing in the Kingdom's economic growth (KPMG 2017). The 2015 oil price drop impact was so significant that international media reported that due to the persistently low prices, and the high spending incurred by the new King Salman government, that the IMF warned that Saudi Arabia was "heading for bankruptcy by 2020" (Matsangou 2015), unless it changed its economic policies (Walker et al. 2015).

The suffering of the Saudi economy due to large slumps in oil prices was felt again during the global pandemic. The year 2020 saw "the largest oil glut", whereby oil prices turned negative, with the price of an oil barrel reaching about $30 below zero at one point (Ristanovic, n.d.; Reed and Krauss 2020). The slump in revenues resulted in the Saudi government increasing the debt ceiling from 30% to 50%, borrowing 26.6 billion USD, and announcing austerity measures like raising value added tax (VAT) from 5 to 15%, reducing energy subsidies, and slashing government expenditures (Middle East and Africa Editor 2020; Grand and Wolff 2020b). More recently, in the second quarter of 2023, crude output cuts and a drop in oil prices slowed Saudi Arabia's economy. CNBC reported that the country's 2023 GDP only expanded by an annual 1.1% in the second quarter, in comparison to 3.8% in the previous quarter and 11.2% in the same period of 2022 (Iordache 2023).

Saudi Arabia is aware of the dangers of not moving away from its oil dependence, and of the paradox of needing to maintain high oil revenues to finance its transformation into a diversified economy. Historically, in the late 20th Century, it sustained budget deficits for one and a half decades because of low oil prices (see Figure 11). The economy of Saudi Arabia did not improve until oil prices finally recovered in the 2000s (IMF 2015). Following the upheavals of the Arab Spring, which were fueled by poor economic conditions and high unemployment in different parts of the Arab world, Saudi Arabia was cognizant of the need to take drastic action to avoid the same in its own front yard (Conan 2011). In December 2015, a report analyzing the future of the Saudi economy, following the acute fall in oil prices, predicted that "unemployment will rise rapidly, household income will fall, and the fiscal position of the national government will deteriorate sharply" (Grand and Wolff 2020b). Saudi Arabia's response has been to develop and implement Vision 2030 (Grand and Wolff 2020b).

Creating the conditions to implement Vision 2030 became one of the foreign and domestic policy priorities of the Saudi Kingdom. Vision 2030 requires enormous funding to implement its many ambitious plans and requires the maintenance of a significant stream of revenues from oil (Farouk 2023). The nosedive of Brent Crude prices in 2020 resulted in the Saudi government announcing an eight billion USD cut to its Vision 2030 budget (Sheejan 2020). The Saudi Finance Minister announced delays to some Vision 2030 plans in December of 2023 due to budget deficits that are projected to continue until 2026. High oil prices are needed to balance the budget and continue to finance the Vision. According to the IMF, crude oil prices should reach 86 USD per barrel if the Kingdom is to balance its budget (BNN 2023). To be able to refinance the Saudi Sovereign Wealth Fund, which the government had dipped into to finance some of its Vision 2030 plans, the price per barrel needed to rise to 110 USD in the second half of 2023, according to Bloomberg analysts (BNN 2023).

Figure 8- Ten Year Historical Crude Oil Prices (Macrotrends, n.d.)

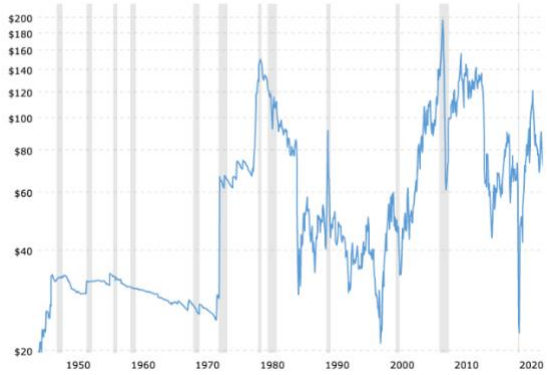


Figure 9- 70 Year Historical Crude Oil Prices (Macrotrends, n.d.)

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

Stabilizing the energy market and keeping oil prices high have emerged as foreign policy goals that aim to sustain high oil revenue streams for the Kingdom. The Kingdom's foreign policy goal of keeping oil prices high (HFIR 2020) helps balance its budget, diversify the economy on the

long run by supporting Vision 2030, and avoid austerity measures that create citizen dissatisfaction on the short run. Saudi Arabia's foreign minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud stated in May 2022, during a WEF panel: "…we will always focus on making sure that all markets are in balance on the oil side, and we have a commitment to the global community to do that" (CNBC International TV 2022a). In October of 2023, the Kingdom announced that it would continue its voluntary production cuts until the end of the year. Since July of that year, these had been about one million barrels a day (Dahan and Soldatkin 2023). In November, Bloomberg reported that the Kingdom had asked other members of OPEC+ to reduce their production, "in order to shore up global markets" (MacDonald, Smith, and El Wardany 2023). Analysts specialized in the Gulf region, like Kristian Coates Ulrichsen of Rice University, stated that determination of the Saudis to keep oil prices high stems from the need to fund ambitious mega-projects linked to Vision 2030 (Associated Press 2023).

Challenges to the Regional Balance of Power

The Challenge

Saudi Arabia faces a situation where several states in the region have been challenging the existing balance of power. Realist analysts would observe that Saudi Arabia is interested in balancing against the regional powers of Iran, Türkiye and Israel (Barzegar 2010; Ehsan 2023). Saudi Arabia emerged as the most dominant power among Arab countries following the Arab Spring which began in 2011, giving it an opportunity "to pursue efficient regional power politics against both its Arab and non-Arab rivals" (Felsch 2020, 132). For years, Saudi Arabia used financial aid to Arab governments to achieve some levels of control over their foreign and domestic policies (Dunne 2020; Institute of Politics and Society 2023).

John Mearsheimer linked hegemonic aspirations of a state with its desire to achieve economic and military dominance over its neighbors (Snyder 2002, 152). Below is a comparison of the military and economic capabilities of the four strongest Middle Eastern players in the region. Militarily, according to the Central Intelligence Agency, the Kingdom spent more on defense programs than its main rivals in the region, calculated as a percentage of GDP. Six per cent of Saudi Arabia's GDP was assigned to military spending in 2022, in comparison to Israel's 4.5%, Iran's 2.5%, and Türkiye's 1.3% [21](CIA The World Factbook, n.d.). However, Saudi Arabia's military power is surpassed by its three rivals in the region.

According to the 2023 Military Strength Rankings of the defense statistics website "Global Fire Power", Türkiye holds the highest ranking in the Middle East North Africa region (11th globally). It is a member of NATO and is home to NATO's second largest army (IISS 2019). Iran comes in third place after Egypt and ranks 17th globally. Israel is the fourth strongest nation militarily in the Middle East (18th globally) and surpasses Saudi Arabia which stands at 22nd place globally and fifth in the region (Al-Monitor 2023). Since 2021, Saudi Arabia has been shoring up its military capabilities by investing in the development of domestic military equipment manufacturing, aided by American firm Lockheed Martin. As per Vision 2030, half of

[21] The data provided by the CIA's World Factbook for Türkiye was for the year 2023, not 2022.

the government's military budget should be spent locally by 2030 (Vision 2030 Overview, n.d., 48). The Kingdom also aims to become an exporter of military equipment (Saballa 2022; Reuters 2021).

Economically, since 2015, the year of the ascension of King Salman, percentage growth in real GDPs of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel, showed inconsistent movements, and growth in different directions for the same years for the four regional hegemonic contenders (IMF, n.d.-a; n.d.-b ; 2023). Saudi Arabia experienced lower percentages of growth in real GDP compared to Türkiye, except in 2022. Türkiye's Gross Domestic Product was also higher than that of Saudi Arabia in 2022, at 1,146.19 and 1,108.15 billion US Dollars respectively (O'Neill 2023c). The Kingdom's GDP was significantly higher than that of Israel's 522.53 billion USD and Iran's 352.21 billion USD for the same period (O'Neill 2023b). The American sanctions on Iran, the war in Yemen, and the depreciation of the Turkish currency continue to put chronic stressors on the economies of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye respectively as they vie for economic supremacy, with changes in oil prices primarily affecting the KSA and Iran (Koç 2023; Motamedi 2022; Sharaby 2002).

Israel placed 14th in the list of the world's countries with the largest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 2022, indicating a high living standard of the population (O'Neill 2023a). None of the other regional hegemonic contenders made it to the top 20 list. Out of the four regional powers, only Saudi Arabia and Türkiye are members of the G20 group (G20 2023), giving them an advantage in shaping global economic trends, and an opportunity to represent the interests of other states in the region.

As the heavyweight of OPEC [The Organization of the Oil Producing Countries] and OPEC+ cartels, Saudi Arabia largely affects decisions of whether to increase production or reduce it, which affects global oil prices. In fact, the 1973 oil embargo by OPEC, and its effects on the Western world, are still remembered by many, and often taught to those who did not experience it (Daoudi and Dajani 1984). Most recently, Saudi Arabia was accused of supporting Russia against Ukraine when it refused to reduce oil production through OPEC+. Iran is also a member of OPEC (OPEC, n.d.).

In August of 2023, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Iran were invited to join the BRICS (Cotterill 2023). Economist Alexandre Kateb believes that the entrance of Saudi Arabia into BRICS is driven by several motivations: Asia being the primary purchaser of oil from the Middle East, with China leading the Asian consumers of Middle Eastern petrol. According to him "BRICS+ membership for Saudi Arabia […] may thus recalibrate the dynamics of this buyer-seller relationship with China within a single multilateral framework, and lead a better understanding of mutual interests, especially in terms of price setting and supply chains". According to Kateb, the entrance into BRICS+ is also incentivized by interest in investments into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and economic partnerships with India. In terms of global influence, aligning with the BRICS helps provide leverage to Saudi Arabia in global economic fora, as the BRICS bloc has been acting as a non-Western counter block to the G7 within the G20. It allows Saudi Arabia to be part of possible future developments of a "non-Western controlled multilateral framework" (Kateb 2024).

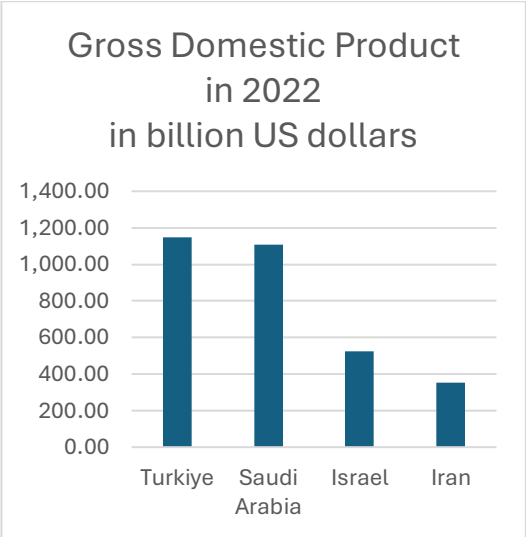


Figure 10- GDP in billion USD in 2022 KSA, Türkiye, Iran and Israel (O'Neill 2023c; 2023a; 2023b) [22]

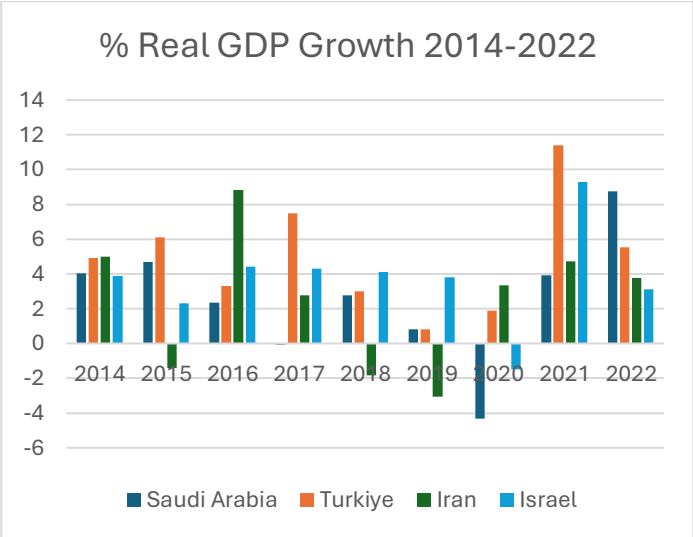


Figure 11- Percentage Real GDP Growth 2014-2022 KSA, Türkiye, Iran and Israel (IMF, n.d.-a; n.d.-b; 2023)[23]

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

Balancing and restoring the status quo is Saudi Arabia's foreign policy goal that emerges in response to regional challenges to the balance of power. According to Glenn Snyder, balancing means acting to preserve an existing distribution of power (Snyder 2002). In 2017 Saudi Arabia took aggressive economic foreign policy measures against Qatar by imposing a travel and trade embargo (The Economist 2023b). This was in response to Qatar taking on an increasingly larger role in manipulating regional politics by supporting Islamic military movements and utilizing its media channel AlJazeera to wield growing influence in the Arab and Muslim worlds (Siegel 2013; Hiltermann 2017). Iran, Israel, and Türkiye continue to challenge the status quo today. Dealing with the quests of these countries to change the existing balance of power has emerged as a foreign policy goal for Saudi Arabia (Hoetjes 2022; Selján 2020).

The Challenge: Iran

Saudis are sensitive to Iran's strategy of extending its military influence: trying to achieve military nuclear capabilities, strengthening the formal Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps IRGC in Iran, and building a non-official Regional Shia Army regionally (Zamir 2022). Middle East expert Bilal Saab declared: "Of all the challenges to Saudi Vision 2030, none may be greater than Iran's threat to Saudi national security. To succeed, Saudi Arabia must not only fortify its defenses against further Iranian and Houthi attacks but also establish a level of deterrence against Tehran" (Saab 2023). The USA and its Sunni allies in the region perceive Iran as seeking to

[22] Chart created by dissertation author. Source: (O'Neill 2023c; 2023a; 2023b)
[23] Chart created by dissertation author. Source: (IMF, n.d.-a; n.d.-b; 2023)

extend its military and religious influences throughout the Middle East.

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal – Deal with Iran's attempt to become the regional hegemon

Countering a belligerent Iran has been one of the key priorities of Saudi foreign policy for decades (Hoetjes 2022). While the two states are not engaged in a direct war, they play out their competition and contention through proxy wars, such as in Yemen and Syria (Marcus 2019). A shared hostility towards Iran has even brought long-term enemies Saudi Arabia and Israel closer (Mekay, n.d.). Like Israel, Saudi Arabia opposed the Iran nuclear deal, fearing it would help Iran improve its economic position and give it the ability to create nuclear weapons, as well as help it increase its regional influence (Al Jazeera 2015). Other Sunni-majority countries in the Arab world, have allied with Saudi Arabia to balance against Iran's ideological influence among Shiite populations, in the area which extends from Beirut to the Persian Gulf, in what has been dubbed 'The Shiite Crescent' (Barzegar 2008).

The Challenge: Israel

Israel's aspirations were summarized by Zachary T. Irwin in 1991:

> "Although no Middle East state seems likely to attain regional hegemony in the traditional sense, the regional international system is conducive to aspirations of hegemony on the part of Israel. Israel seeks to achieve a desired state of affairs along three dimensions: relations of absolute military superiority with respect to individual states within the region; relations of cooperative interdependence with or immunity from extraregional challengers; and, a situation of dominance within the "Core Area" subsystem, and neutralization of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf states"[24] (Irwin 1991, 64).

Israel has been active in trying to create a situation of dominance in the core area, particularly in Israel, Syria, and Lebanon; Israel continues expansion of illegal settlements in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (Kershner 2023; UN Press 2023). Extremists have intensified their activities to annex Palestinian territories, protected by the extreme right government of Benjamin Netanyahu (Melhem 2024). Israeli army has attacked the Syrian army and bombed several targets in Syria since the beginning of the war there in 2011 (AlJazeera 2024). The Israeli air force has made more than 22,000 violations of Lebanese airspace between the years 2007 and 2022 (Salhani 2023).

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal – Deal with Israel's attempt to upset the status quo

Saudi Arabia's strategy to deal with Israel is not only a response to the actions of the state of Israel, but also a part of Saudi Arabia's balancing in response to other state actors. Saudi Arabia started hinting at normalization with Israel after the UAE, Morocco and Bahrain signed the

[24] The areas referred to by Yair Evron in Irwin's chapter "conceptualize the Middle East as a compound of three distinct loci of conflict and alliance": the "Core Area" means Israel, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. He refers to the collective of Israel, Egypt, Yemen, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia as the Red Sea Area. Saudi Arabia is also part of the third area: the Persian Gulf Area, which is comprised of Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Emirates (Irwin 1991, 64).

Abraham Accords in September of 2020, thereby establishing official diplomatic relations with Israel (Ulrichsen 2023). Saudi Arabia is using the possibility of normalization with Israel as a negotiation card in its bid to sign a formal security agreement with the USA, and to start developing its own nuclear technology (Institute of Politics and Society 2023). It had also tied that normalization to the Palestinian issue, and to Israel's "easing the life of Palestinians" (Fox News 2023). After the Gaza attacks in October 2023, Saudi Arabia stated that normalization with Israel was conditional on the establishment of a Palestinian state (Dahan 2024). This brought back the discussions to the Arab Peace Initiative- a Saudi-created peace plan adopted by the Arab summit in Beirut in 2002. It presents a number of conditions, including the two-state solution, in return for "the establishment of normal relations in the context of a comprehensive [Arab] peace with Israel" (The Arab Summit 2002; PBS 2024).

It is a common interest of both states to curb Iran's aspirations for regional hegemony and to disallow the continued development of its nuclear program. This has brought Israel, Saudi Arabia and a host of the Kingdom's Sunni allies into what has been termed by Netanyahu as 'the Israel-Sunni alliance' (Melman 2017). However, analysts believe that, in the absence of a negotiated solution to the Palestinian- Israeli conflict, that this unofficial alliance remains limited to intelligence cooperation particularly in the battle against terrorism, and to sales of high tech military and intelligence systems. The 2017 analysis of Yossi Melman of the Jerusalem Post remains salient today: "In order to propel its relations with the Arab world into the open, Israel must renew negotiations with the Palestinians and be ready to make territorial and other concessions. Netanyahu and his government have neither the plans nor the desire to do so" (Melman 2017).

Saudi Arabia balances different priorities in its dealing with Israel; its desire for peace in the region, balancing against Iran, wanting to keep the US happy, and its desire to continue to claim moral leadership of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Philipp Dienstbier, director of the Regional Program of Gulf States for Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation, says: "The Saudis were previously working on a better relationship with Israel at the Americans' request because the Saudis want to continue to enjoy a good relationship with the US" (Knipp 2024). Saudi Arabia is considered a leader of the Muslim and Arab worlds (Global Affairs Canada 2019). This position necessitates that it takes into consideration the popular sentiments of Arabs and Muslims to maintain its moral headship (Knipp 2024). This has manifested most recently, following the war on Gaza, in Saudi Arabia changing its rhetoric from that of possible normalization to calling for the end of weapon deliveries to Israel (Knipp 2024).

The Challenge: Türkiye

Türkiye has abandoned its "Zero problems with neighbors" foreign policy since 2020 (Yackley 2020). Instead, it has adopted an aggressive military approach, conducting operations in Northern Syria, Northern Iraq, Northern Cyprus and the eastern Mediterranean (Wilson 2022). Türkiye controls large areas in Northern Syria due to a number of cross-border military operations (Yackley 2020). Since 2016, Türkiye maintains a permanent military base in Qatar, its first in the Middle East (Wilson 2022). It has intervened in Libya, militarily supporting the UN backed government and giving it an edge over the opposition backed by France, Russia and the UAE (Yackley 2020). Türkiye is also vying to reclaim its legacy of leadership of the Islamic

world, which it had maintained for decades under the Ottoman Empire. Competing with Saudi Arabia for the position of the representative of the broader Muslim world, Türkiye aims to use that title to elevate its international status (Robinson 2023a; DW 2023).

Türkiye's promotion and support of political Islam in the Middle East defies Saudi Arabia's desire to weaken and dismantle the Islamist movements in its neighborhood. Türkiye was a supporter of Egypt's Mohammad Morsi in the Arab Spring revolution that deposed President Husni Mubarak's forty-year rule (Aljazeera News 2019). Saudi Arabia supported the coup that brought general Mohammad Sisi to the leadership of Egypt and ended the brief rule of the Muslim Brotherhood led by Morsi. Türkiye supported the Islamic political opposition movements in Syria, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt during the Arab Spring, in what analysts saw as a way to "expedite the collapse of the old regional order and cement Türkiye's influence over the new one" (The Economist 2023a).

In 2014, Türkiye took the side of Qatar in its first diplomatic rift with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt over what these nations dubbed support of armed groups (Al Jazeera 2020; DW 2023). In 2017, when these countries, along with Bahrain, imposed a multi-year air, land and sea blockade on Qatar for supporting the Islamic Brotherhood, Hamas, Hizbullah and other Islamic forces across the Arab world, Türkiye chose Qatar's side again. Between 2017 and 2021, it helped Qatar endure the blockade by sending food, water and medicine (DW 2023). It also increased the number of troops it stationed in its military base, hosted in Qatar since 2016 (Muslu EL-Berni and Dogan 2022).

Saudi Arabia's global position and leverage as the leader of the Muslim world are threatened by Türkiye's competing claims. Türkiye's actions, ranging from supporting Islamic political movements, to dispensing humanitarian aid in the region via Islamic-leaning NGOs (Maziad and Sotiriadis 2020), to opening military bases and installations in Qatar, Kuwait and Somalia (Muslu EL-Berni and Dogan 2022; Maziad and Sotiriadis 2020), have been viewed as an "expansionist, pan-Islamist project" (Maziad and Sotiriadis 2020). Saudi Arabia has curbed its promotion of Wahhabi Islam globally (France 24 2018). Meanwhile, Türkiye under Erdogan's leadership, for 20 years and until early 2023, was pursuing an aggressive agenda of promoting political Islam regionally (Maziad and Sotiriadis 2020; The Economist 2023a). Türkiye's aggressive foreign policy under President Erdogan since 2016, which started including the Middle East in its focus, rather than only concentrating on Europe, has resulted in reinforcing "negative historical memory in the Middle East of Türkiye's role as an imperial, occupying power" (Maziad and Sotiriadis 2020), in addition to creating unease among other powers in the Middle East region.

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal – Deal with Türkiye's attempt to challenge the balance of power

Saudi Arabia has adopted a pragmatic foreign policy in response to Türkiye's actions, which has often left the Kingdom with the upper hand. The Kingdom took aggressive stances towards Türkiye in response to the republic's adoption of political positions opposed to Saudi goals. For example, the creation of the military base in Qatar and Kuwait was viewed by Saudi Arabia as a threat to the Gulf Cooperation Council's security consensus (Muslu EL-Berni and Dogan 2022).

This forward-basing was also perceived as a way for Türkiye to expand its sphere of influence in the wider Middle East politically and militarily (Vagneur-Jones and Kasapoglu 2017). However, the Qatar crises was resolved in 2021 without closing the base (Ulrichsen 2021; BBC 2017). Following the Khashoggi murder, Türkiye provided international investigators with audio evidence and accused the Saudi leadership of being behind the murder (Al Jazeera 2023; Turak 2022). Saudi Arabia responded by imposing an informal boycott on Turkish goods, and banning travel and flights into Türkiye, hitting its regional neighbor where it really hurts- in its struggling economy (Turak 2022; Aldardari 2020). Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region created a cooperation platform to extract gas in the Eastern Mediterranean region and excluded Türkiye (Turak 2022). These countries include Greece and Cyprus, Türkiye's regional enemies (Dost and Panikoff 2022; Arab Center Washington DC 2023).

This pragmatic stance allowed the improvement of relations with Türkiye as needed. For example, in 2015, Saudi Arabia included Türkiye in the 34 Muslim country counter terrorism coalition aimed at creating a military block against Iran and ISIS (Muslu EL-Berni and Dogan 2022; France 24 2015b). Following Erdogan's visit to Saudi Arabia in 2022, in what some channels called an "unconditional surrender" (Turak 2022), the Kingdom announced the resumption of flights to Türkiye after a two-year hiatus (Turak 2022). In March of 2023, the Kingdom deposited five billion dollars into Türkiye's central bank to help the country in its fight against currency collapse and rapid inflation (Al Jazeera 2023). For Saudi Arabia, boosting economic ties with its belligerent regional neighbor serves its foreign policy strategy of supporting Vision 2030 and its different sub goals. One of these is expanding its military and technological production capabilities as part of the goal of 'Growing and Diversifying the Economy' and its commitment to localizing defense industries (Vision 2030, n.d.; Vision 2030 Overview, n.d., 48). Saudi manufacturers are now co-producing or negotiating deals to co-produce Turkish drones (Dost and Panikoff 2022: Soliman 2022). Riyadh also bought drones from Türkiye in 2023, in the latter's biggest defense contract ever (News Desk 2023). Following Saudi pressure, Türkiye scaled down its support for Islamic groups, as evidenced by the expulsion of Hamas activists from Türkiye, shutting down the Muslim Brotherhood's television station in the country and restricting the public relations effort the group was allowed to conduct (Arab Center Washington DC 2023). This reproachment is in the interest of Saudi Arabia as it pulls Türkiye into the anti-Iran camp (Turak 2022).

Threats from Neighboring Yemen

The Challenge

The Houthis and their allies in Yemen create a threat to Saudi Arabia, because of their proximity, hostility, alliance with Iran, and willingness to attack Saudi targets. Saudi Arabia shares about 1000 miles of border with Yemen that Saudi Arabia suspected was the route for the entry of arms and the movement of dissidents and terrorist since the early 2000s (AlJazeera 2004; ArabNews 2013). In a rebellion in 2015, the Houthis grabbed Sanaa, the Capital of Yemen. This increased their threat to Saudi Arabia as they took control of much of Yemen's transportation and military infrastructure that was originally overseen by the central government (Abo Alasrar 2022). The Houthis have allied themselves with Iran becoming a part of what has been dubbed the 'Axis of

Resistance', a group of Irani- backed or led forces and movements in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine and Yemen (Abo Alasrar 2022).

Iran has used the Houthis to put pressure on the West and on Saudi Arabia. Their proximity to the Bab al-Mandab Strait in the Red Sea threatens global maritime transportation security and economy (Zamir 2022, 33-35). Their proximity to Saudi Arabia has allowed the Houthis to fire hundreds of missiles and drones into Saudi Arabia causing damage to oil facilities (Kirkpatrick 2019). This gives Iran some negotiating power as it was able to disrupt international oil markets, threaten the interest of the US and its allies, and destabilize the region, without assuming responsibility (Abo Alasrar 2022).

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

One of the foreign policy goals of Saudi Arabia has been to weaken the Houthi threat. The Kingdom maintained varying degrees of military, economic and political, intervention in the internal Yemeni affairs since the drawing of the Saudi- Yemeni border in the 1930s (Lackner 2022). Saudi Arabia engaged militarily in Yemen in March of 2015 in response to a request by Yemeni president Abed- Rabbo Mansur Hadi, when the latter was forced to resign after a Houthi-staged coup. Prince Mohammed bin Salman, then 29, was defense minister (Kirkpatrick 2019). The war was started with operation 'Decisive Storm', that was launched by Saudi Arabia and several Arab allies and was supported by the United States. In the words of the ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Washington DC, "Operation Decisive Storm was designed to eliminate the threats facing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia". Referring to the Houthi militias, he continued: "We've degraded their capabilities substantially and thereby eliminated the threat that they pose to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and, in the process, ensured the safety of our borders, our territory and our citizens. That was the objective of Operation Decisive Storm, in addition, of course, to the protection of the legitimate government of Yemen" (The Embassy of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2015).

The UN adopted resolution 2216 (2015) which legitimized 'Decisive Storm' (UN Security Council 2015). The US also supported the operation and provided intelligence support and air fueling of military planes (NSC 2015). After 'Decisive Storm' ended in April of 2015, Saudi Arabia immediately announced the start of "Restoring Hope Operation" with the official stated goal of restoring the political process, focusing on humanitarian relief, and protecting the Yemeni people from Houthi aggression (The Embassy of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2015). Since the beginning of the military operations in 2015, in addition to air strikes, the alliance blockaded ports around Hodeida and Aden as well as international airports in Sanaa, Taiz, and Aden, severely restricting the flow of aircrafts and ships into Yemen's conflict zones, with the goal of preventing Iran from supplying shipments to Houthi rebels. Attempts by Iran to send planes to the exclusion zones, announced under humanitarian reasons, was met by bombing of civilian plane runways at Sanaa International Airport (Stephens 2015).

America's Reduced Interest in the Region

The Challenge

The USA has attempted to reduce its engagement with the Middle East. This started with President Obama's strategy of 'pivoting to the East'. While his administration focused on East Asia, it lessened its willingness to engage with issues in the Arab World. Democratic administrations withdrew from Afghanistan and ended the combat mission in Iraq in a show of disengagement with the region (Crawford 2023; Arraf 2021). Trump was seen to continue the Obama policy of decreasing the footprint of the USA in the Middle East (Rahman 2017). President Biden continues his Democratic predecessor's focus on East Asia while he tries to counter China in its sphere of influence (Kalin and Said 2023a). Analysts have stated that more recently, when Saudi Arabia's oil facilities were attacked, the absence of a substantive reaction from the USA towards Iran "shocked the Kingdom and led it to question the "oil-for-security" doctrine", which had been a pillar of the bilateral relations between the USA and Saudi Arabia for about eight decades (Zaccour 2023; Beauchamp 2016).

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

Saudi Arabia adopted a strategy of diversification and hedging, while maintaining its close ties with the USA, and choosing its own stance, in response to the USA's reduced interest in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is seen as utilizing strategic hedging, what neoclassical scholars would describe as a foreign policy strategy that middle power states use to accommodate for future risks of a declining hegemonic global power" (Kouleas 2023). The Kingdom continues to cultivate its relationship with the USA, particularly in the defense and security sectors. Saudi Arabia continues to see the USA as its security guarantor and is pushing for a formal defense pact to be signed with the USA in return for full normalization with Israel (Nakhoul, Williams, and Spetalnick 2024). It continues to be the largest purchaser of US arms (Armstrong 2020).

At the same time, Saudi Arabia has been pursuing strategic and economic partnerships with other powers, even if they are rivals of the USA (Zaccour 2023; Demmelhuber 2019). It strengthened its relationship with Russia, formed the OPEC + oil arrangement in partnership with Russia and other partners, and worked with its partners to prop up the global prices of oil (Alexander-Greene 2022). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia accepted China's mediation that resulted in reestablishing diplomatic relations with Iran (Melhem 2024). It also signed more than USD 29 billions worth of deals with China during President Xi's visit to Riyadh (Al-Makahleh and Cafiero 2022). Analysts anticipate that Saudi Arabia is joining a China -led security and political bloc (Kalin and Said 2023a). Partnership with China serves Saudi Arabia's goal of supporting Vision 2030, as it can provide technology transfers in the areas of nuclear and defense industries and bolster the country's technological infrastructure (Batrawy 2022). Saudi Arabia has purchased Chinese drones and received support from China in pioneering its own ballistic missiles development (Al-Makahleh and Cafiero 2022).

Absence of Peace and Security in the Region

The Challenge

The absence of peace and security affects Saudi Arabia in several ways. For example, it can affect the flow of oil from Saudi Arabia to its importers across the globe. Multiple attacks in 2022 by the Houthis on Saudi Aramco oil production and storage stations temporarily cut the Kingdom's production capacity (Yaakoubi and Dahan 2022). Such regional tensions affect Saudi Arabia 's ability to consistently optimize its oil production and export operations. Regional and domestic security concerns “deter much needed foreign investment, and dash Saudi dreams of becoming a regional and global hub especially for cloud computing, logistics, trade, and industry” (Farouk 2023).

The war in Yemen has proven very costly, economically and reputationally. Reputationally, the world accuses Saudi Arabia of sustaining an attack that has aggravated the economic and humanitarian woes of an already poor country that had suffered for decades from civil war. The Saudi war on Yemen has been accused of generating what has been called by the UN in 2021 “the world’s worst humanitarian crises” (UNHCR 2023). Elisabeth Kendall, a researcher at Oxford University stated to news channel France 24 that "At one point, the war was estimated to be costing Saudi Arabia around $1 billion per week" (France 24 2022b). For both Saudis, as well as their allies and their Houthi enemies, strategic analyst Abdulghani al-Iryani described this conflict as “a war of attrition" (France 24 2022b).

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

This challenge drives the foreign policy goal of reducing the disrupting effect of conflicts in the Middle East region. Truce in the war-torn region would allow countries to focus on economic growth (Carlstrom 2023). Analyst Anna Jacobs believes that Saudi Arabia’s move towards a “zero-enemy policy” (Qaed 2023) in recent years is motivated not only by “a desire for a better regional business climate”, one which would provide the needed stability and security for Vision 2030 to work, but also by the US’s distancing itself from its long-term role of “guarantor of Gulf security” (Jacobs 2023). The Kingdom’s engagement in reconciliation efforts across the region, is hoped to “create a geopolitical climate that is conducive to its goals and interests” (Jacobs 2023), and “reduce its threat environment” (Qaed 2023).

Saudi Arabia has been de-escalating frictions with Syria and Iran and getting closer to Israel. A Chinese brokered negotiation led to a détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March of 2023, and a subsequent dwindling of fighting between the Saudi led coalition and the Houthi rebels (Carlstrom 2023). After years of Saudi Arabia providing funding and armament to opposition fighters in Syria, in 2023, the Kingdom invited Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to the meeting of the Arab League in Riyadh, 12 years after Syria was suspended from membership in the organization. It also started the process to reopen embassies and resume flights between the two countries (Chehayeb and Sewell 2023). Before the attacks on Gaza, Saudi Arabia was also hinting in 2023 toward a three-way deal, involving the USA, to normalize relations with Israel (Yaakoubi and Hafezi 2023; Carlstrom 2023). Saudi Arabia allowed flights to and

from Israel to pass through Saudi air space in 2022, a first step in formalizing the relationship between the two countries (Knipp 2024).

Negative Image in the West

The Challenge

The KSA's negative portrayal in Western media, as discussed in Chapter 4, potentially has the ability to negatively affect the attainment of Saudi interests. Saudi Arabia came close to losing US presidential and congressional support for example. Some of the potential adverse economic, security and reputational effects on Saudi's goals resulting from negative perceptions among Western publics are discussed below.

Effect on Attracting Investments

A poor image can affect Saudi Arabia's ability to achieve the economic goals of Vision 2030, particularly the Vision's target of attracting US$100bn in annual FDI by 2030 (Hammad 2023). According to the US State Department's 2023 Saudi Arabia Investment Climate Statement, the Saudi government "is seeking foreign investment in burgeoning sectors such as infrastructure, tourism, entertainment, health and science, technology, and renewable energy" (US State Department 2023) to accomplish its ambitious Vision 2030 reforms. In 2018 many prominent CEOs, top international companies, international organizations and government officials withdrew from Saudi Arabia's Future Investment Initiative (FII) conference, promoted as "Davos in the Desert", prompted by reports of Saudi Arabia's involvement in the disappearance of Khashoggi (Basu 2018; Walt 2022). These included Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan, the US Treasury secretary, the head of the IMF, and UK's trade secretary (The Independent 2018).

A 2021 article in *Forbes* magazine attributed the difficulty facing the Saudi government in attracting significant levels of inward investment in the previous two years to the "clampdown on senior business executives and other figures in 2017" in the Ritz Carlton purge, the "brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul" in 2018 and later by "the Covid-19 pandemic" (Dudley, n.d.). Investments in Saudi Arabia started dropping in 2017 after a few years of stabilization, taking several years to partially start recovery as shown in the figure below.

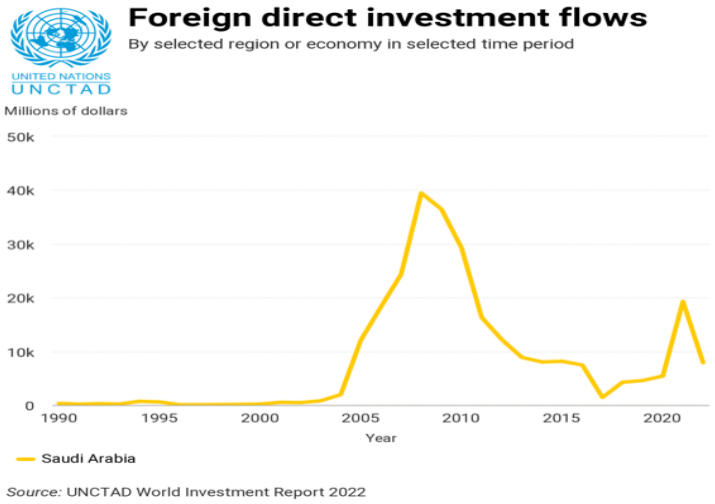


Figure 12- FDIs into the KSA, 1990-2022 (UNCTAD 2023)

Effects on the Nations' Brand

The Nation Brands Index measures the global perception for each of 60 nations along six aspects of a nation's identity; exports, governance, culture, people, immigration & investment, and tourism. In comparison to 59 other nations, the KSA ranked 55th in 2021, and 57th in 2022 (Ipsos 2022). This shows that in the eyes of the global general public, the strength of the power and appeal of its' "brand image" is quite low.

In 2013, UNICEF' Migration Profile for the Kingdom showed that there were 6,717,658 migrants in Saudi Arabia in 2013 (UNICEF, n.d.). In 2021, Statista estimated this to be the number of non-national workers in the private sector alone, constituting more than 76% of the private sector workforce (Puri- Mirza 2022). So, despite the negative coverage of the conditions of low paid foreign workers, the Kingdom continues to attract large numbers of expatriates. This may be a positive contributor to its nation Brand Index [NBI]s score, since one of the pillars of the Nation Brand Index is Immigration & Investment - "a country's power to attract talent and capital" (Ipsos 2022, 6) measured by whether the respondents would consider studying, working, or living there, and the perceptions of the country's economic prosperity, equality of opportunity, and quality of life". Saudi Arabia economic and business conditions also enhance its performance in this aspect.

Vision 2030 is a blueprint for transformative economic and social reform that outlines the vision of the Crown Prince. Two of the overarching objectives of Vision 2030 are growing and diversifying the economy and increasing employment. Its aims include increasing foreign direct investment from its current 3.8% to the international level of 5.7% of GDP; becoming one of the top 10 countries on the Global Competitiveness Index; and increasing the private sector's contribution from 40% to 65% of GDP (Vision 2030 Overview, n.d.). Poor performance on any of the other pillars of the NBI sabotages its ability to achieve these objectives.

The pillar of Governance "incorporates the perceived competency and honesty of government and its treatment of citizens and respect for their rights, as well as global behavior in the areas of international peace and security, environmental protection, and the reduction of world poverty". If the Kingdom is perceived poorly in terms of governance, this can impact its ability to attract foreign direct investment to meet its Vision 2030 targets. Furthermore, the pillar of Exports includes examining "whether knowing where a product is made increases or decreases the likelihood of it being purchased (also known as the "country of origin effect"). A poor image in this pillar would impact the ability of the private sector to grow by exporting products and services.

One of the areas the NBI pillar of Tourism looks at is a country's tourism potential: "How likely a respondent would be to visit a country if money were not an object, and whether the likely experience would be represented by adjectives such as romantic, stressful or spiritual.". Failure to be perceived positively would deal a very hard blow to the Vision 2030 goal of Saudi Arabia's desire to have 100 million visitors annually by 2030.

Effect on the Relationship with the USA

Saudi Arabia's move towards diversifying its alliance beyond the USA, has caused tensions in the relationship between America and the Kingdom. Democrats have called for a one-year freeze on all arms sales, and "a wholesale re-evaluation of the US alliance with Saudi Arabia" after it refused to increase its oil production in 2022" (Bland 2022; Politico 2022). In retaliation for the move by OPEC and Saudi Arabia, seen as support for Putin, three democratic members of the Congress introduced legislation that would withdraw US troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates" (Carbonaro 2022). A measurement of the perception of the American public of Saudi Arabia in the following year, 2023, done by Gallup's 'Perceptions of Foreign Countries' (Gallup Inc, n.d.), showed that the percentage of Americans having 'very unfavorable' views of Saudi Arabia was the highest it had ever been since Gallup began surveying perceptions about the Kingdom in 1991 (See Table 8 in Appendix of Chapter 4).

Reputation Effects

Saudi Arabia's negative portrayal in the media can have reputational repercussions. For example, Several PR and lobbying firms stopped working with the Kingdom in 2018 after Khashoggi's murder (Lippman, Meyer, and Levine 2018; Fuchs 2022). Another example is when the KSA's presidency of the G20 was challenged by human rights groups before and during the summit (HRW 2020; Hawley 2020). These groups also demanded participating nations to "to hold their Saudi hosts accountable for its human rights abuses" (HRW 2020), while the state was trying to use this summit to showcase its advances (Hubbard 2020b). Western media reported that "Saudi Arabia reaps the wrong kind of PR as G20 host" (Sabga, n.d.) and that "Saudi Arabia and human rights activists fight over kingdom's image at G-20" (Hubbard 2020b). The Guardian declared "Reform rhetoric at odds with reality as Saudi Arabia hosts G20 summit" (Wintour 2020). In 2018, the EU parliament called several of Saudi Arabia's laws 'discriminatory', pointing to "the legal provisions relating to personal status, the situation of women migrant workers, the Civil Status Code, the Labor Code, the Nationality Act and the system of male guardianship" (European Parliament 2018).

Effect on Achievement of Security Goals

Saudi Arabia's negative portrayal in media can affect its ability to achieve its security goals. In 2018, following the killing of Khashoggi, the EU Parliament called for an EU-wide arms embargo against the Kingdom (Stone 2018). In 2017, the US senate only narrowly approved a sale of laser-guided bombs and other munitions to the Kingdom by a 53 to 47 vote, with those opposing protesting the civilian deaths in Yemen (Bazzi 2018). In 2019, a bipartisan group of American lawmakers showed opposition to the administration's relationship with Saudi Arabia by attempting to block arms sales to the Kingdom (Barrett and Cohen 2019).

Saudi Arabia lost significant logistic and material support for its military operations in Yemen as a result of the reputational damage caused by the large number of civilian casualties. This negatively affected its effectiveness in the war at its southern border. Because of public criticisms of the tremendous humanitarian suffering caused by the Saudi-led attack on Yemen, the USA moved from being a supporter of the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen War to adopting the stance of a mediator working to end the war. The Obama administration announced the cessation of arms sales to the Kingdom, limitation of intelligence sharing, and intensification of training of the Saudi air force to improve their targeting practices in the future (Stewart and Strobel 2016). Following the increase of attacks on civilian targets, the killing of Khashoggi and the mounting criticism within Congress and internationally, President Trump's administration stopped the provision of aerial refueling to the Yemen military operation (Stewart 2018). In 2021 during Biden's first foreign policy speech, he announced the ending of all support for offensive operations in Yemen including arms sales. Moreover, Biden's administration indicated its desire to become a broker for peace among the warring parties by supporting the UN-led peace initiative and appointing US veteran diplomat Tim Lenderking as a special envoy to Yemen (AlAmer 2021).

International Relations literatures has linked the possession of a good international image with the achievement of foreign policy goals. Good reputations enhance a country's soft power (Fan 2008) and legitimize the use of traditional hard power (Rasmussen and Merkelsen 2012; Nye 2008). High international visibility helps in achieving enhanced status and recognition (Browning 2013), entering into desired alliances, (Szondi 2008, 15), and enhances reputational security. Keith Dinnie has argued that the global community is more concerned with the security of states with positive reputations, whereas states lacking positive images "have been left to the mercy of hostile neighbors or internal extremists" (Dinnie 2009, 230).

Effect on Support for Saudi Leadership

Saudi's image in the West can affect the level of support the leaders of the regime receive from their American ally for regime security. Trump's demonstrations of support for MBS when Prince Muhammad bin Nayef was overthrown, after the Ritz Carlton purge, and even after the Khashoggi murder, were vital. In contrast, President Biden vowed to make Saudi Arabia a pariah state during his election campaign (Hubbard 2022). Unlike his predecessor who rebuffed calls for its release, Biden ordered the release of the intelligence report that concluded that MBS approved the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi (Pazzanese 2021). It took him 18 months to visit Saudi Arabia after he assumed his powers. In contrast to Trump, Biden even felt obligated to justify the visit in an editorial in the *Washington Post*, in which he also highlighted that the

Kingdom was not the first stop on his visit and reminded readers of the strategic need to meet with Saudi leadership despite human rights abuses (Biden 2022).

The Resulting Foreign Policy Strategy/ Goal

Saudi Arabia has recognized that continuing to have a negative image can affect the attainment of its reputational, economic and security foreign policy goals. It can also delay the achievement of its domestic social and economic goals set out in Vision 2030. The state is aware of the ability of publics in Western democracies to affect foreign policy decisions for the Kingdom, not only against it. Literature on public opinion and foreign policy has suggested that public perceptions and resulting opinions affect the foreign policy choices of democratic governments (Knecht and Weatherford 2006; Chu and Recchia 2022; Kertzer 2023). Studies have also shown that a positive image can help a country export more (Vieira 2015; Ortega-Egea and García-de-Frutos 2023) and attract visitors, business, or investment (Anholt 2011).

The improvement of Saudi Arabia's image in the eyes of Western publics has emerged as one of the Kingdom's foreign policy goals (Gause III 2024). Saudi Arabia has invested millions in public relations, lobbying and marketing efforts. It has complemented these with actual changes to some of its policies, including some opening up of society, changing laws and regulations, creating mega projects, and utilizing tourism to improve its image, as discussed in the next two chapters.

Conclusion

Many aspects of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy endure from the pre-Salman era. The USA remains Saudi Arabia's most important military and strategic partner. The Kingdom continues to oppose the development of a nuclear weapon by Iran and continues to eye that neighbor with suspicion. Regionally, it consistently pursues moral and strategic leadership of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Internationally, the Kingdom utilizes its tremendous resources to affect and influence outcomes to achieve its foreign policy goals, including cultivating its control and influence over prices in the global oil market. It continues to see Yemen as a potential threat; and works to maintain a regional balance of power in which the Kingdom is a major power.

However, many aspects of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy have changed since the advent of King Salman and his son Prince Mohammad, due to domestic and international pressures. In response to the USA's pivoting to the East policy, KSA adopted a policy of hedging and diversification, strengthening its relationship with China and Russia. Saudi Arabia has replaced King Abdullah's pan-Arab rhetoric with a more nationalist "Saudi First" narrative (Alhussein 2019), and has not shied away from pursuing closer relationships with Israel, as it seeks balance against Iran and decreased tensions in the region to promote its economic goals. In pursuit of that goal, most recently it has even toned down hostile action towards Houthis, restored diplomatic relations with Iran, and achieved reproachment with Türkiye. Under Prince Saud AlFaisal, who was the foreign minister during the reign of Kings Khalid, Fahd and Abdullah, Saudi diplomacy was generally conducted discreetly, and generally in alignment with US interests (BBC 2015). Now,

the Kingdom pursues a more pragmatic and assertive foreign policy (Kalin and Said 2023b), and does not shy away from asserting its position, even when it is not aligned with that of America.

One of the major new goals of Saudi foreign policy is the support of Vision 2030. The Vision allows the Kingdom to deal with internal challenges like regime survival and unemployment, and to fulfill domestic ambitions related to economic diversification (Citi Global Insights 2024). It is also an excellent tool for Saudi Arabia to deal with two persistent challenges: its image in the West and fluctuations in energy prices.

Saudi Arabia's ability to achieve its economic, reputational and security goals have been affected by its negative image among publics in the West. As a result, building an alternative and more positive image has emerged as one of the foreign policy goals of the Kingdom. The next chapters will show how different public diplomacy tools, including tourism policy, have been used to achieve this goal.

Chapter 6: Image Altering Public Diplomacy Strategies and the Activation of the Narrative Control Mechanism

> "So all responsible governments, on behalf of their people, their institutions, and their companies, need to measure and monitor the world's perception of their nation and to develop a strategy for managing it. It is a key part of their job to try to earn a reputation that is fair; true; powerful; attractive; genuinely useful to their economic, political, and social aims; and honestly reflective of the spirit, the genius, and the will of the people. This huge task has become one of the primary skills of administrations in the twenty- first century."
>
> Simon Anholt
> (Anholt 2011, 8-9)

Introduction

This chapter demonstrates how Saudi Arabia uses instruments of public diplomacy to alter its image among Western publics. Two public diplomacy theories that are particularly useful to analyze the state's image management efforts are examined. These are Image Restoration Theory [IRT], and Nation Branding theory [NB]. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia uses both strategies to manage the way it is perceived by Western publics. The sections below explain each strategy and give examples of how it is used by Saudi Arabia. They also indicate some of the limitations of each model.

As discussed in Chapter 3 (Literature Review and Analytical Framework), the international relations literature has used several different theories to explain distinct public diplomacy actions. Many of these have been borrowed from other disciplines. This dissertation uses these particular two theories, Image Restoration Theory and Nation Branding, borrowed from the communications and marketing disciplines, because they are able to provide practical models to show how the state tries to manipulate its image among foreign audiences. Both theories were explored because they act as complementary strategies when used to manage a country's image; Image Restoration is a reactive and short term strategy that is meant for crisis management, while Nation Branding is an intentional strategy meant to alter, enhance and manage the country's image in the medium to long term. Both are linked to the country's policies. However, while the first is linked to the state's current foreign and domestic policies, the second is linked to its future goals (Elsbach 1997; van Ham 2002).

In the final section of this chapter, tourism policy as a tool of public diplomacy is explored. The applicability of the narrative control model is demonstrated using several aspects of Saudi Arabia's tourism policy. The chapter gives examples from Saudi Arabia's participation in the Dubai Expo 2020; its marketing and public relations [PR] strategies; events; and change of legislation.

The first section of the chapter contributes to answering the research question by clarifying the parts of the research question and thesis statement which refer to altering the KSA's image among Western public audiences. This first part also contributes to clarifying the mechanism referred to in H2 - the Narrative Control Mechanism. H2 states that: Outward targeting elements of Saudi tourism policy can influence the state's image abroad using the same mechanism employed by several Saudi public diplomacy tools [25]. The second part of the chapter confirms H2 by showing that one of the goals of Saudi tourism policy is to alter the Saudi state's image abroad. This is supported by its use of the same mechanism as a number of other Saudi public diplomacy instruments.

The Narrative Control Mechanism Model

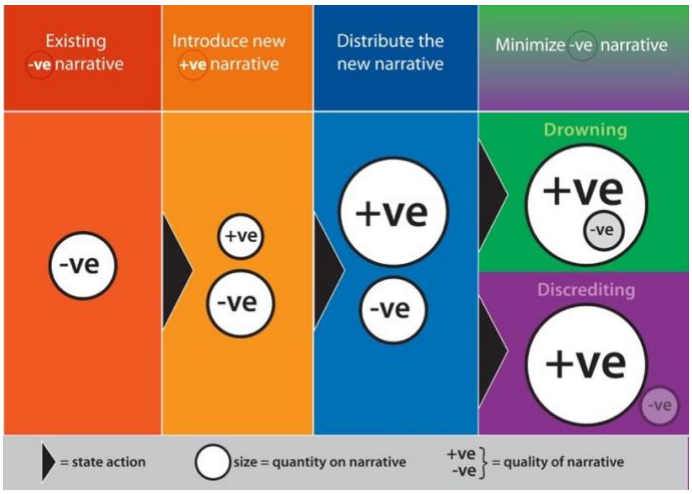


Figure 13- The Narrative Control Mechanism Model[26]

The Narrative Control Mechanism is a theoretical model that summarizes the actions taken by the state to control the quality (content) and quantity of narrative circulating about it abroad. These actions can be summarized in three steps: 1) introducing a new narrative, 2) propagating that new narrative, 3) and minimizing the negative narrative. It is the pathway linking the state's public diplomacy actions with altering the Saudi State's negative image among Western public

[25] Research question: "How does the Saudi state use tourism policy to serve its goal of altering its negative image among Western public audiences?"
Thesis Statement: Tourism policy is used by the Saudi state as a public diplomacy instrument to alter its image among Western publics.
My arguments to support the claim that Saudi Arabia's tourism policy is a public diplomacy instrument are the following:
H1: Saudi tourism policy addresses a foreign policy goal and need
H2: Outward targeting elements of Saudi tourism policy can influence the state's image abroad using the same mechanism employed by several Saudi public diplomacy tools
H3: Saudi tourism policy meets the definition of public diplomacy and delivers the goals of public diplomacy

[26] Model developed by author, designed by Ms. Abeer Malhas.

audiences. The three steps are referred to occasionally in this and the following chapter as mechanism 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

Image Restoration Theory

Saudi Arabia's short term responses to negative publicity are analyzed using William Benoit's Image Restoration Theory [IRT]. IRT categorizes the actions taken by a state in response to negative image portrayals in media due to a crisis into five main strategies: 1) Denial or refusal: a state accused of wrongdoing may simply deny that the act occurred or that it committed it. The state may also shift the blame for the offensive act from itself to another entity, claiming that entity performed the offensive act (Benoit and Drew 1997, 155). 2) Evasion of responsibility which includes evading or reducing responsibility for an offensive act (Benoit and Drew 1997, 155). 3) Reducing offensiveness: the nation accused of misbehavior attempts to reduce the degree of ill feeling associated with the act (Benoit and Drew 1997, 156). 4) Corrective action. 5) Mortification: The tactic involves confessing and begging forgiveness for an act (Benoit 1997, 181).

Under these strategies, Benoit identified several tactics that are used to respond to threats and attacks on image (Benoit 1997, 178-179). For example, under the strategy of evasion of responsibility, a nation may employ the tactic of defeasibility [lack of information or ability] where it "alleges a lack of information about or control over important elements of the situation" (Benoit 1997, 180; Benoit and Drew 1997, 156). To reduce the offensiveness of an event, the country may employ the tactic of differentiation [act less offensive], whereby it may try to differentiate a wrongful act from other more offensive, but similar actions." (Benoit and Drew 1997, 156; Benoit 1997, 181). The table below summarizes the reputational crises management strategies and tactics identified by Benoit's Image Restoration Theory.

Table 9- Strategies and Tactics taken by States to Manage Their Image Following a Crises as Identified by the Image Restoration Theory (Benoit 1997, 179).

Strategy	**Tactic**	**Key Characteristics**
Denial		
	Simple Denial	Did not perform act
	Shift the blame	Act performed by another
Evasion of responsibility		
	Provocation	Responded to act of another
	Defeasibility	Lack of information or ability
	Accident	Act was a mishap
	Good intentions	Meant well in act
Reducing offensiveness of act		
	Bolstering	Stress good traits
	Minimization	Act was not serious
	Differentiation	Act was less offensive
	Transcendence	More important consideration
	Attack accuser	Reduce credibility of accuser
	Compensation	Reimburse victim
Corrective action		Plan to solve or prevent problem

Mortification		Apologize for act

How the Narrative Control Mechanism Works when the Saudi State Deploys the Image Restoration Strategy to Alter Its Image Abroad

In responding to a crisis, the Saudi state uses the public diplomacy instrument of image restoration to achieve an alteration of its image among Western publics, by taking actions which control the content (quality) and visibility and quantity of the narrative circulating about the Saudi state in the West, as summarized in the Narrative Control Mechanism model.

Denial

Simple Denial [A Tactic of the Denial Strategy]

The Kingdom has used different forms of the simple denial tactic in responding to negative publicity. Simple denial involves the accused entity "deny that the act occurred, that it had performed the act, or that the act was harmful to anyone" (Benoit 1997, 179). An example of the latter is when Saudi Arabia's climate envoy Adel Al Jubeir argued in an interview with CNBC in January of 2023, that the Kingdom's decision to cut oil production in October of the previous year was not going to harm the global economy by raising global oil prices. He said: "since that decision was made, the price of oil has actually trended down in a moderate fashion rather than went up". He also added: "price remained stable. In fact, prices today are less than they were a year ago. So obviously, this is the best and the biggest proof that the Kingdom's assessment was correct, and that the decision taken by OPEC + was the correct decision to take" (CNBC International TV 2023).

The above example shows how Image Restoration Theory's Simple Denial tactic uses the Narrative Control Mechanism. Saudi Arabia seeks to control the quality and quantity of the narrative circulating about it using the three actions: 1) Introduce a new narrative: The Kingdom did not harm the global economy, actually prices today are less than they were a year ago. 2) Spread the new narrative: interview with CNBC. 3) Minimize the existing negative narrative: Discredit the accusation that the KSA harmed the global economy by showing that the accusation is false.

Shift The Blame [A Tactic of the Denial Strategy]

Saudi Arabia has used the tactic of shifting the blame to deal with criticisms regarding its energy policies. This tactic involves arguing that another entity is the one responsible for the offensive act (Benoit 1997, 180). Responding to criticisms on CNBC news regarding refusing the US's request to increase its production of oil, the Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs clarified that the issue with oil markets was not a result of the actions of Saudi- led OPEC+: "As far as we are aware there's no shortfall of oil. The problem is in refined products, which is something that is more connected to a lack of investment over the last year and a half [or] two years in refining capacity than [in] bringing barrels [now] to the market" (CNBC International TV 2022a).

In this scenario, Saudi Arabia is using the tactic of Shift the Blame to control the narrative circulating about it by 1) Introducing a new narrative: the cause of instability in oil prices is the

lack of Western investment in refining capacity. 2) Spreading the new narrative: Minister's declaration in a CNBC interview. 3) Minimizing the existing negative narrative: the entities that did not invest in building the refining capacities are responsible for the crises. The accusation that the instability of oil markets is caused by OPEC+'s reduction of supply is false.

Evasion of Responsibility

Provocation [A Tactic of the Evasion of Responsibility Strategy]

A state "can say its act was merely a response to another's offensive act, and that the behavior can be seen as a reasonable reaction to that provocation" (Benoit 1997, 180). "Provocation suggests that the accused performed the act in question in response to another, prior, wrongful act, which understandably provoked the undesirable reaction" (Benoit and Drew 1997, 155).

In 2018, the Canadian foreign ministry tweeted a call to Saudi Arabia to release human rights defenders. The Kingdom did not limit its reaction to a reciprocal twitter response. The KSA demanded an apology, and when the Trudeau government refused to offer one, Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador and pulled out the thousands of Saudi students and medical fellows studying in Canada, an investment that had brought hundreds of millions of dollars into Canadian universities and hospitals. The Kingdom also expelled the Canadian ambassador to Saudi Arabia and suspended new trade and investment with Ottawa (Reuters - NBC 2018). This included the decision to sell off Canadian assets, and to stop buying grains from Canada (Evans 2018). The Saudi reaction to criticism was swift, punitive, and created immediate financial consequences for Canadian institutions (Kassam 2018).

Some analysts have described the response as 'harsh' and 'severe' (Gollom 2018). However, according to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia at the time, Adel AlJubeir, they came as an appropriate response to Canada's actions. "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [...] will not accept interference in its internal affairs or imposed diktats from any country," the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs tweeted (Kassam 2018). Saudi Arabia declared that it would not remove those sanctions without a proper apology from Canada. "It's very easy to fix. Apologize and say you made a mistake" Minister Al-Jubeir said (Thomson Reuters - CBC News 2018). The Foreign Minister also stated that "the Canadian position is an overt and blatant interference in the internal affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and is in contravention of the most basic international norms and all the charters governing relations between states" (Kassam 2018).

In this scenario, the Saudi state sought to control the narrative circulating regarding the severity of its response to criticism by 1) Introducing a new narrative: the cause of its reaction is the breaking of international norms by Canada and the meddling in Saudi's internal affairs. 2) Spreading the new narrative: Minister's responses in international fora, like his statement on the topic made at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York (Thomson Reuters - CBC News 2018). 3) Discredit the existing negative narrative: The mistake is Canada's action which provoked Saudi's reaction.

Accident [A Tactic of the Evasion of Responsibility Strategy]

Saudi Arabia used the tactic of claiming the act was an accident in the case of the killing of Khashoggi. This tactic aims to reduce or absolve the responsibility of the actor by claiming that the offensive action occurred by accident (Benoit and Drew 1997, 156; Benoit 1997, 180). The disappearance of Journalist Jamal Khashoggi in a Saudi consulate in Türkiye, and the announcement of several contradictory explanations by Saudi officials fed negative coverage of the issue in international media. After several weeks, the foreign minister of the KSA admitted that the journalist was indeed killed. He claimed the killing was an accident. In an interview with Fox News, he said: "Unfortunately, a huge and grave mistake was made and I assure them that those responsible will be held accountable for this." He added: "This was an operation where individuals ended up exceeding the authorities and responsibilities they had. They made the mistake when they killed Jamal Khashoggi in the consulate, and they tried to cover up for it" (Reuters 2018).

In this example, Saudi Arabia sought to control the quality and quantity of the narrative circulating about the state using the three actions:1) Introduce a new narrative: This action was the result of individuals acting beyond the scope of their authority and responsibilities. 2) Spread the new narrative: Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on Fox News. 3) Minimize the existing negative narrative: Discredit the accusation that this action was an intentional decision made by the Saudi state. The action was a mistake.

Good Intentions *[A Tactic of the Evasion of Responsibility Strategy]*

Saudi Arabia has employed the tactic of invoking good intentions. The public is sometimes willing to forgive an act that it deems wrongful, if the entity shows that it was done with good intentions (Benoit and Drew 1997, 157). In 2017 after the incarcerations of tens of royals and several businesspersons in the Ritz Carlton in Riyadh, western media raised the alarm about the lack of a transparent legal process, the violent treatment of those detained, and for forcing them to hand over some of their assets (Hubbard et al. 2018). The public relations firm APCO Worldwide, hired by the Saudi Ministry of Culture, reported on Saudi actions as an anti-corruption campaign (Fielding-Smith 2018). Saudi authorities periodically reported the amounts ceased for the state coffers. For example, Al Jazeera reported that "the finance minister told Reuters the authorities had collected some $13bn from settlements in 2018" (AlJazeera 2019). CBC reported that Saudi attorney general Sheikh Saud Al Mojeb declared that "the estimated value of settlements currently stands at more than 400 billion riyals [$106 billion US] represented in various types of assets, including real estate, commercial entities, securities, cash and other assets" (Thomson Reuters 2018).

Saudi Arabia invoked Good Intentions as a tactic to achieve narrative control by: 1) Introducing a new narrative: This wave of incarcerations was a reform activity intended to crackdown on corruption in the country. 2) Spreading the new narrative: Publicize the amounts retrieved from the action in statements by officials in major news outlets and through public relations agencies. 3) Discrediting the negative narrative: This is not a campaign to consolidate the power of the Crown Prince, it is rather an anti-corruption campaign as shown by the large sum of assets seized.

Reducing Offensiveness of Event

Bolstering [A Tactic of the Reducing Offensiveness of Event Strategy]

The Kingdom often utilizes the tactic of bolstering, stressing its good traits and positive actions, in an attempt to temper down negative attacks on its image. This tactic is utilized to moderate the negative effects of a particular act by strengthening the audience's general positive feelings for the actor through describing positive characteristics that they have, or positive acts they have done in the past" (Benoit 1997, 180; Benoit and Drew 1997, 156). In 2021, shortly before the expected release of documents related to the American government's investigation of the 9/11 attacks, Saudi Arabia issued a statement of innocence expressing indignation that accusations claiming the Kingdom's connection to the hijackers persist. In the statement, it reminded readers of its decades-long contribution to America's efforts in fighting terrorism. It stated: "The Kingdom is an essential counterterrorism partner to the United States […] Together, our two countries have countered ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and delivered severe setbacks to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS in Yemen, among other successes. The coordinated work of Saudi Arabia and the United States to disrupt and intercept terrorist plots over the last 20 years undoubtedly has saved the lives of thousands of Saudis and Americans, and made the world a safer place" (Shinkman 2021).

In this example, the use of the Narrative Control Mechanism was clear: 1) Introduce a new narrative: Saudi Arabia has been a partner of the US in fighting terrorism and saving American lives 2) Spread the new narrative: Official statement of the Saudi state in American press. 3) Minimize the existing negative narrative: The accusations that the Kingdom is connected to the hijackers are meaningless and false.

Minimization [A Tactic of the Reducing Offensiveness of Event Strategy]

Saudi Arabia has resorted to using minimization in response to some of the attacks directed at it, especially in relation to its energy-related foreign policies. This tactic involves trying to minimize the perceived offensiveness of the act in question (Benoit and Drew 1997, 156) or trying to minimize the negative feelings associated with the wrongful act (Benoit 1997, 180). Saudi Arabia has been under attack for including Russia in OPEC+. The Saudi minister of energy responded at the World Government Summit 2022, by reminding the audience that Russia contributes around 10% of the global oil needs and is a major global producer of gas. As such, its inclusion of Russia within OPEC+ was crucial for energy security and energy market stability. He added: "If it wasn't for OPEC+ existence we would not be celebrating a sustainable energy market to its level [even with] today's volatility, because volatility would have been even worse if OPEC+ did not exist and did not attend to the market" (CNBC International TV 2022b).

The Kingdom in this example sought to control the quality and quantity of the narrative circulating about the state using the three actions of the Mechanism:
1) Introduce a new narrative [Russian involvement in OPEC+ is important for everyone as it ensures global energy market stability and energy security. 2) Spread the new narrative Saudi

Energy Minister's statement at an important global conference. 3) Discredit the existing negative narrative: Challenge the accuracy and validity of the content of the attacks on OPEC+ members.

Transcendence [A Tactic of the Reducing Offensiveness of Event Strategy]

Official spokespersons of the Kingdom often use the tactic of transcendence, especially when responding to negative publicity regarding the KSA's energy policies. This tactic attempts to place the act in a larger, more desirable context (Benoit and Drew 1997, 156). The response of the Saudi state through its Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud to criticisms regarding its high levels of fossil fuel extraction was: "we have to be sure that while we transition to a renewable future, there is enough energy in the market". He added while participating in a panel at the World Economic Forum that: "there have been others who have called for a complete stop to investment in hydrocarbons in the short term before we are ready for that ... we will work with our partners to address the longer-term issue of how do we manage the transition to […] a green powered economy without disruption and without undue burden on the global economy" (CNBC International TV 2022a). The Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud said at the World Government Summit 2022: "You cannot attend to climate change without getting security, and certainly if you don't have energy security you would not have economic prosperity. You would not have economic growth. And if you don't have the two you would […] lose the means of attending to climate change" (CNBC International TV 2022b).

The three Narrative Control actions here were: 1) Introduce a new narrative: Attending to climate change requires energy security and economic growth, 2) Spread the new narrative: Statements bearing the same message by two high level ministers at important global summits that receive high international media coverage, 3) Discredit the existing negative narrative: show the fallacy in the suggested logic of demands calling for a complete stop to investment in hydrocarbons in the short term.

Attack Accuser [A Tactic of the Reducing Offensiveness of Event Strategy]

Saudi Arabia has resorted to attacking accusers, in response to negative attacks on its image. It has used the tactic to reduce the credibility of the accuser (Zhang and Benoit 2004, 164). In response to denunciations made by Amnesty International regarding the disappearance of a Saudi dissident, and not allowing him to have a lawyer, Prince Turki al-Faisal, former head of Saudi intelligence attacked the credibility of Amnesty International, with their historically very negative view of Saudi Arabia. He said in an interview with DW news network: "we call them actually Nasty International, not Amnesty International" (Conflict Zone 2017). "These human rights groups […] have an agenda against us... they're specifically targeting Saudi Arabia because we're a country that follows Islam, because we're a country that believes in God, because we're a monarchy, because we are all the things that these human rights [organizations] find fault with" (Conflict Zone 2017). "Saudi Arabia is the most important Muslim country in the world and that's why it is targeted" (Conflict Zone 2017).

In this example, a Saudi state official is seeking to control the narrative using the Attack Accuser tactic by 1) Introducing a new narrative: Human Rights groups accusations stem from an agenda

against the KSA. 2) Spreading the new narrative: Statement by a Saudi prince during an interview with a European channel. 3) Minimize and discredit the existing negative narrative: Discrediting attackers by suggesting they are impartial and intentionally attacking the image of Saudi from discriminatory standpoints.

Compensation [A Tactic of the Reducing Offensiveness of Event Strategy]

Saudi Arabia used compensation as a tactic to minimize criticism regarding the effects of its war in Yemen. The tactic of compensation helps offset the negative feeling associated with a wrongful act through offers of positive reinforcements, such as cash, goods, or services to be provided to the victims (Benoit and Drew 1997, 156). Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates [its major Yemen war coalition ally] provided about one billion US Dollars in aid to the UN's Yemen Humanitarian Fund in 2018 (UN News 2018). This funding was earmarked for humanitarian support to sectors such as food security and agriculture, health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (OCHA 2018). During a U.N. fundraising event in February of 2019, Saudi Arabia pledged a further $750 million (Nichols 2019). According to the UN, the Kingdom was one of its top three donors to the Yemen cause in 2022 (Reuters 2023).

In this example, the state's action sought to alter its image among Western audiences by offering compensation to the victims. This served to 1) Introduce a new narrative: Saudi Arabia is helping Yemen and Yemenis. 2) Spread the new narrative: Coverage in news media using the Kingdom's PR agencies and the UN media coverage. 3) Minimize the existing negative narrative: While the war is causing harm, Saudi Arabia is offsetting the effect of the war by providing significant humanitarian aid and compensating victims.

Corrective action

Saudi Arabia has taken several forms of corrective action in response to criticisms affecting its image in the West. The strategy of corrective action involves reducing the offensive act, promising to prevent its recurrence, or restoring the state of affairs existing before the offensive action (Benoit 1997, 181). An example of Saudi Arabia's use of this tactic is when it took specific measures to reduce child casualties in Yemen. As a result, Saudi Arabia and the Yemen war coalition were removed from the list of shame in the UN Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. Secretary General of the UN Antonio Guterres said this was a result of "the implementation of measures aimed at protecting children" and "a sustained significant decrease in killing and maiming due to air strikes" (Nichols 2020). Another example is the Kingdom lifting its ban on women's driving in 2018, to change its reputation of being "the only country left in the world where women could not drive" (Guerin 2018). The state's prohibition of flogging as a form of punishment in 2020, is another example of the use of this tactic following the global negative coverage of the flogging of social media blogger Raif Badawi (Rashad and Jalabi 2020).

Here the Saudi state sought to control the quality and quantity of the narrative circulating about this issue by 1) Introducing a new narrative: Saudi Arabia no longer operates in this way. 2)

Spreading the new narrative: Campaign to announce the legislative or operational changes to media. 3) Minimize the existing negative narrative: This accusation is no longer valid.

Mortification

The tactic involves confessing and begging forgiveness for an act (Benoit 1997, 181). Desk research on this tactic was not able to generate results showing the use of mortification by the Saudi state. It is likely that the reason is that this tactic would not introduce and spread a new narrative. Instead, it would confirm the negative accusation and consolidate the negative narrative and image. It would therefore not contribute to altering the state's image abroad.

The Image restoration strategy described above is best suited for one off attacks on the state's reputation, where the Kingdom was willing to acknowledge the presence of an issue in international media before attempting to provide an alternative framing of it. Given its focus on crises management (Zhang and Benoit 2004, 161), the strategy is not equipped to explain the use of pre-planned activities designed for longer term image management. For example, the strategy, as summarized in Image Restoration Theory, is unable to account for the Kingdom's use of sports and cultural events, tourism or marketing campaigns to improve its image. This next section explores Nation Branding as another instrument of public diplomacy used to alter the Saudi State's image among western publics using the Narrative Control Mechanism. It complements IRT by addressing some of its weaknesses.

Nation Branding Theory

A quote by Phillip Kotler and David Gertner in 'Building Strong Nation Brands' explains what a nation brand means and how nation branding is used to create that brand:

> "A nation brand refers to a network of meanings in people's mind based on the visual, verbal and behavioral expressions of a nation. When these meanings are a result of active management of these perceptions and strategic efforts to advance specific meanings by policy makers in the country in question, this is called nation branding" (Steenkamp 2021, 8).

Nation Branding is a "strategy of active building and management of a country's image" (Steenkamp 2021, 7). It has been explored under the academic disciplines of marketing, tourism, political science, geography, urban planning and public management (Vuignier 2016). This chapter borrows from the marketing and political science literature on the topic to show how nation branding can improve a state's image abroad, thereby serving the foreign policy goals of that state. Policy makers pursue nation branding to create or alter and proactively manage a nation's image, with the purpose of enhancing that nation's reputation among overseas target audiences (Steenkamp 2021, 7).

Stages of Nation Branding

The process of nation branding involves three phases: Immersion or strategic nation brand analysis; followed by development of the brand and the refinement of the nation branding marketing strategy; and finally, roll out and institutionalization, where the nation branding marketing strategy is implemented. The table below summarizes the process. It was created by consolidating findings from interviewing an international branding expert (Interviewee #7 2024) with adaptations from Steenkamp's 'Model for Nation Branding' (Steenkamp 2021, 8). The analysis below links these stages with the three actions of the Narrative Control Mechanism model.

Phase 1: Immersion, Strategic Nation Brand Analysis

The first phase contributes to mechanism 3 as it allows the state to identify what narratives exist about among the target audience and identify which of these narratives it wishes to change. It also contributes to mechanism 1 as it uses feedback from research to decide what new narrative it needs to project in order to alter its image abroad. A very important audit conducted in this first phase is target audience analysis. This allows the team to define the audience and identify their decision drivers (Dinnie 2009) and understand how the nation is viewed abroad (Surowiec 2016, 23).

Third party communications contractors like public relations and marketing firms have been delivering a diverse set of activities in service of Saudi Arabia's nation branding strategy. Strategically, they have provided advice on the best courses of action to reach the Kingdom's goals and devised plans to reach those goals (Green 2016; Halliwell 2022). In the 'strategic nation brand analysis' phase, these firms identified where negative publicity in online and traditional media was generated. For example, in its bid to offer public relations services to the Saudi government, PR firm Edelman proposed that it "research, identify and monitor online conversations and media coverage to identify 'friends' and 'detractors', mainly in the US media" (Lowenstein 2022).

Phase 2: Development of the Brand, And Development and Refinement of the Nation Branding Marketing Strategy

The second phase contributes to mechanism 1, as this is the stage where the new image is constructed. It also contributes to mechanism 2, as the plans are made in this stage on the way to project and circulate the new image. This phase involves the development of the nation brand, and the building and refinement of the nation branding marketing strategy. To achieve these goals, the team creates a brand strategy and positioning, determines the personality of the brand; builds the brand's verbal and visual identities; and creates the brand architecture; before moving on to testing to ensure that the created brand package works (Interviewee #7 2024). The branding team undertakes nation branding efforts to change negative mental associations with its brand and create alternative associations with a new positive persona. Nation branding expert Jean-Benedict E.M. Steenkamp recommends that the nation branding team decide the kind of personality it will project to communicate to its audience, and to select specific globally recognized meanings to associate the country with (Dinnie 2009, 17-18).

Brand strategy and positioning outline the purpose of the nation branding (the large scale vision, the 'why' of the effort), the ambition (the three to five year goal, including a plan with clear key performance indicators [KPIs]), the 'what' of the effort, and the trajectory (the 'how' to get from the starting point to the ambition and vision) (Interviewee #7 2024). Validation Research is the next step, where qualitative and quantitative testing are done to gauge understanding; likelihood of consideration and engagement with the brand; and familiarity of the brand (Interviewee #7 2024). As a result of testing, the nation brand design and marketing materials are refined and finalized. The brand guidelines are then documented to ensure consistency throughout the use and marketing of the brand. The brand is expressed through visual and verbal identities, and through the personality that is projected about the nation [persona].

Phase 3: Roll Out and Institutionalization

The third phase activates mechanism 2 as it is the phase where the new narrative is spread. It is also where mechanism 3 takes place, whereby the original negative narrative is discredited by showing that it no longer holds, and where it is drowned in the high volume of new positive messaging. This phase is comprised of roll out and implementation of the nation branding launch and marketing strategy, and institutionalization of the overall branding strategy (Interviewee #7 2024). This involves implementing a series of campaigns to introduce and market the new brand and taking actions to ensure the proliferation and sustainability of the new brand. Nation branding marketing strategy can have one or more goals, such as change a message, behavior, or perception of the nation. Its goals may also be driving traffic and generating leads (Interviewee #7 2024).

Nation brand roll outs are usually done in big bang modes, involving such activities as launches, events, road shows, and other direct messaging activities. It is rare that a nation brand roll out would adopt the stealth mode. The stealth mode option relies more on such subtle activities as changing information in websites, and some public relations effort (Interviewee #7 2024). This part of phase three also involves training internal stakeholders, like government employees, on the identity and behaviors supporting the brand (Interviewee #7 2024). The nation branding communication effort of this phase also includes creating internal and external brand ambassadors. Internal ambassadors are people who have influence within the state itself and within the relevant organizations in the state. They help cascade the learning relevant to adopting the brand identity and behavior across the organizations and throughout the nation. External ambassadors and influencers who speak to the intended target audience (generation, intended media, socio economic background, etc.) are also recruited in this phase. An important aspect of this phase is reinforcing and institutionalizing the brand. Steenkamp recommends working with policy makers to deliver on the promises implied by the nation brand meanings (Dinnie 2009, 17-16). States have created working groups to institutionalize and reinforce the brand (Steenkamp 2021). These can include representatives of government, industry, the arts, education and the media (Surowiec 2016, 23).

Table 10- A Nation Branding Process Model[27]

Phase 1: Immersion, Strategic nation brand analysis		**Connection to the Narrative Control Mechanism**
Conduct Analysis		Contribute to Mechanism 1: introduce a new narrative Contribute to Mechanism 3: gather necessary information to minimize the existing negative narrative
	Self-analysis	
	Competitor analysis	
	Customer analysis/Target Audience	
	Aspirational Audit	
	Media Audit	
Generate data from analysis of research findings		
	The drivers for decision making to engage with this nation brand	
	Current state analysis	
	Gaps and opportunities	
Phase 2: Development of the brand, and development and refinement of the nation branding marketing strategy		Contribute to Mechanism 1: introduce a new narrative
Develop brand strategy and positioning		
Develop strategy	Purpose Ambition Trajectory	
Develop nation brand	Personality Verbal Identity Visual Identity	
Refine Strategy	Test Refine Finalize	
Document the guidelines		
Phase 3: Roll out and institutionalization		Contribute to Mechanism 2: spread the new narrative Contribute to Mechanism 3: minimize the existing negative narrative
Determine how the stakeholders will be engaged and introduced to the new brand	Option 1: Big bang Option 2: Stealth	
Train internal stakeholders on the identity and behaviors supporting the brand		
Launch Brand and nation brand communication		
Create brand ambassadors		
Nation brand reinforcement		

[27] Developed by the author based on interviews and desk research.

How the Saudi State Deploys the Nation Branding Strategy to Alter Its Image Abroad

The Saudi State's Experience in the Development and Refinement of Its New Persona

Saudi Arabia's faces a considerable feat in choosing to rebrand the country and change its image among Western publics. This is because of the decades-long legacy of the country's internal governance system and domestic culture, and its external foreign policies. As seen in Chapter 4, the Kingdom's persona is that of a closed, mysterious, violent, chauvinistic, racist, old fashioned, extremist, self-centered, traditionalist, narrow minded, and high-handed state. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, having a negative image abroad can be detrimental to the Kingdom's achievement of its new foreign policy goals, and can have negative economic and reputational consequences for the state. Simon Anholt stated that "given Saudi Arabia's current negative image", the Kingdom would not be able to achieve any of the Vision 2030 aims unless it would first "improve the country's standing and make people think new and better and more positive things about it, [and] see it as a constructive player rather than just a rather frightening mystery" (Cull and Anholt, n.d.). The state has recognized this and has been actively engaged in working toward changing the persona that it projects to the West. Gregory Gause III, professor of International Affairs at Texas A&M University, believes that Saudi Arabia is now trying to project an image that it is a "normal" and "modern" country (Gause III 2024). Professor Gause also noted that MBS was portraying Saudi Arabia "like a cradle of civilization" (Gause III 2024). An employee of the Saudi tourism sector indicated that the character the country is trying to project is "modern; open; tolerant; with deep cultural roots" (Interviewee #8 2023).

Saudi Arabia has actively tried to change its chauvinistic, conservative, old fashioned image. Public relations firm Edelman, for example, sent regular press releases to the media covering the B20[28], with messages about the KSA "mainstreaming women in business" and "doubling down efforts to empower women and youth" (Lowenstein 2022). The establishment of a number of new Saudi women's sports teams is highlighted in social media as a new development (Smart Runners 2023), as is the launching of new global initiatives that introduce women into previously male monopolized sports. Examples include organizing the first ever all female camel race (Startup Dubai 2024). A more globally visible example was holding the first female-only racing championship founded by Formula One, F1 Academy Tournament, at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit. Adwa Alrifi, the Saudi Assistant Minister of Sports highlighted the event. She commented: "We are incredibly proud that Saudi Arabia is the launching pad for such a transformative initiative. It underscores our nation's commitment to gender equality and to fostering opportunities for female athletes in sports" (AlArifi 2024). Most recently, Saudi Arabia applied for, and won by acclamation, the chairmanship of United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (Hauser 2024).

The Kingdom has also worked to change its image as a closed, and mysterious country. The New York Times, commenting on the visit of Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the USA in 2018 said

[28] The B20 was the official forum for business leaders to present policy recommendations to the G20, ahead of the main summit hosted by Saudi Arabia in 2020.

the prince "… is seeking to change the perception of Saudi Arabia from an opaque and conservative kingdom, where mosques promote extremist ideology and women are relegated to second-class status, to a modernist desert oasis" (Arango 2018). It quoted Mohammed K. Alyahya, a Saudi expert at the Atlantic Council in Washington saying: "For the longest time the Saudis wouldn't explain themselves, and explain why things were happening in their country" … "That is changing dramatically" (Arango 2018). At the time of the Crown Prince's visit to the UK, also in 2018, advertisements were published in British national newspapers and on billboards. They carried the message that MBS was "opening Saudi Arabia to the world" and "bringing change to the Kingdom" (Fielding-Smith 2018).

The KSA seeks to show that it belongs to what Arturo Escobar calls the 'economically accomplished' states club (Escobar 2012, 4). It emphasizes that it is similar to the West in this regard, rather than an example of an underdeveloped, backward "other". Saudi Arabia often places a high focus on being the 'first' and building 'the best' and the 'largest'. This contrasts the features of powerlessness, passivity, poverty, and ignorance or lack of initiative that are often associated with underdeveloped states (Escobar 2012, 4). It has, instead, pushed a narrative of being a modern, innovative, industrially advanced, pioneering nation. For example, it has been creating initiatives that position it as one of the pioneering players in the field of green energy and sustainability. MBS said in a TV interview on the Saudi-owned Alarabiya TV channel: "We have the cash, we have the land, we have the stability, we have good infrastructure, we are a G20 country. We want to create the new civilization for tomorrow and we need to encourage other nations to keep doing the same thing for a better planet" (Al Arabiya English 2023).

The Saudi State's Experience in the Roll Out Phase

In the 'roll out' phase, third party firms contracted or sponsored by the Saudi government have promoted new events, disseminated information through public relations, and handled advertising (Green 2016). United Entertainment Group, for example, was hired to help promote the Saudi golf tour, LIV (Lowenstein 2022). Other firms were very active in setting the stage for the new Saudi persona to be introduced to the West by the Crown Prince. As part of the roll out and institutionalization phase, these firms provided media management services and media relations, including managing social media activity and online communications (Green 2016; Halliwell 2022; Lippman, Meyer, and Levine 2018). They were also responsible for creating a crises management strategy and handling public relations (Lippman, Meyer, and Levine 2018). These specialized firms have also been involved in building strategic partnerships (Halliwell 2022), and harnessing government relations (Green 2016).

One of the rollout techniques used in this stage is the creation of brand ambassadors. Saudi Arabia has been hosting celebrities to act as external brand ambassadors living or performing in Saudi Arabia. For example, the Kingdom made headline news when Christiano Ronaldo and his family moved to Saudi Arabia. Ronaldo was contracted by AlNassr football club for a two-and-a-half year contract of 200 million USD. Ronaldo's message to the world regarding his stay in Saudi Arabia was: "… I'm happy here, I want to continue here, I will continue here." (Reuters 2023).

The Saudi State's experience in Institutionalizing Nation Branding Efforts

The Saudi state showed its commitment to changing its persona by making changes to the way it did things. When making these changes, it demonstrated that the new image it has been projecting is not an act of propaganda, but rather a true transformation of society, culture and state. As indicated often by Simon Anholt, who coined the term Nation Brand, any nation branding effort needs to be supported by changes in strategy, policies and legislation. He said: "People don't change their views about countries — views they may have held for decades — simply because a marketing campaign tells them to. Most publics today, I have always maintained, are simply too well inoculated against advertising and too savvy about the media to believe mere government propaganda" (Anholt 2006, 272).

The Saudi state has integrated, into the Vision 2030 Strategy, a number of objectives that support creating a change in the value systems in society. For example, under Vision 2030 Pillar 'A Vibrant Society', the state's strategic objectives include fostering the values of moderation and tolerance, excellence and discipline, equity and transparency, and determination and perseverance. It also set the strategic objective of developing positive attitude, resilience and hard work culture among Saudi children. Under the pillar of 'A Thriving Economy', the state has instituted a strategic objective of enabling integration of people with disabilities in the labor market, as well as improving living conditions and working conditions for expats (Vision 2030, n.d.). These strategic objectives have also been included in the Vision Realization Programs, particularly the National Transformation Program, the Quality of Life Program, and the Human Capability Development Program. The inclusion of these objectives in the strategy and the VRPs signals and consolidates many of the new personality traits the Saudi nation is projecting about itself through nation branding (See Table 3 in the Appendix to Chapter 1).

Saudi Tourism Policy and the Mechanisms of Narrative Control

As indicated in Chapter 1, the Saudi state adopts a comprehensive tourism strategy and policy. Certain aspects of the different tourism components are utilized to stimulate an alteration of the state's image in the West. The World Expo, events, promotional campaigns, and legislation reform are examples of four different aspects of Saudi tourism policy that activate the three actions to control the quantity and quality of narrative circulating about the Saudi state in the West. In this section I prove H2, that Saudi tourism policy uses the same actions [summarized as the Narrative Control Mechanism] as a number of other Saudi public diplomacy instruments designed to alter the Saudi state's image abroad.

Exhibitions/ the World Expo

Saudi Arabia capitalized on the exposure potential of Expo Dubai 2020 and invested in creating an impressive pavilion experience to communicate a carefully curated narrative about itself. The designers of the KSA pavilion used word, music, film, technology, and structure to convey specific messages[29]. It employed advanced technologies to create an interactive user experience

[29] Expo Dubai 2020 took place in 2021 and 2022 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

that allowed visitors to see examples of its diverse natural wonders. Images of roaming oryxes, Red Sea fish and corals, desert landscapes, mountains, and greenery were displayed on a large upright screen at the entrance of the pavilion (see Figure 14) and on a very large round concave screen that visitors watched from an elevated platform (see Figure 12). The pavilion was accessible to persons with disability through special elevators and other accommodations (see Figure 17). The use of technology and the attention to the needs of persons with disabilities conveyed the narrative that it was a modern, advanced, forward looking nation. One section of the exhibition showed a mini rendition of a traditional Saudi city, with mud houses and ancient structure designs (see Figure 15). The entire pavilion experience was accompanied by traditional music. This conveyed the presence of a rich culture, as one of the messages the state wants to project is that it has deep cultural roots (Interviewee #8 2023).

Furthermore, the pavilion was awarded the LEED Platinum Certificate from the US Green Building Council (Time Out Editors 2022). By achieving the highest level of LEED certification, the pavilion showed adherence to standards that address carbon, energy, water, waste, transportation, materials, health and indoor environmental quality (U.S. Green Building Council, n.d.). Building its pavilion to such strict specifications signaled the Kingdom's awareness and commitment to environmental responsibility, improving efficiency, lowering carbon emissions and contributing toward meeting the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals (U.S. Green Building Council, n.d.). Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy recently stressed that the Kingdom is leading influential changes in efforts to confront climate change, and that it "seeks to enhance its efforts to achieve its ambitious goal of reaching net zero by 2060 through the Circular Carbon Economy Framework" (Ministry of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia 2024). This is in contrast to Western media's coverage relating to Saudi Arabia's role as the leader of OPEC and OPEC+ and a major producer of carbon fuels, which had projected an image of a consumerist and selfish nation.

Saudi Arabia used the Saudi pavilion to project new personality traits (mechanism 1). A new persona of a modern, normal, welcoming, engaging, interesting fun-loving, happy, forward looking, diverse and ecologically conscious country was projected. The displays, narrative and design projected by the pavilion discredited the stereotypical images of Saudi Arabia as a closed, old fashioned, harsh, backward, opaque desert Kingdom (mechanism 3). It capitalized on its huge financial capabilities to build the second largest pavilion in the Expo, and to deploy state of the art technology to deliver intended messages, and to capture the attention of millions of tourists. During the Expo, the count of in-person visitors to the Saudi pavilion exceeded three million (Forster 2022). The number continues to grow even several years after the event ended, as it was created as a legacy pavilion that did not get dismantled once the Expo concluded, but rather continues to stand today to receive sightseers who visit the Global Village in Dubai (Blooloop Innovation Awards, n.d.). Virtual visitors can also tour the pavilion using 360° video technology (Virtual Expo, n.d.), thereby delivering Saudi Arabia's intended narrative and messaging to those who were not able to travel to Dubai. The investment of millions of dollars in the size, technology and content of the pavilion allowed the Saudi state to spread the new narrative to millions of people (mechanism 2).

Figure 14- Large-scale curved concave screen displaying Saudi's nature at the Saudi Pavilion Expo 2020 (Boris Micka Associates 2022)

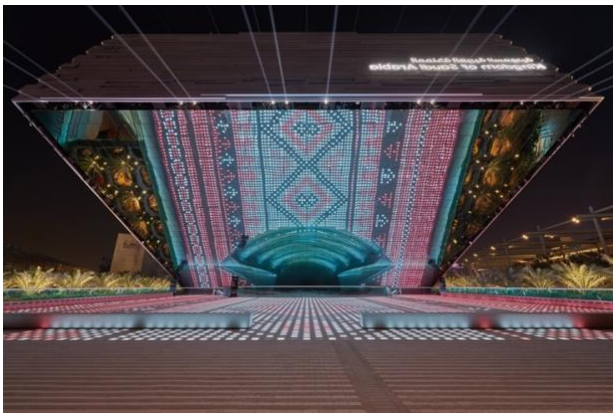


Figure 15- The world's largest LED interactive digital mirror screen displaying images of Saudi heritage at the Saudi Pavilion Expo 2020 (Boris Micka Associates 2022)

Figure 16-An immersive display of Saudi's nature projected on a large screen at the entrance of the pavilion (Kraftwerk Living Technologies GmbH [KLT] 2024)

Figure 17- Special elevator for persons with disabilities allows enjoyment of the immersive sound and light experience while using the elevator. Here showing a rendition of a traditional Saudi city (Boris Micka Associates 2022)

Events

The number of events the Kingdom holds annually is astounding. The country is hosting thousands of concerts, sporting events and entertainment activities annually that were unfathomable only a few years ago because of the strict religious laws of the country then. In an interview with travel industry intelligence and marketing platform SKIFT, the CEO of the Saudi Tourism Authority revealed that in 2023, the Kingdom had delivered 11,000 events. "We're […] building a lot of activations and events like no other place in the world", he said (Habtemariam 2024). The large number of events and the type of entertainment they offer allows the state to project its new persona to thousands of viewers who attend these events in person or through

social and traditional media. High profile events like Formula1, for example, attracts attention of hundreds of thousands of international fans and tourists, as well as worldwide media coverage. In addition to those who attended the race in person, 920,000 viewers watched Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on the ESPN channel in 2024. One year earlier, the Jeddah Corniche circuit event had more than 1.5 million TV viewers on the same channel (Brittle 2024). The Kingdom has been successful in hosting other live events that also attract hundreds of thousands of spectators. Soundstorm EDM festival, for example, brought 630,000 in-person attendees over three days (Habtemariam 2024) [30].

A western diplomat I interviewed in the Saudi capital commented on the revealing clothing worn by a Lebanese singer at a concert he attended in Riyadh. He said: "I had seen a concert by this singer in another Arab country and she wasn't wearing revealing clothing. She must have received direction by the entertainment commission on what to wear, and I believe this is an intentional message signaling the change in the country" (Interviewee #1 2022). When asked what image of Saudi Arabia he thought the Kingdom was trying to convey about itself, he responded: "open, normal, sophisticated, engaging, interesting, and welcoming" (Interviewee #1 2022). He also pointed out that the messaging was "consistent and purposefully done". It emphasized that the Saudis are "180 degrees from where they used to be" and that this is "not yesterday's Saudi Arabia" (Interviewee #1 2022)[31].

The content and presentation of the events introduce the new persona the Kingdom is trying to project about itself (mechanism 1). They also contribute to refuting the claims that it is old, conservative or oppressive (mechanism 3). A simultaneous focus on quantity as exemplified by the large numbers of events, and quality as exemplified by hosting high profile events, ensures wide viewership in person and via social and traditional media. This helps propagate the new narrative the state is presenting about itself (mechanism 2).

[30] An EDM festival is an event where several DJs play at once. One of the world's most famous EDMs is Coachella.
[31] See figure 16 and figure 17 for examples of how some performers dress in the KSA.

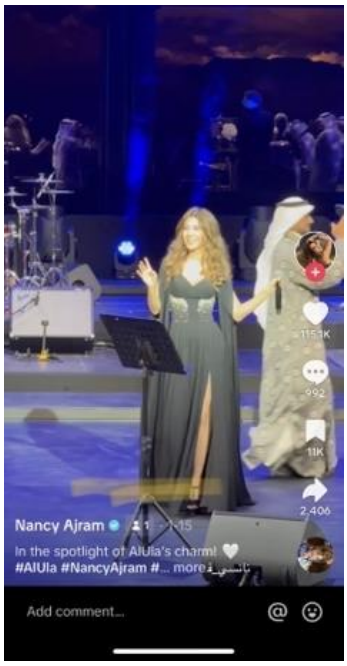


Figure 18- Screenshot of singer Nancy Ajram performing in Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia, on January 11, 2024 (nancyajram 2024)

Figure 19- Screenshot of K-Pop group BlackPink performing in Saudi Arabia, on Jan 21, 2023 (Jisooyaachu 2023)

Saudi Arabia is trying to replace its old fashioned, conservative persona with a happier, more engaging one. A 2023 event titled "Joy Awards" gathered artists, athletes, directors, and social media influencers from the Arab and international communities in Saudi. It hosted Mel Gibson, Amitabh Bachchan, Georgina Rodriguez, Lebanese singer Nancy Ajram, US-Colombian actress Sofia Vergara, Hollywood director Michael Bay, and international football player Achraf Hakimi (Transcontinental Times 2023). Other western singers who have performed in the KSA have included Seal, Lionel Richie, Black Eyed Peas and John Legend, among many others (Hancock 2022a; 2022b; 2023). These artists brought the attention of fans of different ages, cultural backgrounds and interests to Saudi Arabia, and endorsed Saudi Arabia's new brand when they chose to live or perform there. This conveys to visitors and followers of entertainment news and fans of these celebrities a message about Saudi Arabia's attractiveness as a fun, engaging and welcoming destination.

These events change the narrative about Saudi Arabia by activating the Narrative Control Mechanism. It helps to control the quality and quantity of the narrative circulating about the state using the three actions: 1) Introduce a new narrative that the Kingdom is fun, modern, friendly, engaging, open, normal, tolerant, interesting, welcoming, happy, and forward looking. 2) Spread the new narrative to hundreds of thousands of viewers on traditional and social media and in person. 3) Minimize the existing negative narrative by showing that this narrative no longer holds, as Saudi Arabia is not closed, conservative, old fashioned, boring, chauvinist, extremist or backward anymore.

Figures 18 and 19 below show the reach of two the social media vehicles of the General Entertainment Authority [GEA]. The GEA, an arm of the Ministry of Culture is responsible for most of the events taking place in Saudi Arabia. In addition to organizing events, it is responsible for regulation and development of the entertainment sector in the Kingdom (GEA, n.d.-a). Its Instagram account reaches more than 390 thousand followers, and its X [Twitter] account is followed by more than 2.7 million followers, making it a great vehicle for the Narrative Control Mechanism's second step: distributing the new narrative widely.

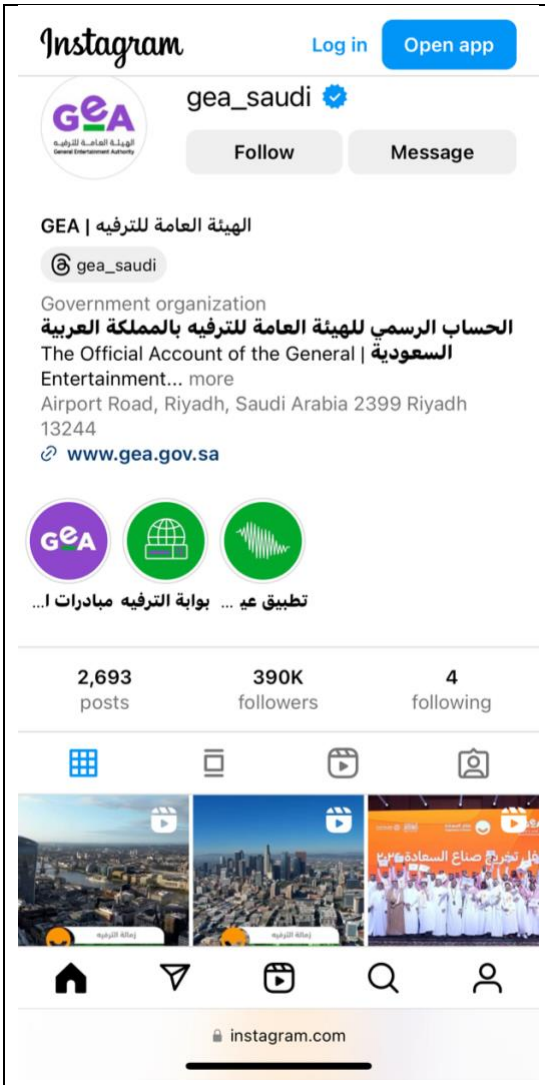


Figure 20- the Instagram Account of the GEA with 390 thousand Followers (GEA Instagram Account, n.d.)

Figure 21- The X (Twitter) Account of the GEA with 2.7 million Followers (GEA X Account 2024)

Promotional Campaigns

Ten promotional campaigns have been launched by the Saudi Tourism Authority between the launching of its e-visa in 2019 and March of 2024 (Habtemariam 2024). For example, the Kingdom launched 'Journeys in Arabia,' an online event curated to educate international travel trade providers in six countries about the tourism possibilities in the Kingdom (BW Online Bureau 2021). A twitter campaign titled "Where in the World" aimed at changing the way the country is perceived by international markets and likened the Kingdom's attractions to very famous ones in other countries of the world (Stepfeed 2019). The messaging in both campaigns challenged the stereotypical image of Saudi Arabia as only a desert (Afifi 2024). It did so by showing a diverse set of landscapes and adventure tourism possibilities.

In 2022, the kingdom launched "Welcome to Arabia" an online and traditional media campaign to promote the country globally. The campaign focused on Saudi heritage before presenting modern offerings of tourism in Saudi Arabia. The campaign used TV, social and digital media marketing tools, as well as OTA tactics[32] (BTN 2024). In 2023, the campaign also added a new tool, tourism ambassadors. One of its advertisements featured Messi doing cultural and adventure activities in the Kingdom and inviting the viewers to plan their adventures to Saudi Arabia and "unleash [their] inner thrill seeker and uncover the unimagined". The advertisement promised that whether the visitor's intent was to "travel to discover new things, old things, or just to awaken something new inside [themselves], Saudi satisfies on all fronts" (Gregory 2023). The campaign videos prominently featured foreign and Saudi women, as well as foreign couples engaging in tourism activities, clearly countering the stereotype that the Kingdom is conservative and closed minded (Reale Ambasciata dell'Arabia Saudita a Roma 2019; Experience AlUla 2021)[33].

The campaign videos showed traditional handicraft making, old buildings, and historical sites, as well as colorful traditional clothing and garments. This reference to Saudi heritage emphasizes Saudi Arabia's deep cultural roots, one of the main themes the Kingdom is trying to project about itself (Interviewee #8 2023). The Saudi government created the Heritage Commission in 2020 to revive, organize and develop the heritage sector (Heritage Commission 2021). The revival of heritage is an important part of Vision 2030. "Conserving and Promoting Islamic, Arab and National Heritage of the Kingdom" is one of the Vision Realization Programs under the Pillar of a Vibrant Society. One of the Vision 2030 targets under the same pillar is to "double the number of Saudi properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List". See Table 3 in Appendix to Chapter 1.

This counters the negative stereotypes of Saudi Arabia, based on its historical destruction of many expressions of non- Wahhabi heritage, such as buildings, music, and dress (Farhat 2018). Jonas Otterbeck tied the practice of destruction of heritage sites to Wahhabi social control, the desire of the Wahhabis to create "a controlled, uniform social sphere", and their opposition of

[32] OTAS are online travel agencies like Booking.com and Expedia.com.

[33] See also the all-female-cast video promoting AlUla tourism zone https://youtu.be/NI0Q-2ypZhg. (Experience AlUla 2021).

public plurality of lifestyles (Otterbeck 2012, 344, 342). As mentioned by one of my interviewees, "for decades, the Wahhabis fought all expressions of Saudi culture that existed before the formation of the Saudi Kingdom. They turned colorful dresses into black for women and white for men. They prohibited music and frowned upon expressions of happiness" (Interviewee #2 2023).

Figure 22- Examples from the advertisements of the Welcome to Arabia campaign launched in collaboration with Expedia

Whereas one of tourism advertising's advantages is the ability to offer a subtle way to minimize the negative narrative and introduce a new narrative, the latest tourism authority marketing campaign was very explicit in attacking criticisms against Saudi Arabia. This shows the high level of coordination between the different government entities working on Saudi Arabia's nation branding strategy, and the conscious use of tourism as a nation branding and public diplomacy instrument. The Saudi Tourism Authority's 2024 campaign titled "Go Beyond What You Think" featured Lionel Messi attacking four misconceptions about the country: Just a desert, nothing much happening, closed culture, and girls can't (Visit Saudi 2024; Habtemariam 2024). The campaign video offered an alternative narrative, showing sea, corals, rivers, and snow in response to the first criticism. An exciting ride in a theme park, a Formula 1 race, a hot air balloon show by candle lights, fireworks, and a western style concert were shown in response to the second criticism. To refute the third notion about the country, the video showed people of different races sitting at a meal in Saudi Arabia, a young western family visiting a cultural heritage site being shown around by a local guide, a western man dancing to a Saudi group performing traditional music, and a convertible car being driven by a Saudi woman with one male and one female western passengers.

In the last section of the movie, the video even incorporated some non-tourism related examples to contest the existing image of Saudi Arabia, as it showed the Saudi female soccer team and the first female Saudi astronaut Rayyanah Barnawi. It also included a shot of Saudi female DJ Cosmicat, and Dania Akeel, the female Saudi motorsport athlete**.** Communications website CampaignME reported in March 2024, only two months after the launch of the campaign, that "Go Beyond What You Think" had reached 747 million persons across 92 countries in 20 languages, with an engagement of 84.3 million. It attributed 48 million of the Instagram reach to the partnership with Messi, given his large following on the social media platform (mechanism 2) (Harper 2024).

The Narrative Control Mechanism summarizes how tourism campaigns can contribute to controlling the content of the narrative circulating about the Kingdom, and to affect the extent of its circulation by offering an alternative narrative to large numbers of people, using three steps: 1) Use tourism marketing videos and still advertisements to introduce a new narrative. This narrative says Saudi Arabia is a modernizing, fun, engaging, welcoming, interesting, tolerant, diverse, happy, and open minded country that has deep cultural roots. 2) Spread the new narrative to millions in the West using paid advertisements in social and traditional media and using the platforms of very popular influencers 3) Discredit the existing negative image about Saudi Arabia by showing that old stereotypes should no longer hold. The Kingdom is no longer a conservative, closed-minded, intolerant desert Kingdom that is closed to the West.

Legislation Development & Reform

The Saudi government has enacted several legislative reforms to support the implementation of its tourism strategy. Examples of such reforms include changing visa laws to create a tourism visa (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.-d;); allowing women to enter the Kingdom without a male guardian (The Week Staff 2014); allowing the organization of concerts and events (GEA, n.d.-a), and announcing the opening of new entertainment zones (SEVEN, n.d.; Afifi 2024). Laws that pertain to tourists directly have also been changed. For example, residency rules in hotels have been changed, allowing non-married mixed gender individuals to stay in the same room (Hamdi 2021). New rules enacted after King Salman was throned allow women to walk publicly without covering their heads or wearing an Abaya and permit them to drive cars (Specia 2019). The legislative reform contributed to projecting an image of a modernizing nation and to contesting accusations of being old fashioned, oppressive, and closed -minded.

The Kingdom used tourism marketing techniques to advertise these regulatory changes. The state employed this strategy when the Saudi Tourism Authority built an entire campaign around changing visa legislation. The Saudi Tourism Authority's first-ever video and outdoor global marketing campaign "Welcome to Arabia, A Journey You've Never Imagined" aired in more than 30 tourist markets in North America, Europe, Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council in 2019. The focus of the campaign was the online 90-day tourist visa application made available for the first time ever (Al Jazeera 2019; Chua 2021). The state which had until that date only granted work, family visit or pilgrimage visas had started to grant tourism visas, and to issue them electronically to citizens of certain nations.

The Narrative Control Mechanism activated by advertising changes in legislation contributes to controlling the quality and quantity of the narrative circulating about the Saudi state using the three actions: 1) Introduce a new narrative about the country that emphasizing active reform efforts, moves toward social liberalization, and commitment to progress, 2) Spread the new narrative by using tourism marketing techniques, public relations, and statements in media 3) Minimize the existing negative narrative by discrediting old stereotypes about the country, such as those about it being closed and opaque, or its treatment of female visitors or citizens.

Public Relations and Lobbying Tools used by the KSA to Support Public Diplomacy Strategies

The Kingdom uses public relations and lobbying among its arsenal of tools to alter its image in the West. *The Guardian* reported that many of the PR and lobbying efforts were financed by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, known as the Public Investment Fund (PIF) (Lowenstein 2022).

Saudi Arabia has contracted several PR firms in Europe to deliver lobbying and public relations services. In 2017, the *Financial Times* reported the KSA planned to set up PR hubs in three European capitals, Berlin, London, and Paris "to promote the changing face of the Kingdom" and "to improve international perception of the Kingdom" (Kerr 2017). *The Guardian* reported in 2018 that since MBS was appointed Crown Prince, the list of UK PR firms the Kingdom has worked with has included Freud's, CT Group, Pagefield Global Counsel, Kekst CNC, and Vice (Waterson 2018). The list also includes Consulum FZ LLC (European Parliament 2018; Fielding-Smith 2018), as well as Qorvis MSLGroup (Green 2016). In 2022 Saudia, the state-owned Saudi Airline, chose the international representation, marketing and communications company AVIAREPS to handle PR activities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom (AVIAREPS 2022). Edelman (Lowenstein 2022), APCO Worldwide (Fielding-Smith 2018), United Entertainment Group (Lowenstein 2022), and the lobbying and communications shop BGR, The Clover Group and The Harbour Group were also among the firms identified by Western media as serving Saudi public relations and lobbying interests in the West.

The absence of such stringent requirements to publish information about lobbying in Europe has made it difficult to track actual spending by the Kingdom there (Transparency International EU 2024). However, news reports about the engagement of tens of Europe-based public relations firms with the Saudi state indicate that lobbying and image management efforts targeted at the publics and governments of European countries have been widespread, as indicated in the examples above. An estimate of the magnitude of spending made by the KSA on managing its image in the West could be gauged based on its spending in the USA alone. It is possible to track the KSA's spending in the USA because legislation requires the amounts contracted to be registered with the Department of Justice via the Foreign Agents Registration Act [FARA] (Halliwell 2022).

A specialized public relations news website reported in 2023 that in the USA "at least 28 organizations are registered as foreign agents for the kingdom and its various nonprofit and commercial entities" (Czarnecki, n.d.). Western media has reported that the contracting entities

included the Saudi golf tour, LIV (Lowenstein 2022); Business 20 (B20) Saudi Arabia[34] (SABIC 2020); the Ministry of Culture, and Neom (Lowenstein 2022). The Saudi Basic Industries Corporation, a company producing chemicals and other materials that is majority owned by the Saudi government is also represented by PR companies in the US (Fuchs 2022). The table below (Table 11) shows the different Saudi entities that have engaged in lobbying and PR services in the US and the types of activities it hired American lobbying and public relations firms to do in the years 2018 and 2019, according to research done by Alexander Dukalskis.

Politico reported that in 2018, Glover Park Group was being paid 150,000 USD monthly by the Saudi government, while BGR Group was paid 80,000 USD a month (Lippman, Meyer, and Levine 2018). Politico also reported that the value of Edelman's 2020 contract with the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation, was registered with the Department of Justice at around 6.7 million USD (Fuchs 2022). *Foreign Policy* reported that Edelman's contract with Neom to provide communications services was reported at 225,000 USD in 2020 (Baram 2021). In 2021, the Saudi Embassy hired Off Hill Strategies for three months for $75,000 to lobby for the Kingdom. In 2022, Politico reported that the "PR activities aimed at improving the reputation of Saudi Arabia, a controversial state, in recent years" was registered at "$787,000 USD via the Foreign Agents Registration Act (Halliwell 2022), while the *Middle East Eye* reported that in May of 2022, a three month, 750,000 USD contract, was signed between lobbying firm Qorvis and the Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, to provide public relations services to the Human Rights Commission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Mathews 2022).

Millions of dollars have been spent by the KSA annually on lobbying and public relations in the USA. The graphs below (Figures 23 and 24) have been constructed based on information provided in Alexander Dukalskis' book "Mechanisms of Authoritarian Image Management*"* (Dukalskis 2021, Appendix A)[35]. They show that in 2018, Saudi Arabia outspent every other non- democratic country in Dukalskis' list on lobbying and PR in the USA. At USD 6,188,550 million USD dedicated for this goal, it spent almost double the UAE, the second highest spender on the list. In 2019, Saudi Arabia doubled its spending to 11,472,000 million USD. Among the budgets of the authoritarian group of countries captured by the source document, its US lobbying and PR budget was only exceeded by those of Russia (34,345762 million USD) and China (31,125,496 million USD)[36] [37].

[34] B20 was the official voice of the global private sector to the G20, which hosted the B20 Summit virtually on October 26-27th, 2020

[35] Countries that have not shown spending on these activities in the source document during a particular year have been excluded. The calculations in the figures also excluded any amounts that were billed to states hourly when no numeric amount was provided to specify the total billing, or when the amounts spent by the state were not specified in the appendix.

[36] It is worth noting that 10 million USD of China's spending per the above budget in 2019 was allocated to the printing and distribution of China Daily, whereas more than 23 million USD was spent by Russia on running Russia Today. 1,044,000 million USD of UAE spending was made by Expo 2020 Dubai.

[37] Opposition website, Saudi Leaks, accused Saudi Arabia of spending more than $100 million on lobbyists in the USA. The website did not mention the period over which this amount was spent (SaudiLeaks 2022).

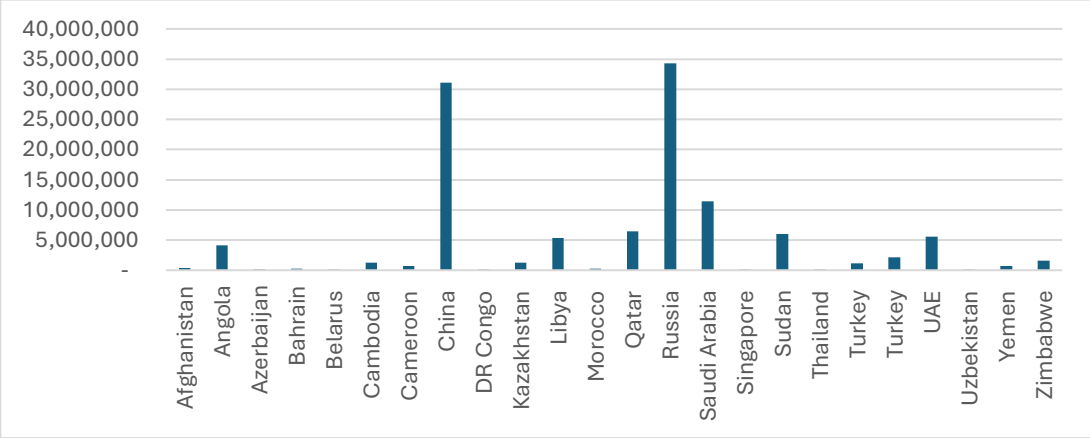


Figure 23- PR & Lobbying Spending by Saudi Arabia in Comparison to other Authoritarian Countries in 2019 [38]

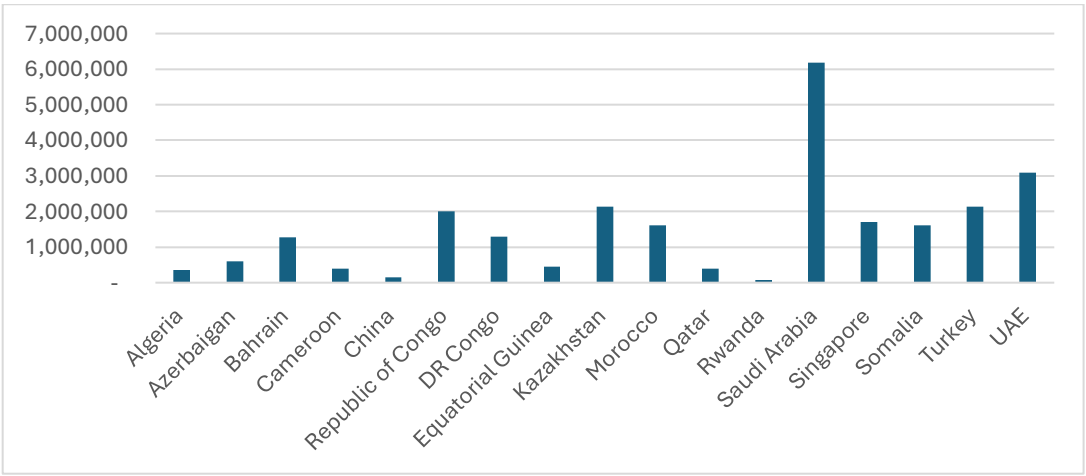


Figure 24- PR & Lobbying Spending by Saudi Arabia in Comparison to other Authoritarian Countries in 2018[39]

[38] Graph constructed by dissertation author based on information provided in Alexander Dukalskis' book "Mechanisms of Authoritarian Image Management*"* (Dukalskis 2021, Appendix A).

[39] Graph constructed by dissertation author based on information provided in Alexander Dukalskis' book "Mechanisms of Authoritarian Image Management*"* (Dukalskis 2021, Appendix A).

Table 11- PR and Lobbying by the KSA in the USA, 2018–2019 (Dukalskis 2021, Appendix A)

Foreign Principal	Country	Annual Contract Value (USD)	Date	Activities	Link
T&R Productions LLC	Russia	23,395,522	2019	Run RT	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6485-Amendment-20190211-2.pdf
Rwanda Development Board	Rwanda	80,000	2018	Publicity for Rwanda: The Royal Tour	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6170-Exhibit-AB-20180515-43.pdf
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	120,000	2019	Public relations	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6761-Exhibit-AB-20191203-1.pdf
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	120,000	2019	Media outreach and engagement in Colorado	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6760-Exhibit-AB-20191202-1.pdf
Muslim World League	Saudi Arabia	135,000	2018	Organize conference, arrange meeting with policymaker, promote image of Islam	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6457-Exhibit-AB-20181012-5.pdf
Muslim World League	Saudi Arabia	38,000	2018	Consulting services, conference promotion.	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6426-Exhibit-AB-20181229-4.pdf
Embassy of Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	600,000	2018	Lobbying, government relations	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6391-Exhibit-AB-20180820-5.pdf
Public Investment Fund	Saudi Arabia	1,440,000	2019	"[O]utreach and relationship-building to various stakeholders in business and the media"	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6162-Exhibit-AB-20190225-3.pdf
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	1,518,000	2019	"[M]edia outreach and engagement efforts across select media markets throughout the U.S."; "inform the public, government officials and the media about the importance of fostering and promoting strong relations between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia"	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6749-Exhibit-AB-20191112-1.pdf
Ministry of Economy and Planning	Saudi Arabia	1,999,733	2017	Strategic consulting, communications	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/3301-Exhibit-AB-20180105-32.pdf
General Sports Authority	Saudi Arabia	264,000	2018	Consulting, lobbying, "attend quarterly events"	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6519-Exhibit-AB-20180202-1.pdf
NEOM Company (government owned)	Saudi Arabia	2,100,000	2019	Strategic advice, narrative and messaging	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6698-Exhibit-AB-20190708-1.pdf

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Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	2,100,000	2019	Lobbying	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/2244-Exhibit-AB-20191017-89.pdf
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	5,964,000	2019	Public relations, content development, event planning, research	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5483-Exhibit-AB-20191030-69.pdf
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	5,151,500	2018	Public relations services, event planning	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5483-Exhibit-AB-20190423-64.pdf
Government of the Republic of Singapore	Singapore	216,000	2018	"[S]trategic counsel, message and materials development, and media and public outreach support"	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5867-Exhibit-AB-20180309-39.pdf
Singapore IMDA	Singapore	11,300	2019	"[S]trategic media counsel and recommendations"; media outreach and engagement	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6064-Exhibit-AB-20190220-18.pdf
Government Technology Agency	Singapore	13,500	2018	"[T]o pitch and secure two phone interviews with principals in US on 18th Nov."	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6227-Exhibit-AB-20181203-15.pdf
Singapore Economic Development Board	Singapore	1,481,763	2018	Marketing and communications	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6387-Exhibit-AB-20170920-2.pdf
Federal Government of Somalia	Somalia	0	2019	Lobbying	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6757-Exhibit-AB-20191127-1.pdf
Ministry of Finance	Somalia	420,000	2018	Lobbying, PR, improve relations between US and Somalia	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5430-Exhibit-AB-20180501-65.pdf
Federal Government of Somalia	Somalia	1,200,000	2018	Lobbying	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6399-Exhibit-AB-20180810-23.pdf
Transitional Council of Sudan	Sudan	6,000,000	2019	Lobbying, PR	https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6200-Exhibit-AB-20190617-8.pdf

(continued)

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Conclusion

This chapter contributed to answering the research question by confirming the second hypothesis H2: Outward targeting elements of Saudi tourism policy can influence the state's image abroad using the same mechanism employed by several Saudi public diplomacy tools. The chapter used evidence from Saudi foreign policy communications and actions to demonstrate how public diplomacy instruments were deployed to alter the state's image in the West. The Narrative Control Mechanism summarized how the state's actions were designed to change its image. This Saudi state attempted to control the content (quality) and dissemination (quantity) of the narrative circulating about the country using three mechanism: 1) introducing a new narrative , 2) propagating the new narrative, 3) minimizing the original negative narrative.

The chapter first analyzed two public diplomacy instruments used by the Saudi state to manage its image in the eyes of western public audiences, Image Restoration and Nation Branding. In the section discussing the use of image restoration by the Kingdom, samples of responses given by Saudi Ministers in interviews, Saudi embassy statements, and actions by the Saudi state were presented. The deployment of the strategies of 'Denial', 'Evasion of Responsibility', and 'Reducing Offensiveness of Act', were illustrated using real life examples. These examples showed the three parts of the mechanism being implemented. The Saudi state tried to minimize or discredit the narrative that emerged because of the crises (mechanism 3). It also introduced a new narrative using one of the image restoration theory tactics (mechanism 1), and it sought to propagate that new narrative using statements, interviews, and even actions at the United Nations (mechanism 2).

Analysis of the Nation Branding strategy in the first section explained the strategy's three phases. The chapter provided samples of the evidence collected from the Saudi case study to demonstrate steps within the three phases of immersion and strategic brand analysis; development of the brand and the development of the brand marketing strategy; and rollout and institutionalization. It showed how the Saudi state used different tools to rebrand itself, like hiring public relations and lobbying firms and creating brand ambassadors. The chapter also gave examples of the new personality traits the Kingdom has been trying to imbue itself with. Interviews with marketing analysts, foreign policy experts, and tourism practitioners produced a list of characteristics the KSA was trying to associate itself with in the eyes of Western publics through using nation branding tactics. These personality traits include being modernist; open; tolerant; having deep cultural roots; normal; engaging; interesting; welcoming; forward-looking; reforming and committed to a rules-based international system. Chapter 4 had presented the negative personality traits the Kingdom was trying to disassociate itself from. A successful nation branding effort creates an association with the positive traits and replaces the negative traits that continue to be projected about the Kingdom internationally. The new persona formed part of the new narrative introduced by the Kingdom (mechanism 1). The branding and marketing strategies were designed to spread the new narrative (mechanism 2), and the large scale advertising and marketing spending was designed to discredit or drown the previous negative image (mechanism 3).

The third section of the chapter showed that different aspects of Saudi Tourism strategy could alter the state's image the way nation branding and image restoration strategies did. This is

because they had the potential of delivering the three steps that could lead to a change in a state's image abroad. That is, outwardly targeted tourism policy aspects could introduce a new narrative, propagate that new narrative widely, and minimize the old narrative by drowning or discrediting it. This section of the chapter provided examples from different components of Saudi tourism policy. The contribution of events, exhibitions, announcements about changes in legislation, and promotional campaigns to altering the image of the Saudi state among foreign publics, using the steps of the Narrative Control Mechanism model, was explored.

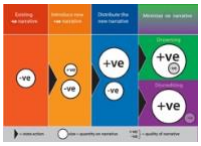
For example, expos project new country personality traits to visitors (mechanism 1); promote the new persona to millions of visitors through sound, light and design (mechanism 2). Tourism campaigns, on the other hand, contribute to controlling the quality and quantity of the narrative circulating about the Saudi state by using tourism marketing videos and still advertisements to introduce a new narrative (mechanism 1), and spreading the new narrative using influencers and paid advertisements in social and traditional media (mechanism 2). The chapter showed how changes in legislation give the state an opportunity to highlight changes and reform in the country (mechanism1), and use tourism marketing techniques and public relations tactics to spread awareness about the new reforms (mechanism 2). Events allow the state to present a new image as a fun, open, tolerant, westernized location (mechanism 1); and then to reach hundreds of thousands of spectators in person and through different media (mechanism 2). The four tourism policy aspects explored in the chapter minimized the negative narratives mainly by discrediting old stereotypes and accusations about the country and showing that they were no longer valid (mechanism 3).

The table below compares the three strategies discussed in this chapter, Nation Branding, Image Restoration and Tourism Policy, and summarizes how they were used as public diplomacy instruments to adjust the state's image abroad. The next chapter confirms the third hypothesis.

Appendix of Chapter 6

Table 12- Comparing three Public Diplomacy Instruments: Image Restoration, Nation Branding and Tourism Policy

	Image Restoration Theory	Nation Branding	Tourism Policy
Who delivers the messaging	A state institution, like an embassy or the ministry of foreign affairs Agent of the state, like a minister or official spokesperson Third party representing the state, like a PR agency	Third party nation branding specialist contracted by the state develops the strategy State institution spearheads the consolidation and institutionalizing of the strategy, bringing together the public and private sectors The campaign launch is implemented by specialized state organizations or third party contractors	Official state announcements Third party representing the state, through promotional videos and advertisements Curations in exhibitions, events and expos Word of mouth (tourists) Word of mouth (private sector) Third party representing the state, like a PR agency
What triggers the action	Immediate response to a particular incident or accusation	Implementation of a long term goal of changing the perception of target audiences of the nation's brand	Implementation of a medium to long term goal of changing the perception of target audiences about the state
Why is the action taken	To alleviate negative publicity in media as it relates to a particular incident To restore the image of the country it had before the particular incident Linked to the existing nations' strategy, domestic goals, and foreign policy goals	To change a negative image in the eyes of publics and governments as it relates to the different elements of the nation brand, and to gradually replace it with an improved perception of the nation brand. Linked to the strategy, domestic goals, and foreign policy goals the nation is trying to achieve in the future	To change the original negative image in the eyes of publics as it relates to the country and its citizens, and to replace it with a very different positive image and persona Linked to the strategy, domestic goals, and foreign policy goals the nation is trying to achieve presently and in the future

When is it implemented	Immediate Immediately after the event and for a limited period afterwards	Medium to long term When the policy makers decide that the current image is negatively affecting the state's economic and/or political goals, and decide to undertake a medium to long term institutionalized effort to change that image	Immediate to long term When the policy makers decide that the current image is negatively affecting the state's foreign policy goals, and decide to undertake an immediate to long term institutionalized effort to change that image
Where is the policy implemented	Media; Conferences; Official statements; Official websites, UN and international organization (where humanitarian gestures are made)	International Media, Events, the nation's official communications and media, marketing campaigns and materials, behaviors, and attitudes within the state	Trade exhibitions; expos; tourism locations within the country; events within the country; abroad during road shows and in promotional and PR campaigns; social media space
How is the policy implemented	Statement by official spokespersons Interview with an official spokesperson Statement by PR agencies Official statements in media or on website Official report Official action	Research, design, rollout, institutionalization, and testing of the brand Big bang (launches, events, road shows, marketing campaigns), or Stealth (PR activities, change of tone and content in statement and official media channels) Brand ambassadors	Legislation development and reform; promotion; product development; giga projects; events; human resource development and sector governance
 How does the Narrative Control Mechanism of seeking to control the quality and quantity of the	At least one of the tactics of IRT is used to control the content (quality) and distribution (quantity) of the narrative covered in Western media during a crisis by: Offering an alternative story or a justification for the state's action (mechanism 1).	Nation branding is used to control the content (quality) and spread (quantity) of the narrative in the West by adopting the three actions: Identify the desired new image through consultations and research. Construct the new image. Offer the target market and the domestic population a new image and identity (mechanism 1)	Events, expos, advertisements and other tourism instruments introduce a new persona and a new image of the Kingdom (mechanism 1) Advertising, public relations, word of mouth, social media and traditional media exposure disseminate

narrative circulating about the state works when this strategy is used? How are the three actions of the Mechanism manifested? 1) introduce a new narrative, 2) spread the new narrative, 3) minimize the existing negative narrative	Distributing and promoting the alternative response of the state in western media using public statements, interviews, and public relations efforts (mechanism 2). Discrediting the negative story that is being covered in the media by showing alternative explanations (mechanism 3)	Launch a powerful marketing effort to distribute the new narrative and enforce association with the new persona, using advertising, PR, events, external ambassadors, social media, etc. Reinforce the new persona domestically by training staff and internal ambassadors on demonstrating the new persona. Work on institutionalizing the new persona in the country through training, change of policies, reform, investments and integrating the desired change into the grand strategy (mechanism 2) Discredit the original negative narrative by showing that it no longer holds given the changes happening in the country. Also drown the negative narrative in a flood of alternative positive messaging (Mechanism 3)	the new image and persona (mechanism 2) With younger generations, the positive experiences and images discredit and replace negative portrayal of the Saudi state they may have been exposed to. The messaging directed at younger populations, over time, replaces that held by older publics. With time, the positive portrayal drowns and displaces the negative portrayal (mechanism 3)

Chapter 7: Saudi Tourism Policy as A Tool of Public Diplomacy

Introduction

This chapter contributes to the dissertation by confirming H3: Saudi tourism policy meets the definition of public diplomacy and delivers the goals of public diplomacy. Tourism policy shares definitions, mechanisms and practices with public diplomacy. The previous chapter showed that tourism policy had the capability of influencing the image of the Saudi state in the West. It could do so by deploying the same steps used by Nation Branding and Image Restoration, instruments of Saudi public diplomacy, as summarized in the Narrative Control Mechanism model.

The first section of this chapter shows that several aspects of tourism policy could be utilized as public diplomacy because: 1) they are state policies geared toward actors in the international system- making them examples of diplomacy, one of the three categories of foreign policy, 2) they are diplomatic actions geared toward the publics of foreign nations- making them public diplomacy, and 3) they exhibit diplomatic practices.

This chapter also provides justification on why it is advantageous for states to utilize tourism policy as an instrument of public diplomacy. Providing examples from the Saudi context, it identifies the conditions that allowed tourism policy to become a tool of public diplomacy. Finally, the chapter explores the limitations of tourism policy as a tool of public diplomacy in the context of the Saudi state.

Tourism Policy as a Diplomatic Foreign Policy Action

The parts of the Saudi tourism policy that are directed at audiences outside the state within the international system, qualify as diplomatic foreign policy instruments according to Derek Beach. In his book 'Analyzing Foreign Policy', Beach states that foreign policy is "both the broad trends of behavior and the particular actions taken by a state or other collective actor as directed toward other collective actors within the international system. Foreign policy actions can be undertaken using a variety of different instruments…" (Beach 2012, 3). He divides foreign policy into three categories: security foreign policy which refers to "the threat, use and control of military force"; economic foreign policies, or economic statecraft, which denote the use of different economic policy instruments by the state to achieve its objectives (like sanctions or economic aid); and diplomacy, which refers to the state's "range of non-violent foreign policy actions" (Beach 2012, 172). As such, the aspects of the Saudi tourism policy that are non-violent foreign policy actions are examples of diplomacy. These diplomacy instruments, as discussed in the dissertation, include marketing efforts, promotional campaigns, spreading awareness about changes in legislation; and hosting or participating in expos.

Tourism Policy as Public Diplomacy

The parts of the Saudi tourism policy that are directed at foreign publics, are consistent with

public diplomacy's definitions and goals. The concept of Public Diplomacy was explored in the Literature Review (Chapter 2) but will be revisited here. New definitions of public diplomacy explain it as "activities of governments and other actors to wield influence over foreign public to achieve foreign policy goals" (Merickova 2014, 353). A broader definition states that public diplomacy covers "all a nation does to explain itself to the world" (Merickova 2014, 353). A third definition states that public diplomacy is "policy-based communication activities designed to understand, engage, inform, and influence foreign publics" (Banks, n.d.) with the explicit goals of impacting a foreign government and advancing foreign policy (Cull 2008b; Gilboa 2008). All of these definitions apply to the Saudi tourism policy components of 1) marketing efforts, 2) promotional campaigns, 3) expos, and 4) informational activities regarding changing the state's tourism legislation.

Tourism Policy Delivers Practices of Diplomacy

Saudi tourism policy performs diplomatic practices. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), these are activities or actions that are associated with diplomacy. Diplomacy is defined as "a historically and culturally contingent bundle of practices that are analytically alike in their claim to represent a given polity to the outside world" (Pouliot and Cornut 2015, 298). Practices of diplomacy include representation, advocacy, communicating, negotiation, mediation and representation of a collective self (Henders 2020; Young and Henders 2016; Young and Wylie (forthcoming); Cull 2008a). Different components of state-directed Saudi tourism policy perform the diplomatic practices of representation, advocacy and negotiation of differences.

Traditional public diplomacy uses media, cultural exchanges and cultural ambassadors like musicians and artists to present the values and culture of a state to foreign publics (Gregory 2008). Tourism policy engages in similar representation practice by presenting the Saudi Kingdom's culture, values, identity and interests to foreign tourists, and publics engaging with news and advertising about different components of its tourism policy. Saudi Arabia uses museum curation; signage in tourism destinations; culturally themed events and festivals; and messaging in promotional campaigns to communicate its identity, values and culture to Western publics (Interviewee #1 2022). Public diplomacy uses press relations to promote to a foreign public a particular idea or policy. Saudi tourism does the same type of advocacy by ambassadors like Messi or Ronaldo and other influencers to endorse the country, ask the western publics to change their view on the country, and support the Kingdom's policies.

Embracing western style tourism entertainment and standards signals to Western publics that Saudi Arabia now accepts the western way of life and western values. For years, the country was exporting Wahhabi ideology which was openly hostile to non-Muslims (Pandith 2024). Not only was the Kingdom seen as 'the other' by the West (Akdag and Swanson 2018), it also practiced 'othering', looking down on non-Muslim traditions and lifestyle (Danielewicz-Betz 2013). The Saudi state now engages in mediation of differences through tourism policy when hosting events with western performers, and creating tourism destinations that move beyond religious tourism to invite western tourists to enjoy its sun, sea and adventure destinations and experience its culture.

The Advantages of Using Tourism Policy as a Tool of Public Diplomacy

Using tourism policy as a tool of public diplomacy has several advantages. Some of these benefits even outweigh those offered by traditional public diplomacy instruments like state-funded cultural and educational exchanges, because of the magnitude of reach of tourism policy. At the same time, the use of tourism policy as public diplomacy can distribute the intended public diplomacy messaging; allows the state to modify its persona internationally; is a good justification for spending millions on marketing, public relations and promotion; improves the state's brand and reputation; shows commitment to change; appeals to youth and circumvents the damage done by traditional media.

- As indicated in Chapter 6, the use of tourism policy allowed the Saudi state to introduce a new persona of a modern, tolerant, normal, interesting, welcoming, fun, happy, forward looking, reforming country with deep cultural roots. It used its new country personality traits, conveyed through its tourism strategy, to counter its image in the West of being a backward, closed, extremist, chauvinist, dangerous, cruel and closed-minded country. The embracing of western modes of entertainment like cinemas, concerts, sports events, and different types of tourism, along with the standards of hospitality expected of these touristic activities, have signaled to the western public that Saudi is not what had been depicted in media for decades, and is different from how to it used to be before the Salman era.

- Tourism marketing allows the Saudi state to spend millions of of dollars on improving the state's image and changing the narrative about it in the West, while also achieving other foreign policy goals. These include attracting foreign direct investment [FDI] and diversifying the economy by bringing in tourists into the country to support its new tourism industry, reduce leakage of Saudi tourist spending out of the country, and contribute to the country's non-oil GDP.

- The Saudi Arabian state can use the best marketing and public relations agencies in order to promote tourism, without the effort being called advocacy or propaganda. Public diplomacy has been "presented as a variety of propaganda" for decades by the public and by scholars (Melissen 2005). Even some diplomats conflate public diplomacy with propaganda, as demonstrated in the quote of US ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke: 'Call it public diplomacy, call it public affairs, psychological warfare, if you really want to be blunt, propaganda" (Melissen 2005). However, while achieving the public diplomacy goals of addressing publics, changing the states' image abroad and achieving other foreign policy goals, tourism communication appears justified as a necessary functional component of tourism policy and strategy (Abuharris and Ruddock, n.d.). As such, it contributes to achieving the state's goals without looking like state propaganda. Jami Fullerton and Alice Kendrick have proven empirically the ability of tourism advertising to act as a form of 'mediated public diplomacy' "whereby

government representatives attempt to positively frame their country's policies in international media" (Fullerton and Kendrick 2013).

- Implementing the Saudi national tourism policy can lead to improving the Saudi state's general reputation as measured by the nation brand score on the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index. Successful tourism policy goes beyond affecting the score on the tourism pillar which measures the draw of natural and man-made tourist attractions. The successful implementation of the tourism policy could also positively affect other aspects on the NBI such as Heritage and Culture, as the Kingdom invests in researching and promoting its culture and heritage; and supporting the music, film, art and sports scenes (Ministry of Culture, n.d.; Film Commission 2021). The People pillar in Vision 2030 which looks to improve the "population's reputation for competence, openness and friendliness and other qualities such as tolerance" can be enhanced by tourism marketing which emphasizes the new personality traits of the country. This new persona is presented in events and promotional campaigns. The events also contribute to national identity building, as the new personality traits are domestically institutionalized when entertainment activities that steer the character of its population towards more openness, friendliness and tolerance are created (Al-Busaidi 2019). The Investment component of the index is supported by the tourism policy's focus on attracting FDI; creating new tourism related partnerships with the private sector domestically and internationally; and changing tourism related legislation. Furthermore, the reform in tourism-related laws positively affects the governance aspect of the nation brand index. Statistics on the third quarter of 2023 revealed that Saudi tourism was the sector that contributed most in terms of FDI net inflows to the Kingdom, with 26 FDI projects announced between July and September 2023 (Dojan 2024).

Figure 25- Anholt-IPSOS Nation Brand Index Components (Lewis 2018)

- The change of legislation and liberalization of society and regulations in sectors related to tourism allows the Saudi Kingdom to respond to some of the criticisms regarding its governance of the country. It can do so by indicating that it is moving toward liberalization and reform in the desired direction at its own pace (Feierstein 2018).

- The success of the effort to promote tourism abroad and to provide appealing tourism attractions within the country will lead to more people coming into Saudi Arabia and then bringing back into their own communities a new narrative about the Saudi state (Rosendorf 2010; Baranowski et al. 2019, 67; Fayard 2023). Assuming that they have positive experiences, this will help in reshaping and changing the existing narrative. Research has shown empirically that word-of-mouth marketing is effective in restoring the image of destinations in crises (Xu et al. 2020). Saudi Ministry of Tourism statistics show that 1.6 million of the 2022 visitors were from Europe and the Americas (Tourist Intelligence Center, n.d.). News reports show an overall growth of about 168% in inbound tourism in 2023 into the KSA (Corder 2024). Those tourists with positive experiences will be ambassadors of the country through positive word of mouth.

- Tourism policy offers the state possibilities of reaching millions of targeted audiences with desired messaging. The events and exotic destinations offered by the Saudi tourism policy provide content for online influencers regularly. Saudi Arabia's high-profile sports events are also viewed by millions of traditional media audiences. Paid advertising campaigns on social media, and in traditional and untraditional media reach millions of viewers in targeted countries. Tourism marketing also reaches hundreds of thousands through participation in several tourism trade fairs annually. For example, Saudi Arabia was one of the main sponsors of ITB Berlin, known as the "the world's leading travel trade show" in 2024 (Montefusco 2024). The Saudi Tourism Authority also hosted a booth, promotional events and shared promotional materials at the trade fair, which had hosted around 100,000 visitors (ITB 2024). Saudi Arabia has won the bid to host expo 2030. This will be an opportunity to deliver its message to millions of domestic and international visitors and to attract millions of tourists into Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Expo is expected to outperform its predecessor, where more than 24 million persons visited the Dubai Expo between October 2021 and March 2022 (UAE Embassy in Washington, DC, n.d.).

- Entertainment components of the Saudi tourism policy appeal to young audiences in the West. In the medium to long term goal of controlling the narrative and altering the image of Saudi Arabia in the West, it may be a shrewd strategy to focus on those who are young. It may be difficult to undo decades of poor image programming in the minds of older Western audiences who had been exposed to years of negative portrayal of the Kingdom in Western films and traditional media. However, targeting a younger populace allows the Kingdom to speak to an audience which has encountered far fewer incidents of negative image portrayal and which can be reached, and possibly positively influenced, via social media regardless of traditional Western media coverage. Investment in changing the image of Saudi among young western publics today means the Kingdom will have more

supporters in the future, and possibly less critics in the West. These investments are made in creating events, attractions and messages that appeal to the younger generation. The policy seems to bear fruit. Simon Anholt has noted in a LinkedIn post that "younger people all over the world have quite different preferences for other countries than older people" (Anholt 2023). He shared a chart in the same post which showed that the scores given to Saudi Arabia on the Nation Brand Index by three age cohorts, (45+, 30-44 and 18-29), got higher as the age group got younger (Anholt 2023).

Necessary Conditions to Allow Tourism Policy to be Used as a Tool of Public Diplomacy

Certain contextual conditions allowed tourism policy to be used as an instrument of public diplomacy in the Saudi case: The state foresaw the value of using tourism policy as one of its tools to improve its image abroad. It created a tourism policy, and then extended leadership and financial support to that tourism policy to enable it to take on a foreign policy role. The Kingdom also made that effort a part of the state's strategy. The tourism policy, while managed by the Ministry of Tourism, was supported by other government entities and coordinated with their work. Here is a list of some conditions necessary to enable tourism policy to act as a tool of public diplomacy, and how they were manifested in the Saudi case:

- The state needs to believe in the potential of tourism policy to deliver public diplomacy functions and be willing to use it for that purpose. The Saudi leadership moved from giving low focus to what the Western publics think about it to actively trying to improve its image abroad. It switched from not believing that the state should open its borders to Western tourists, to seeing the value of tourism to its foreign policy and domestic goals. It also converted from not believing in inbound Western tourism to acknowledging its value as a tool to effect change in western perceptions. If the Saudi state had not believed in the potential of tourism as a foreign policy tool, it could be like many other countries that promote their tourism product without linking it to the state's foreign policy or to projection of the state's desired international persona. Many countries see tourism as a tool of bringing in foreign currency, or employment, or economic diversification. However, often, a foreign policy goal of managing a state's image abroad is not envisioned for tourism.

- The effort must be supported by leadership, and the entire government must have a common goal, and must coordinate its efforts and agree on the messaging (Scott 2011, 4). For many years the Saudi Tourism and Heritage Commission was headed by Prince Sultan bin Salman who was quite active in trying to revitalize Saudi tourism, focusing on creating domestic attractions to reduce leakage of Saudi tourists into external destinations (Oxford Business Group 2016). However, King Abdullah was not particularly supportive of the idea (Gause III 2024). On the other hand, under King Salman, the tourism policy in Saudi Arabia has been intentional, supported by Saudi leadership at the highest levels, and integrated within the national grand strategy Vision 2030.

The support is shown in the involvement of the Crown Prince in tourism development. For example, different initiatives within the tourism policy are either driven by the Crown Prince himself or headed by him. MBS announced new initiatives like Trojena ski village (Tanatarova 2022). He chairs tourism development entities like Soudah Development and Neom (Gulf Insider 2023; NEOM 2022). After Saudi Arabia won the pitch to host Expo 2030 in 2023, the Crown Prince met in person in 2024 with the Secretary of the Bureau International des Expositions to discuss Saudi preparations for the expo (Arab News 2024a). Furthermore, the messaging about the state's desired identity and persona is managed across the state from within the Royal Court. The desired image that is projected by tourism policy, as well as by non-tourism related state entities, is unified, centrally managed, coordinated and monitored (Interviewee #8 2023).

- The country must be willing to invest the necessary resources to enable the tourism policy to be used as a public diplomacy tool. Investments in marketing, infrastructure, change of legislation and even in disrupting social norms are extremely costly. The Saudi state allocates large sums to promote tourism; to support the tourism initiatives and projects; and to attract investment into the sector. The Annual budget of the Saudi Tourism Authority in 2024 was 2.8 billion Saudi Riyals (approximately 746 million USD) (Interviewee #2 2023). According to the Saudi Minister of Tourism, 800 billion USD will be invested in tourism over ten years to fund mega projects around the Kingdom, like the Red Sea, Diriyah and Qiddiya projects (Ferziger 2023; Saudi Press Agency 2023b). The state has also announced that it will be working to attract 80 billion USD in foreign investment into the sector (Burke and Martin 2024). Furthermore, the state has created a special entity, the Tourism Development Fund, to "facilitate local and international investors' access to high potential tourism investments across key destinations in the Kingdom" (Tourism Development Fund, n.d.). This entity also provides grants and loans to micro, medium and small establishments to help them establish and grow tourism businesses.

- The Tourism policy needs to be intentional, part of the state's diplomacy strategy, and coordinated at the state level. Saudi tourism policy is part of the state's grand strategy Vision 2030 and is coordinated at the highest levels. The state's tourism decisions are coordinated with other ministries and state entities through the Council of Minister's Committee for Tourism, as shown in the figure below, taken from the Saudi Tourism Strategy (Boston Consulting Group BCG 2019, slide 80). The state declared its objective of developing the tourism sector in the state's overarching economic strategy Vision 2030. Vision 2030 listed the strategic objective 'Enable the development of the tourism sector' under the pillar of 'A Thriving economy' and the 'Quality of Life' Vision Realization Program (See Table 3 in Annex of Chapter 1). In turn, the Saudi Tourism Strategy, stated that it aims to support all three pillars of Vision 2030 by contributing to four of its six plans, as the table below shows.

Table 13- Planned contribution of the Saudi Tourism sector to the pillars and plans of Vision 2030, according to the Tourism Strategy (MoT, n.d.).

Vision 2030 Pillars	Ambitious Nation		Thriving Economy		Vibrant Society	
Vision 2030 Plans	Enhance Government Effectiveness	Enable Social Responsibility	Grow and Diversify the Economy	Increase Employment	Strengthen Islamic and National Identity	Offer a Fulfilling and Healthy Life
Tourism sector contribution	Unlock the potential of the non-oil government sector		Support Saudi Arabia's GDP by 10% Grow contribution of the private sector Attract direct foreign investments	Create 1.6 million job opportunities by 2030	Facilitate hosting more than 3.7 million Hajj and Umrah tourists	

Figure 26- Saudi Council of Ministers' Committee for Tourism

Some Limitations on Using Tourism Policy as a Tool of Public Diplomacy in the Saudi State

The type of communication that is offered by the tourism policy is effective in communicating with some of the world's audiences but not all of them. The use of this policy is contingent on who the state wants to target as a goal of its foreign policy. Therefore, tourism policy is appropriate as a tool of public diplomacy that speaks to western audiences that can influence their country's foreign policies through democracy. Trying to influence publics that live under authoritarian rule may not be the best use of a country's resources. The audiences also need to appreciate the tourism product and messaging that is being disseminated. A religious or conservative audience may perceive the tourism-related liberalization negatively. Saudi Arabia's tourism diplomacy may not be appropriate for many Muslim audiences or conservative audiences from the Arab world. The persona of an open modernizing and fun country that the KSA is trying to project possibly contradicts the image of Saudi Arabia as a spiritual leader among conservative and nationalist audiences of the Arab and Muslim worlds (Devji 2018). The KSA does not seem to have found a middle ground that appeals simultaneously to both the East and the West (Interviewee #9 2024).

The KSA's current approach of using tourism policy as an instrument of public diplomacy is more in line with traditional public diplomacy than New Public Diplomacy. Tourism policy is used as a tool of traditional public diplomacy with messaging overwhelmingly directed from the state and its agents towards foreign publics. New Public Diplomacy is more akin to a conversation between both sides of the interaction (possibly progressing into a form of collaboration and relationship building), while the former is more about sending specific messages from the state to the foreign public (O'Shea 2016; Tiessen and Lough, n.d.; Melissen 2013, 442). Saudi Arabia's current approach of using tourism policy as a tool of public diplomacy is extremely uni-directional as it relies on sending curated messages and marketing specific areas and events to the target audience. Saudi Arabia may need to prepare to adopt an interactive, two way communicative approach in its tourism policy, as the numbers of tourists increase, as does their interactions with locals.

Saudi Arabia is a vast country and not all of its areas have been touched by tourism developments and seen the economic and social effects of tourism. Therefore, a visit to these areas may generate a very different and possibly negative experience for the visitor than going to areas that are earmarked for tourism. Some Saudi residents find the changes too radical and the transformations too quick to grasp or to adapt to. A 29 year old Saudi female interviewed by NPR said: "We have to change, that's something I know is a fact", "Just, the way we are changing, I wish it was mindful of everyone. I talk to younger people; they are happy with it. But older people are not" (Northam 2018).

Others find the changes associated with tourism policy particularly unacceptable because they involve actions that are against the Muslim law (Sharia) and Arab or Saudi traditions. Such recent changes include allowing women to travel without a guardian (al-Rasheed 2019); allowing event performances in tight or revealing clothing (Newsweek 2018); and allowing unwedded mixed couples to stay together at Saudi hotels (Buckley 2019). Examples from a discussion on social media site Reddit [Appendix of Chapter 7, Figure 25] capture the responses of the

anonymous contributors to a question asked in 2023 about how Saudis feel about the many changes taking place in the country (Various Anonymous Contributors 2023).

Some areas with concentrated tourism developments are facing resistance from local populations. In Al-Ula for example, youth from AlHuweitat tribe have objected to the changes happening in their lands (Morgan 2020). Several of the dissidents facing extreme sentences and featured in human rights campaigns come from that area (Martusciello and Gancia 2020; US Department of State 2023). The state may not be taking the appropriate steps to ensure fair treatment and protection of the traditional land rights of residents, nor working to provide an equitable distribution of the fruits of tourism development. In a personal conversation with a tourism consultant working in Saudi Arabia, she told me that while she was being taken on a tour of one of the new mega tourism developments by one of its foreign executives, he pointed to a group of Bedouins and told her "All this will go".

Diplomatic studies literature on 'Other Diplomacies' reminds that interactions between tourists and locals are diplomatic practices. If tourists notice abuse of indigenous tribes, spaces that are not ready for receiving tourists, poverty in underserved areas of the very rich Kingdom, engage in conversations about political and social rights, and they convey their negative feedback through social media, personal interactions, or other channels, then tourism may have an adverse effect on the state's image abroad, rather than a redeeming one.

Conclusion

This chapter confirmed H3: Saudi tourism policy meets the definition of public diplomacy and delivers the goals of public diplomacy. The chapter does so by arguing that state actions in the international system which are not security or economic actions are diplomatic actions. Diplomatic actions that are targeted by the state at foreign publics are public diplomacy. Tourism policy performs functions in the international relations realm, and targets foreign publics to serve foreign policy goals. It also delivers diplomatic practices like advocacy, communicating, mediation of differences and representation of a collective self. Therefore, tourism policy is a form of public diplomacy.

The chapter outlines several benefits to thinking of and using tourism policy as a tool of public diplomacy. It acknowledges, however, that the Saudi state has been able to use tourism as a tool of public diplomacy because of its intentionality in doing so. The Saudi kingdom saw the potential of tourism policy to deliver public diplomacy functions, and used it for that purpose. It invested the necessary financial, legislative and human resources to enable the tourism policy to be used as a public diplomacy tool. The Kingdom also coordinated its messaging at the state level, and supported tourism as part of the state's overall strategy. Other nations may not be able to do the same if they lack the resources, political will, and coordination ability that was evident in the Saudi case study.

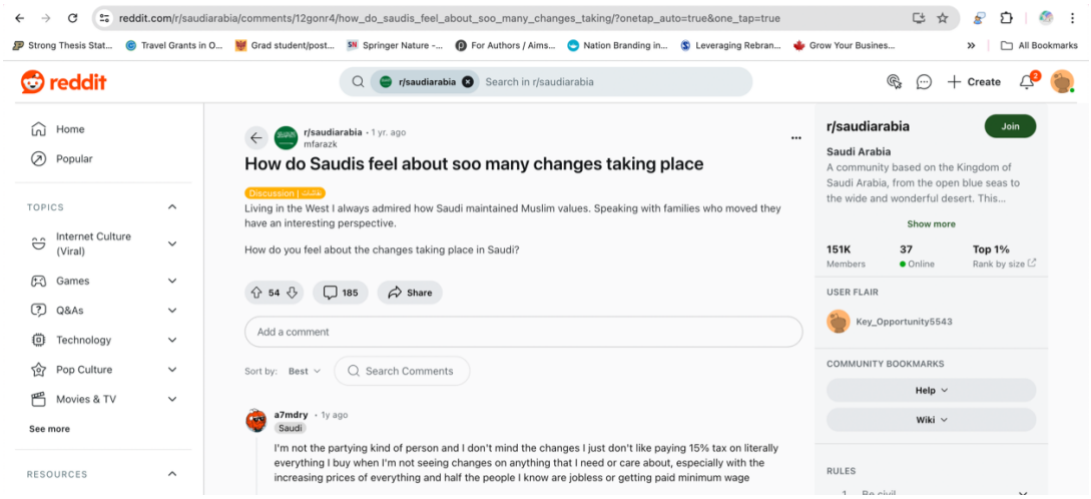
Finally, the chapter highlighted some of the risks faced by the Saudi state in focusing on tourism. These included disrupting its image as the leader of the Muslim world and the hegemon of the

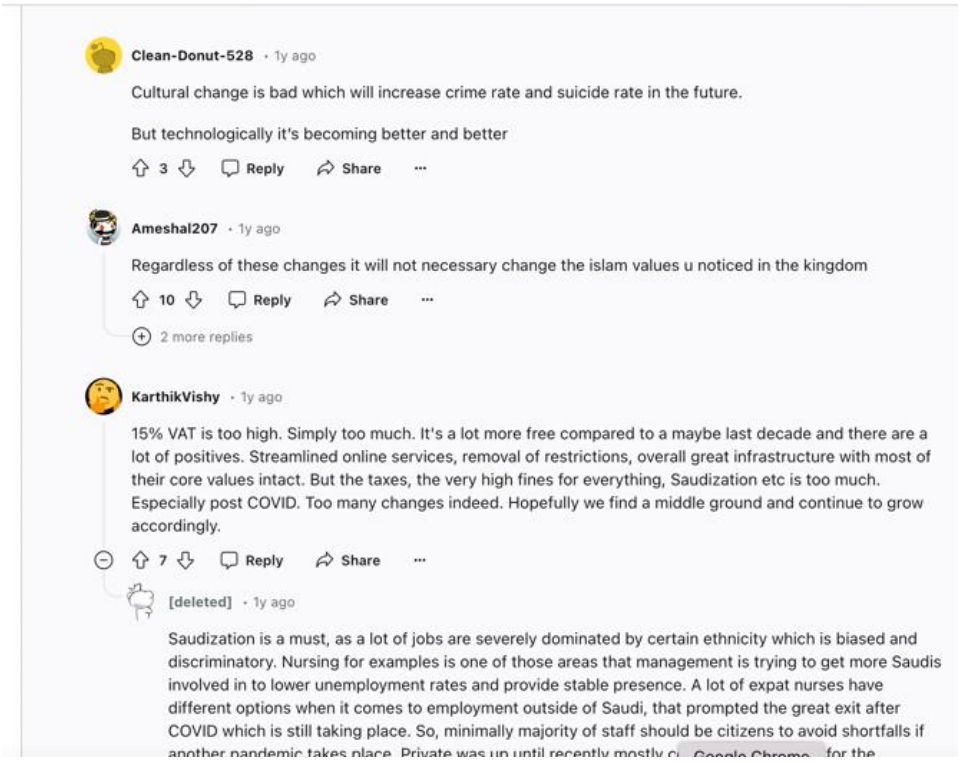
Arab world; negative feedback by tourists based on their experiences and observations in the country; and the antiquated public diplomacy approach of relying on unidirectional communication and sending curated narratives, rather than adopting the new public diplomacy approach of asking questions and having two-way conversations.

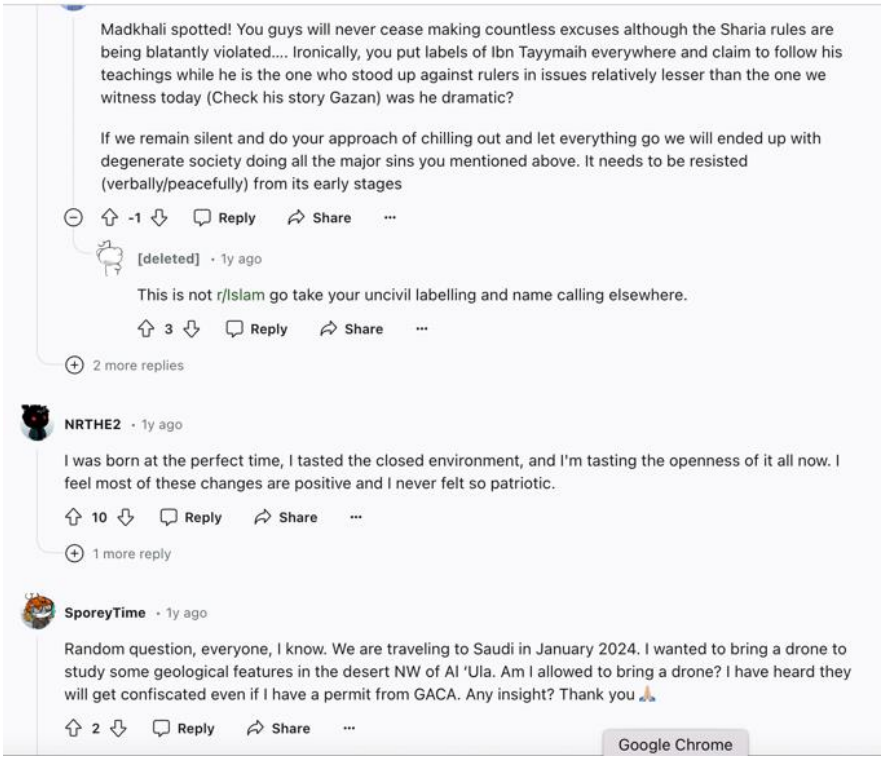
The next chapter summarizes the dissertation and outlines the limitations of the research and avenues for future research, as well as limitations of public diplomacy. It also highlights the contributions to knowledge made through the dissertation's research and analysis.

Appendix of Chapter 7

Figure 27- Reddit discussion about changes in Saudi Arabia (Various Anonymous Contributors 2023).







Madkhali spotted! You guys will never cease making countless excuses although the Sharia rules are being blatantly violated.... Ironically, you put labels of Ibn Tayymaih everywhere and claim to follow his teachings while he is the one who stood up against rulers in issues relatively lesser than the one we witness today (Check his story Gazan) was he dramatic?

If we remain silent and do your approach of chilling out and let everything go we will ended up with degenerate society doing all the major sins you mentioned above. It needs to be resisted (verbally/peacefully) from its early stages

-1 Reply Share ...

[deleted] · 1y ago

This is not r/Islam go take your uncivil labelling and name calling elsewhere.

3 Reply Share ...

2 more replies

NRTHE2 · 1y ago

I was born at the perfect time, I tasted the closed environment, and I'm tasting the openness of it all now. I feel most of these changes are positive and I never felt so patriotic.

10 Reply Share ...

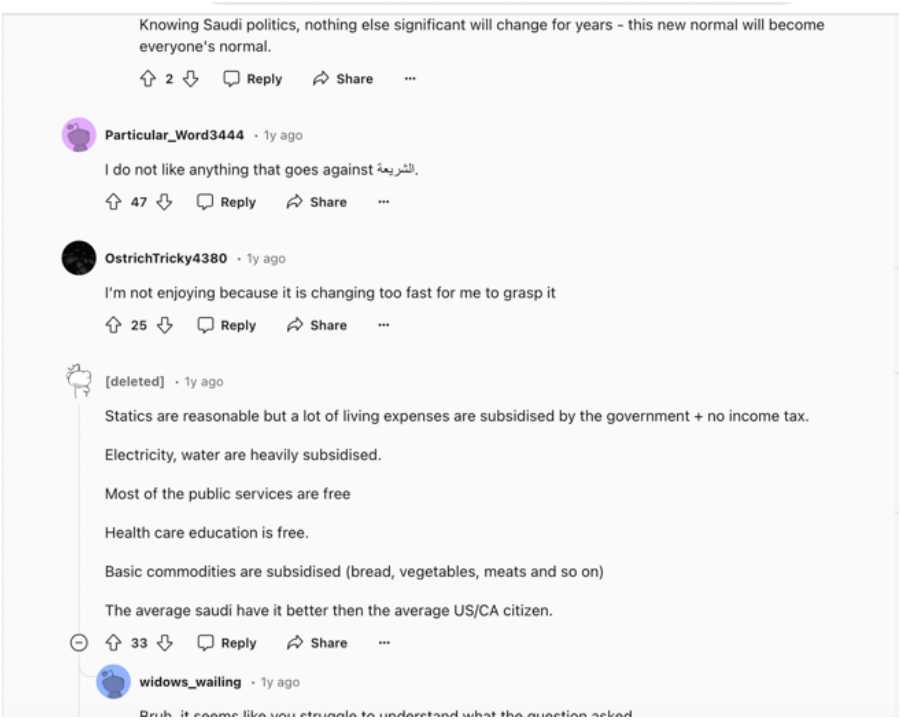
1 more reply

SporeyTime · 1y ago

Random question, everyone, I know. We are traveling to Saudi in January 2024. I wanted to bring a drone to study some geological features in the desert NW of Al 'Ula. Am I allowed to bring a drone? I have heard they will get confiscated even if I have a permit from GACA. Any insight? Thank you 🙏

2 Reply Share ...

Google Chrome



Knowing Saudi politics, nothing else significant will change for years - this new normal will become everyone's normal.

2 Reply Share ...

Particular_Word3444 · 1y ago

I do not like anything that goes against الشريعة.

47 Reply Share ...

OstrichTricky4380 · 1y ago

I'm not enjoying because it is changing too fast for me to grasp it

25 Reply Share ...

[deleted] · 1y ago

Statics are reasonable but a lot of living expenses are subsidised by the government + no income tax.

Electricity, water are heavily subsidised.

Most of the public services are free

Health care education is free.

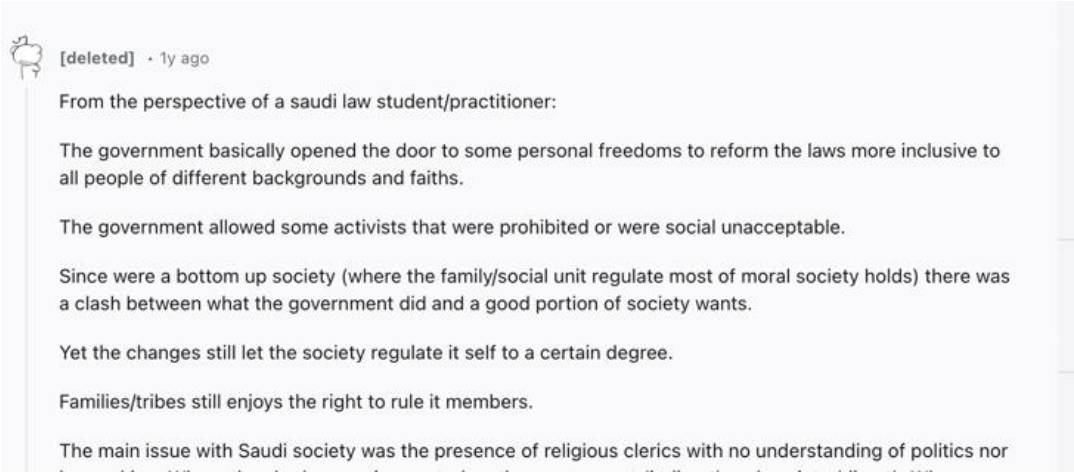
Basic commodities are subsidised (bread, vegetables, meats and so on)

The average saudi have it better then the average US/CA citizen.

33 Reply Share ...

widows_wailing · 1y ago

Bruh, it seems like you struggle to understand what the question asked



[deleted] · 1y ago

From the perspective of a saudi law student/practitioner:

The government basically opened the door to some personal freedoms to reform the laws more inclusive to all people of different backgrounds and faiths.

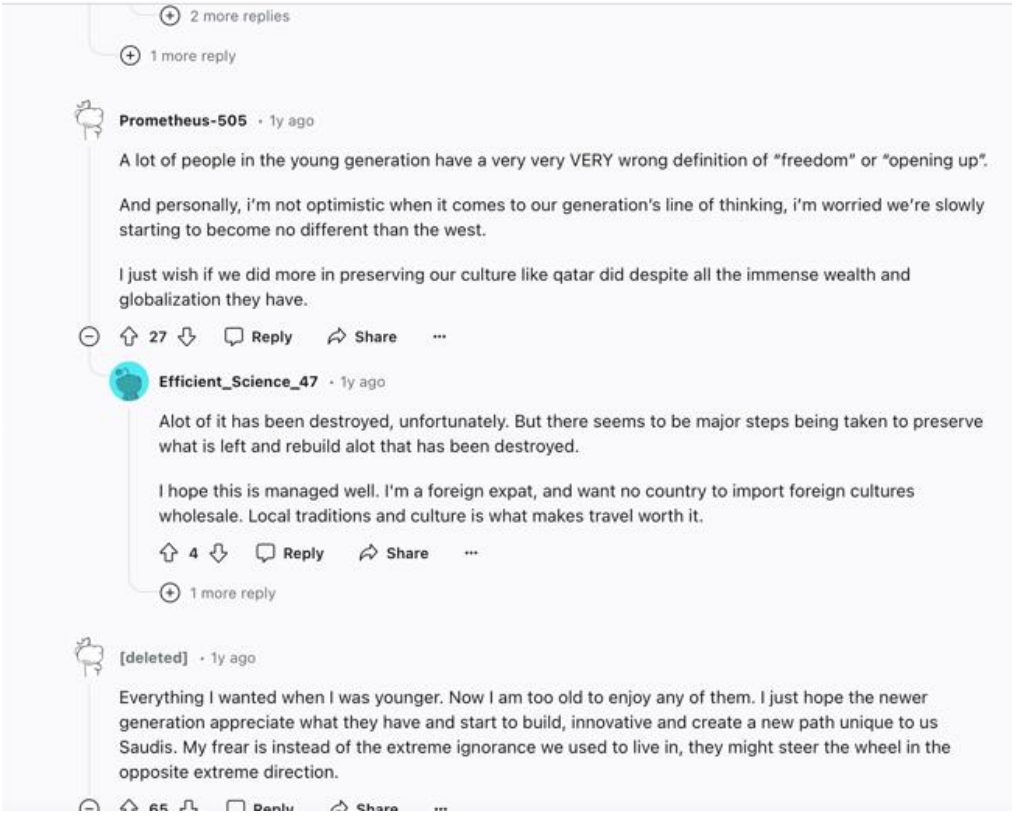
The government allowed some activists that were prohibited or were social unacceptable.

Since were a bottom up society (where the family/social unit regulate most of moral society holds) there was a clash between what the government did and a good portion of society wants.

Yet the changes still let the society regulate it self to a certain degree.

Families/tribes still enjoys the right to rule it members.

The main issue with Saudi society was the presence of religious clerics with no understanding of politics nor



2 more replies

1 more reply

Prometheus-505 · 1y ago

A lot of people in the young generation have a very very VERY wrong definition of "freedom" or "opening up".

And personally, i'm not optimistic when it comes to our generation's line of thinking, i'm worried we're slowly starting to become no different than the west.

I just wish if we did more in preserving our culture like qatar did despite all the immense wealth and globalization they have.

27 Reply Share ···

Efficient_Science_47 · 1y ago

Alot of it has been destroyed, unfortunately. But there seems to be major steps being taken to preserve what is left and rebuild alot that has been destroyed.

I hope this is managed well. I'm a foreign expat, and want no country to import foreign cultures wholesale. Local traditions and culture is what makes travel worth it.

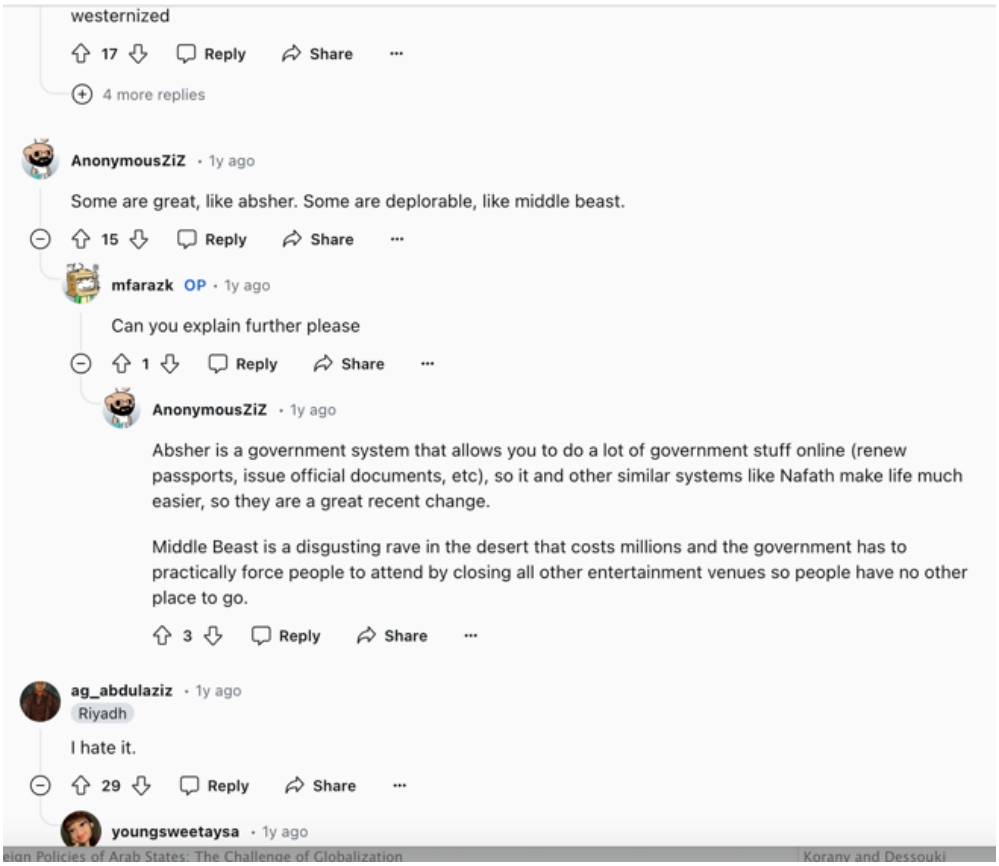
4 Reply Share ···

1 more reply

[deleted] · 1y ago

Everything I wanted when I was younger. Now I am too old to enjoy any of them. I just hope the newer generation appreciate what they have and start to build, innovative and create a new path unique to us Saudis. My frear is instead of the extreme ignorance we used to live in, they might steer the wheel in the opposite extreme direction.

65 Reply Share ···


westernized
17
Reply
Share
4 more replies
AnonymousZiZ · 1y ago
Some are great, like absher. Some are deplorable, like middle beast.
15
Reply
Share
mfarazk OP · 1y ago
Can you explain further please
1
Reply
Share
AnonymousZiZ · 1y ago
Absher is a government system that allows you to do a lot of government stuff online (renew passports, issue official documents, etc), so it and other similar systems like Nafath make life much easier, so they are a great recent change.
Middle Beast is a disgusting rave in the desert that costs millions and the government has to practically force people to attend by closing all other entertainment venues so people have no other place to go.
3
Reply
Share
ag_abdulaziz · 1y ago
Riyadh
I hate it.
29
Reply
Share
youngsweetaysa · 1y ago

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

> "It will be impossible for the Saudi State to change a negative image that was acquired over decades of Wahhabism without undertaking action that changes the perceptions of a critical mass of people… millions, not thousands"
>
> Strategic Image Consultant
> (Interviewee #2 2023)

Introduction

Are you critical of Saudi Arabia in your dissertation? Aren't you afraid of Saudi Arabia's retaliation if you are critical? These are two of many surprised and sometimes judgmental questions I got when I told people about my research topic. That's why I decided to end this chapter with addressing some of these question in the 'positionality, ethical consideration and critical scholarship' section. I start the chapter with presenting a summary of the dissertation, outlining how the chapters and sections have been organized and how they relate to each other. The chapter moves then to list the epistemological limitations of this study, before discussing some conditions that can limit the effectiveness of tourism policy and other public diplomacy tools in changing the opinion of publics abroad. Recommendations that may increase the effectiveness of tourism policy as a public diplomacy tool follow. The contributions of the dissertation to the international relations and diplomacy literatures are also discussed in this chapter. Avenues for further research, building on the themes and issues that have emerged from this dissertation are suggested in the future research section. The chapter closes with a summary of the main issues that emerged when discussing Saudi Arabia's use of tourism policy as a tool of public diplomacy.

Summary

Those who are familiar with the domestic policies of Saudi Arabia before the ascension of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz, have been amazed in the past few years to see the Kingdom's rapid transformation. Traditionally, the country that was one of the most fundamentalist in the world, had for almost a century adopted an ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam. The alliance of the clan of Al-Saud with that of Al- Al Shaikh, the descendants of Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdul Wahhab, had rendered Wahhabi Islam, a puritan version of the faith, the guiding principle organizing social relations within the state (Murtado and Waehama 2024; Interviewee #6 2023). As a result, cultural expressions like music and other forms of art were severely restricted (Dumairieh 2021). Agents of the state controlled the way women and men dressed, public spaces were highly segregated, religious police had the right to beat up people if they were not "dressed

appropriately"[40], incarcerate them if they were suspected of 'immoral behavior', and force them to attend prayers or to close shops during prayer time (Otterbeck 2012). The Wahhabi doctrine, which not only treated other religions as false but also condemned alternative factions of Islam, was sponsored and exported by the state around the world (Shahi 2012).

Therefore, when the Saudi state announced that it would begin issuing tourist visas, then started organizing concerts and sporting events, opening cinemas, allowing the mixing of genders in public spaces, and inviting the West in by creating new tourism destinations and experiences, observers were in shock at the extreme transformation and rapid change at the legislative and implementation levels.

The focus on opening the country to tourism has received wide coverage as a domestic move aimed at contributing to diversifying the economy away from oil dependence (CNN Market Place Middle East, n.d.). It was also seen as a way to preserve foreign currency and domestic resources by reducing the leakage of Saudi tourist to global destinations (Boston Consulting Group BCG 2019, slide 101). The Saudi state also touted tourism as a way to increase employment and to integrate women into the economy (Callen 2024). These goals were part of the state's economic strategy, Vision 2030.

Analysts and critics, however, saw more to this aggressive launch of the Saudi tourism policy than domestic economic goals. Saudi tourism policy had numerous integrated parts, including tourism strategy; destination development; human resource development; marketing; events; legislation reform; social changes; and public relations (Interviewee #8 2023). Saudi Arabia was accused of using different components of its tourism policy to cover up human rights abuses, crises, and actions the West did not approve of. Its tourism policy was labeled as whitewashing and sportswashing (OMCT 2023; Cook 2023; Madani 2022), indicating a belief by critics that the Saudi state wished to change how it was perceived among Western public audiences and took actions to improve its prevailing image. It also indicated a perception that tourism was therefore a possible tool to change that image. This raised the dissertation question about the relationship between tourism policy and the state's image abroad.

Consequently, the research sought to answer the question**: "How does the Saudi state use tourism policy to serve its goal of altering its negative image among Western public audiences?"**. The thesis posited in this dissertation to answer this question is: **"Tourism policy is used by the Saudi state as a public diplomacy instrument to alter its image among Western publics"**. Three hypotheses were used to support the claim that Saudi Arabia's tourism policy is a public diplomacy tool. Each of the sections of the dissertation confirmed one of the three hypotheses.

The research first determined why the Saudi state wished to change its image abroad, and what the drivers of that negative image were. Chapter 4 determined the negative aspects associated with Saudi Arabia in Western media. An analysis of the foreign policy priorities of the Kingdom in Chapter 5 revealed that improving Saudi Arabia's perceived persona in the West was

[40] Women were required to cover their heads and wear a long robe called the Abaya, men were required to dress modestly.

conducive to achieving some of the state's foreign policy objectives, while failing to improve its existing negative image among Western publics had the potential of negatively affecting its economic, reputational and security objectives. This part of the research confirmed the first hypothesis, **H1: Saudi tourism policy addresses a foreign policy goal and need.**

The dissertation analyzed how some of the public diplomacy instruments deployed to achieve the foreign policy goal of improving the state's image among foreign publics were used. In Chapter 6, analysis revealed that aspects of tourism policy use the same image altering actions as the public diplomacy tactics of Nation Branding and Image Restoration. The three actions taken by the state to change its image among foreign publics were summarized in a new model introduced in the dissertation as the "Narrative Control Mechanism".

The Narrative Control Mechanism as a theoretical model summarized the actions taken by the Saudi state to control the quality (content) and quantity of narrative circulating about it abroad. The actions came in three steps: 1) introducing a new narrative, 2) propagating that new narrative, 3) minimizing the negative narrative. The model presented the pathway linking the Saudi state's public diplomacy actions with the desired outcome of altering its negative image among Western public audiences.

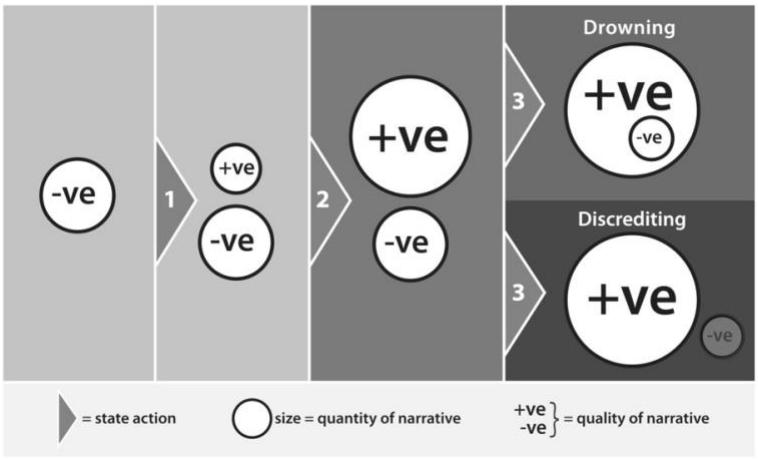


Figure 28- The Narrative Control Mechanism Model

It showed that when trying to control the quantity of the narrative, the Saudi state strove to maximize the positive narrative by spreading the new story, persona or explanatory facts as widely and powerfully as possible. It also attempted to minimize the quantity of the negative narrative circulating about it by discrediting it or by drowning it in the flow of alternative positive narrative. On the other hand, when controlling the quality of the narrative, the actions of the state, as summarized in the model, ensured that the negative narrative or persona were drowned or discredited, and replaced with an alternative positive narrative which was heavily promoted, and also supported by new actions or legislation. Consequently, this part of the dissertation confirmed the second hypothesis, **H2: Outward targeting elements of Saudi tourism policy can influence the state's image abroad using the same steps employed by**

several Saudi public diplomacy tools- summarized in the Narrative Control Mechanism model.

Finally, the analysis in the dissertation showed that tourism policy was deployable as a public diplomacy action to alter the state's image abroad. The research had identified diplomacy as the instrument that was used to effect change in the international system by states, outside of security policy and economic statecraft. Since the question was particularly concerned with altering the image of the Saudi state among Western publics, the study examined public diplomacy- the type of diplomacy targeted at publics, rather than governments. In this section, Chapter 7 showed that tourism policy also met definitions of public diplomacy, exhibited practices of public diplomacy, and was more efficient in addressing and influencing large numbers of foreign public audiences than some other public diplomacy instruments. This part of the analysis confirmed the third hypothesis **H3: Saudi tourism policy meets the definition of public diplomacy and delivers the goals of public diplomacy.**

Limitations of the Research

In the methodology section I mentioned two limitations of the research. I was not able, due to time and funding constraints, to include another observer during my field visit, as is recommended by Robert Yin, to increase the reliability of evidence collected from observation (Yin 2003, 92). Evaluating the efficacy of the Saudi state's efforts at changing its image using tourism policy would have been a valuable contribution to this dissertation. However, it was decided in the early stages of the research that measuring the effectiveness of Saudi Arabia's efforts at using foreign policy as an instrument of public diplomacy was beyond the scope of the dissertation. The research question prompted the investigation of how the tourism policy was used, rather than how successful it was, in altering the image of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia abroad. However, I have included results from Gallup's "Perceptions of Foreign countries", the Nation Branding Index, the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report, and the Freedom in the World Report to capture different aspects of how perceptions of the Kingdom abroad have changed over time.

In this chapter, I wish to highlight a few more concerns. The first is the difficulty I faced in finding Saudis willing to be interviewed, even anonymously. The second is the generalizability of findings. The last is issues that emerged when trying to triangulate data regarding the criticisms leveled against the Saudi state by foreign bodies. The fourth is the limitations of the scope of research.

Saudis became particularly alarmed after they read the information letter mandated by the Ethics Review Board, as the letter outlined possible risks associated with being interviewed. Their fear may also have been associated with the stories of heavy punishment suffered by dissidents criticizing the Kingdom or its rulers. I had interviewed some Saudis before the board approval letter was issued in informational interviews earlier in the PhD process. These same persons declined to have a follow up interview once they read the information letter or shared it with their legal departments for approval.

The second issue is generalizability. The dissertation adopts an interpretivist philosophy, where research practices and design are motivated with contextuality rather than generalizability (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011). It also uses the case study methodology, where some views have called for focusing "on understanding the case rather than generalization beyond", with some scholars like R. E. Stake warning that "direct comparison diminishes the opportunity to learn from" the case (Bartlett and Vavrus 2018). Mark Bevir and R.A. Rhodes claimed in the *Handbook of Interpretive Political Science* that "such notions as reliability, validity, and generalization are not seen as relevant when the aim of research is the 'complex specificness' of situated agents" (Bevir and Rhodes 2016; 178).

The results of the dissertation research are dependent on context, including on the intentions and motivations of the actors in the case study. Moreover, the author recognizes that any causal conclusions that have been drawn, may not "hold more widely than in the case at hand" (Ortega Nieto, Widner, and Woolcock 2022). This is why the chapters have provided thick descriptions to clarify the context of the case study. These have sought to unpack the motivations, beliefs and contexts behind the actions of the state. For example, Chapter 1 presented the history of the launch of the tourism strategy and the current accomplishments of the tourism sector. It also presented Vision 2030. Chapter 4 introduced the context in which the Saudi state finds itself in, as it relates to its image among Western public audiences. Chapter 5 introduced the domestic and international pressures on the Saudi state and the goals that have dictated current Saudi foreign policy. Chapter 6 presented the actions of the Saudi state that have been taken to address a particular foreign policy goal targeted at a specific audience- that of changing the image of the Saudi state among Western publics.

It is noteworthy that during my research, I found some errors in reporting the shortcomings of the Personal Status Code. Amnesty international reported that "the mother, i.e. the child's custodian, is only allowed to travel outside Saudi Arabia with the child for a period of a maximum 90 days in a year; any travel exceeding this period requires consent of the father, as the legal guardian, or a person appointed by the father if the father is deceased... By contrast, the PSL does not require consent from the child's mother if the father or appointed legal guardian wants to relocate with the child" (Amnesty International 2022). Upon reviewing the code, I found that the travel of a child with one parent or guardian required the approval of the other parent, without reference to either parent's gender (BOE 2022, article 129). Moreover, Amnesty International repeatedly referred to the codification of the personal status guidelines as laws [Personal Status Law PSL], when in fact they are regulations, not laws. Such discrepancies raise questions about the degree of reliability and accuracy of the reported information.

Getting specific information online about the female detainees in Saudi prisons or who are under trial was particularly difficult. The sources seemed to cite each other, and the names of the women were grouped together under arrests and detentions. However, the sources did not always indicate which charge each defendant was accused of. One person was listed anonymous, so it was not possible to triangulate the research to corroborate the report. One agency reported: "At least 10 activists have endured a range of human rights violations while in prison, including torture, sexual abuse, and other forms of ill-treatment. For the first three months of their

detention, the women were held incommunicado with no access to family or lawyers. Several have also been subjected to lengthy spells in solitary confinement" (Amnesty International 2020). While Amnesty International reported that some of these female prisoners have endured torture, it did not mention which of them were the recipients of this ill treatment. Furthermore, these reports did not provide comparative data to show how the country fares in comparison to other states in terms of incarceration of women for the same charges. Are women put in a separate category because they deserved different treatment from male defendants facing the same charges? is it because they were disproportionately targeted? or is it because creating a category of "female prisoners" generated more visibility, sympathy or support? Moreover, it is not clear whether this information was kept for privacy purposes or to provide a blanket statement. Pooling the information may indicate a general desire to emphasize Saudi Arabia's human rights violations whereby numbers are piled to increase effect from the side of Western Human Rights organizations and reporting media. It also shows that the information is very scarce and guarded, indicating tight controls on the narrative from the side of the KSA.

Finally, it is important to remember that the policy and tactics discussed in this dissertation are those that are targeted at publics of Western democratic nations, where public opinion is empowered to impact foreign policy decisions (Sandlin and Simmons 2022; Jacobs and Page 2005; Frizzell 2011; Cooper, Dobson, and Wheeler 2017)[41]. The dissertation did not explore the messaging and tools directed at the publics of Muslim or Arab countries, where citizens are much less empowered politically, especially regarding foreign policy making (CFR Education 2023). For example, Saudi Arabia has put a target of increasing religious tourists, as indicated in its Vision 2030[42], and has therefore implemented specific tourism policies geared towards Muslim tourists. However, since they are outside the scope of the research question, these actions and the public diplomacy strategies that may be guiding them have not been discussed in the dissertation.

Limitation of the Tourism Policy and Other Public Diplomacy Instruments

There are numerous issues that could limit the efficacy of the use of tourism policy and other public diplomacy tools. Four main points are discussed in this section, as they relate to the Saudi case: Brands and personas are hard to change. Attempts to change these narratives can backlash leading to the opposite effect. Attempts to change the persona without changing legislation and the way the state behaves can undermine the credibility of the narrative of the state. Furthermore,

[41] The newly established visitor visa was first made available to permanent residents of EU and GCC countries, the UK and the US, and to holders of valid Schengen, UK and US visas that have been used to enter those countries before arriving in Saudi Arabia (Saudi Press Agency
2023a). It is worth noting the nationalities first selected to receive tourist visa are from the countries the dissertation assumes are targets of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy enacted through tourism policy.

[42] See Chapter 1, Table 12. Vision 2030 target, under "Vibrant Society": Increase Saudi Arabia's annual capacity to welcome Umrah visitors from 6.2 million to 30 million. Also, Vision 2030 Strategic objective under "Vibrant Society": Facilitate Hosting More Umrah Visitors and Provide an Easier Access to The Holy Mosques/ Improve Quality of Services Provided to Hajj and Umrah Visitors/ Enrich the Spiritual and Cultural Experience of Hajj and Umrah Visitors.

the state's credibility is adversely affected when it does not deliver on its promises of change. These issues may be applicable to other states wishing to emulate the Saudi model of using tourism as public diplomacy, especially if they are autocratic nations.

It is very difficult to change brand perceptions (Dawson, n.d.). It is difficult to undo decades long damage done to a country brand in a few years. A strategic image consultant noted that Saudi Arabia will have a very hard time changing its image in the West. "It is difficult to undo 80 years of pictures of people being beheaded or their hands cut off with a sword as punishment by state agents. The legacy of the oppression of foreign workers through the worker's Kafalah system[43] will also be difficult to overcome" (Interviewee #2 2023). Even when the country makes positive reforms, news coverage includes references to old and current human rights violations. For example, when public floggings were banned in Saudi Arabia, an article about that on German news channel DW contained a link to news about the death of a human rights activist in prison, to the execution of 184 people, and to the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi (DW 2020a). It also included criticisms of the state's continued repression of dissidents and activists.

Narrative Control efforts can backfire. Increased publicity may bring further scrutiny into a states' negative issues (Bergkvist and Skeiseid 2024, 1097). For example, in response to efforts trying to establish its new persona as an open, fun and engaging country, the Saudi kingdom often got media coverage reminding readers of its human rights abuses. This was evident when it bought the English Premier League football club, Newcastle United. There was a backlash in British media and among fans, accusing Saudi Arabia of "sportswashing". Media reports quoted Amnesty Internationals' accusation that the Kingdom was "trying to use the glamour and prestige of top-tier sport as a PR tool to distract from the country's abysmal human rights record" (Skey 2022, 1).

Similarly, strong negative reactions were generated on social media following Saudi Arabia's unchallenged win of the chairmanship of the UN Commission on Status of Women (Borger 2024). The Chief of the Gender Unit at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs UNOCHA commented "Collective shock, perplexity, disbelief, trying to find a silver lining somewhere. Anywhere… This is where we are at. No longer fighting for more and bold progress, but fighting to maintain what we already have because so much is at stake" (Pham 2024). Instead of seeing this move as an effort from Saudi Arabia to reform itself on the gender-equality front and to show commitment to a rules-based international system[44], running for chairmanship of this position emphasized the Kingdom's original misogynistic and brash persona, and brought renewed criticism for its record of treatment of women.

[43] According to the Council on Foreign Relations: "The *kafala*, or sponsorship, system gives private citizens and companies in Jordan, Lebanon, and most Arab Gulf countries almost total control over migrant workers' employment and immigration status…workers need their sponsor's permission to transfer jobs, end employment, and enter or exit the host country. Leaving the workplace without permission is an offense that results in the termination of the worker's legal status and potentially imprisonment or deportation, even if the worker is fleeing abuse. Workers have little recourse in the face of exploitation, and many experts argue that the system facilitates modern slavery" (CFR 2022).

[44] The rules-based international system is founded on relationships between states and through international institutions and frameworks, with shared rules and agreements on behavior (www.gov.uk).

Figure 29- Screen shot of the reaction of Canadian women's rights advocate Shari Graydon to Saudi Arabia's chairmanship of the UN forum for women's rights (Graydon 2024)

Changing of policies and laws is necessary if the re-branding of a country is to be credible. Saudi Arabia's attempts to adjust its image from a closed and old-fashioned mysterious country to an open and fun destination will be supported by its observable commitment to changing many of the laws governing tourism and events. On the other hand, it is difficult to change a nation's persona or brand without genuinely changing the way a country behaves (Interviewee #5 2023). Saudi Arabia may have eased up the restrictions on women's movement and dress. However, it is still largely perceived as a chauvinist nation which generally does not respect women's rights, because of the persistence of gender norms and personal status regulation that do not give complete equality to women (Amnesty International 2022b).

This problem persists when considering political freedoms. Saudi Arabia is still perceived as an autocratic oppressive country, despite its latest economic and social liberalization. The perspectives on the overall status of freedoms in Saudi Arabia is summed up by its scores on the annual Freedom in the World Report published by Freedom House[45]. Saudi Arabia's status was labeled as 'not free' because of its very low scores. It scored a total of eight 8 out of 100; the aggregate of its political rights score was 1 out of 40, and its civil liberties score was 7 out of 60 in 2023 and 2024 (Freedom House, n.d.-a). Out of 57 countries designated by Freedom House's report as Not Free, Saudi Arabia's total score placed it among the 16 countries with the worst aggregate scores for political rights and civil liberties in 2023 (Freedom House 2023, 31).

Freedom House also publishes a ranking of countries' internet freedom scores. Out of a total score of 100 that would indicate complete internet freedom, Saudi Arabia's total score was 24 in

[45] The report is produced "by a team of inhouse and external analysts and expert advisers from the academic, think tank, and human rights communities". (Freedom House, n.d.)

2022, designating its status as not free. Its score on obstacles to access to internet was 13, on limits on content 7, and on violations of user rights 5 (Freedom House, n.d.-c) [46]. To put Freedom House's global freedom and internet freedom rankings for Saudi Arabia in perspective, the tables in the Appendix to Chapter 8 compare them to those for Jordan, another Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim country, and to those for Canada, a western secular country.

Naturally, when the state reneges on its newly announced commitments, it also receives negative publicity. Human Rights Watch reported in March 2022 that the Saudi state ignored its own promises and an international ban on the child death penalty. This was in reference to the case of Abdullah al-Huwaiti. He was a minor when he committed his alleged crime and was imprisoned for over six years. After his previous death penalty conviction was overturned by the Saudi Supreme Court, he was sentenced to death again on new charges by a lower criminal court (Human Rights Watch 2022). Such actions negate the positive effects that may accrue from public diplomacy actions. In the case of Saudi Arabia, they reinforce the negative persona of the Kingdom as scary and as a country of violence and cruelty.

Recommendations

This dissertation has already discussed some of the necessary conditions for the strategy of using tourism policy as a public diplomacy tool to work in the Saudi case. These included centralized coordination at the state level to ensure consistent messaging and to ensure support for the entities and activities used to deliver the tourism policy and its messaging. Such support has included dedication of needed resources, and the identification of the narrative that needed to be replaced as well as the new narrative that needed to be introduced and propagated. Very importantly, the adoption of this strategy demanded political will and the ability to enforce the societal and legislative changes needed to apply the policy. Another important aspect was the presence of a long-term vision of what the state wanted to achieve, and a strategy, road map and plans that guided the implementation of that vision.

This section provides some additional points that may increase the effectiveness of the use of tourism policy as a public diplomacy tool, particularly in the Saudi case: first, the policy is most appropriate for targeting democratic nations where publics can influence their states' foreign policy decisions. Second, young publics are more amenable to being influenced than older publics. Third, monitoring, evaluation and control are necessary to ensure the policy is achieving its goals.

[4646] "Obstacles to Access details infrastructural, economic, and political barriers to access; government decisions to shut off connectivity or block specific applications or technologies; legal, regulatory, and ownership control over internet service providers; and the independence of regulatory bodies Limits on Content analyzes legal regulations on content; technical filtering and blocking of websites; other forms of censorship and self-censorship; the vibrancy and diversity of online information space; and the use of digital tools for civic mobilization; and Violations of User Rights tackles legal protections and restrictions on free expression; surveillance and privacy; and legal and extralegal repercussions for online speech and activities, such as imprisonment, cyberattacks, or extralegal harassment and physical violence". (Freedom House, n.d.)

The use of tourism policy as a public diplomacy strategy is particularly suited for young publics. Young publics have been subjugated to less negative portrayals of Saudi Arabia in traditional media. In fact, an Ipsos Anholt study has shown that the younger the target audience is, the less negative opinion they already have of Saudi Arabia (Anholt 2023). They are also more engaged in social media and more interested in entertainment events than older publics, making them more amenable target audiences for Saudi's strategy of using tourism as public diplomacy. Moreover, the third aspect of the Narrative Control Mechanism, minimizing the negative narrative, is enhanced at the medium to long term through the attrition of older publics because of age. With time, the number of those with long held negative perceptions of Saudi Arabia is naturally reduced. Time also gives the possibility to influence younger publics with alternative messaging, using the first and second activities of the Narrative Control Mechanism, introducing and spreading the new narrative. Furthermore, at the short to medium term, younger publics who are influenced by tourism policy and other public diplomacy tools, are not only the targets of these messages, but also used as tools to dispense the messages to other young publics through word of mouth and social media, given their communications patterns and their lifestyle choices.

To ensure the achievement of the long term goal of altering a state's image abroad, Jean-benedict E.M. Steenkamp recommends undertaking regular evaluation of the success of the state policy used. He proposed an assessment of the efficacy of the campaign against the specific intended economic, social or political outcomes should be followed by corrective action. Steenkamp suggested policy makers conduct surveys abroad, among target audiences to assess whether the state policy was successful in imbuing the nation with specific meanings and shifting perceptions in target segments and countries. He further recommended that this should be compared to the benchmark, obtained in the research phase (Dinnie 2009, 17-18). It is important to also assess whether there are any positive or negative unintended spillover effects (Interviewee #7 2024). Assessment should be done periodically, allowing for time lags, to track evolution over time (Steenkamp 2021).

This is a challenging and long term project, that some governments attempting to measure the efficacy of public diplomacy efforts, like those of the US and the UK, have been struggling with (Pamment 2012). As Dr. Robert Banks explained to his students in his "Public Diplomacy (PD) Evaluation" course syllabus:

> "Measuring success in public diplomacy […] is a challenging enterprise. It is difficult, for instance, to establish a direct causal link between any given PD program and its desired impact on a target audience, often framed as positive attitude or behavior change. The degree of complexity grows exponentially when, as is often the case, the desired impact only begins to manifest itself years, even decades, later. Investing in public diplomacy, in short, rarely results in dramatic, demonstrable change or produces instant gratification" (Banks, n.d.).

A complementary approach to the state itself undertaking post (and pre) evaluation of its public diplomacy efforts, is the use of external evaluations, like the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index and the FutureBrand Country Brand Index (Dajani 2023) to measure the effectiveness of state policies, as was thinly done in this dissertation.

Contribution of the Dissertation to the International Relations Literature

Three main contributions to the IR literature were made in this dissertation. First, it unpacked the steps some states use in public diplomacy to alter their perceptions among foreign public audiences. It introduced these steps in a new model dubbed the Narrative Control Mechanism. Second, it offered an expanded view of tourism, when discussing the nexus of tourism and foreign policy or tourism and diplomacy. Third, it introduced tourism policy as a public diplomacy tool.

Public diplomacy lacks an integrated theory to grasp all the tools and practices taken by the state to address foreign publics, according to Eitan Gilboa. However, the literature is tolerant of the adoption of many models and theories, including from other disciplines, to explain the actions of state and non-state actors who aim to influence foreign publics to achieve foreign policy goals. Gilboa has mapped some of these models in his article "Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy" (Gilboa 2008). He mentioned the borrowing of some of the concept of Public Relations from the discipline of Communications (Saliu 2020); Nation Branding from the discipline of Marketing (Dinnie 2009); and Soft Power from International Relations (Nye 2008). Costas Constantinou and Paul Sharp noted different ways that other disciplines have also embraced diplomacy or contributed to diplomatic studies. For example, religious studies spoke about the effect of Islam or Christianity on mediation and communication between different peoples; anthropology and sociology discussed non state actors as diplomatic agents; geography discussed unofficial diplomacies; while psychoanalysis discussed diplomacy from different identity perspectives; and ethnology and art history have contributed an angle on the contribution of diplomatic objects to diplomatic studies (Constantinou and Sharp 2016).

A new model has been introduced in this dissertation to the diplomatic studies literature. Like Image Restoration Theory by William Benoit (Zhang and Benoit 2004) or Alexander Dukalskis' *Authoritarian Extraterritorial Image Management* (Dukalskis 2018), the model suggested in this paper, the Narrative Control Mechanism, can be useful in summarizing the actions of some states attempting to change their image among foreign publics.

Integrated tourism policy has been suggested in this dissertation as one of the public diplomacy instruments that should be considered in diplomatic studies, alongside scholarships, foreign aid, cultural diplomacy, nation branding, etc. Additionally, this research has provided an integrated view of tourism policy when studying the relationship between tourism and foreign policy or diplomacy. This new view is one of an integrated tourism policy that encompasses many components beyond the traditional focus of literature on travel of tourists from their countries of residence to a tourism destination, or the contribution of events and expos to managing the images of nations. Several aspects of tourism were explored while answering the research question: tourism strategy, expos, events, change of legislation, and marketing and promotion. If the scope, length and time allowed, research could also have looked at other aspects of the integrated tourism policy, like the choices of tourism product development, museum curation, or human resource development.

Furthermore, at the policy level, this research provided examples of how tourism promotion and tourism related activities could be used by states for more than domestic economic purposes. The research has demonstrated that tourism policy could be a valuable tool in the arsenal of policies a state uses to affect its image abroad and achieve some of its foreign policy goals. Failure to capitalize on the potential of this tool means lost opportunities for states, and a less-than-optimal use of their tourism resources.

Future Research

The results that emerged out of this interpretive research were particularly relevant to the context of the case study that was explored- that of the use of the tourism policy by Saudi Arabia to alter its image among Western publics. However, they may be generalizable to similar contexts, like autocratic nations or Middle Eastern countries' use of non-traditional public diplomacy tools. Future research could also evaluate how successfully tourism policy has been used by other previously closed states to alter their images abroad. The use of different aspects of tourism policy as a tool to legitimize dictatorial regimes domestically and abroad could benefit from the Narrative Control Mechanism model developed in the dissertation, building on the work of Alexander Dukalskis and David Black (Dukalskis 2018; 2021; Black 2007). Moreover, future research could explore whether the Narrative Control Mechanism model reflects the mechanisms employed by other public diplomacy instruments, like scholarships, cultural exchanges and foreign aid, that aim to alter a state's image abroad.

The dissertation has adopted a statist approach in its analysis of the use of tourism policy to serve foreign policy needs. Future research could investigate other actors. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the dissertation did not tackle the subject of decision making in foreign policy, one of three approaches suggested by Derek Beach to conduct foreign policy analysis (Beach 2012, 12-13). One level of analysis of foreign policy making involves looking at the individual decision maker and exploring the political psychology of world leaders (Hudson 2007). For example, the role of MBS in deciding on and enforcing the new Saudi foreign and tourism policies, and the reasons behind these decisions as they relate to his interests in legitimation, consolidation of power, or legacy building may be explored in future research.

Processes of liberalization and reform can be politically destabilizing. The Saudi state is embarking on a fast social liberalization agenda, with tourism policy being one of its main vehicles. However, not all members of society are on board, and some perceive the changes as religiously or culturally unacceptable, while others find the transformations too quick to grasp or adapt to. Certain tribes' livelihoods, homes and way of life have been threatened by new tourism development and mega projects. The dissertation discussed the state's harsh response to domestic dissent as well as to criticisms by Saudi citizens living abroad. Future research could investigate the possible effects of the quick state-led reforms on the stability of the Saudi regime, or the steps taken by the state to manage change. Hussein Ibish, a resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington said "The Saudi leadership thinks they have no choice because they can't develop a post-hydrocarbon economy without these liberalizations and turning Saudis from dependent subjects to wealth-producing citizens" … "But they also see it as

dangerous to the regime - as potentially setting in motion forces they cannot control" (Bulos 2022).

The research conducted for the purposes of this dissertation has indicated that the Kingdom rarely, if ever, used the tactic of mortification. Mortification, one of the crises management tactics of the Image Restoration Theory, involves acknowledging the mistake and showing remorse for it following a crisis. The absence of the use of the tactic of mortification is consistent with the goals of the Saudi state of changing its image abroad. Mortification would not alter the negative narrative circulating about the state, but rather confirm it. However, further research may reveal the presence of certain incidents of the use of the tactic of mortification by the KSA. In that case, future research could investigate why such a tactic was used and how it served the Kingdom's public diplomacy or foreign policy goals.

Future research could look into the tourism policy actions that are geared towards international Muslim publics. The KSA has stated that increasing the numbers of pilgrims coming into the lower pilgrimage as one of its Vision 2030 targets and strategic objectives[47]. Religious areas that were previously closed to pilgrims and visitors, because visiting them was considered blasphemy under Wahhabism, have now been opened to visitors (Interviewee #1 2022; Farhat 2018). Religiously themed museums have been developed (Welcome to Saudi Arabia, n.d.). Future research could look into how this is linked to Saudi Arabia's foreign policy goals (Sritharan, Malik, and Sami 2023). This is especially pertinent since in many of the targeted Arab and Muslim countries, which suffer from a deficit in democracy (Kharroub 2022; Koopmans 2021; Albadawi and Makdisi 2011), citizens cannot affect foreign policy through voting or democratically acceptable means as Western publics do. However, their opinions may still be important to the Saudi state. Future research could look at the purposes or effectiveness of using tourism policy to control messaging directed at the publics of Muslim and Arab countries to serve the Kingdom's foreign policy goals.

Looking into the contribution of tourism policy into building a new national identity may be a fruitful avenue for future research (Campbell 1998) and is one which I personally would like to explore. Another area which I would like to investigate is the effect of introducing and propagating the new persona of an open liberal state on Saudi Arabia's leadership of the Muslim World. Finally, the ability of an expanded Narrative Control Mechanism model to summarize state actions that are offensive to the public and yet aimed at changing the state's image abroad is another issue I wish to explore in my upcoming research. I am particularly interested in testing the usefulness of the Narrative Control Mechanism in explaining why Saudi Arabia is willing to accept short and medium term reputational damages when engaging in violent persecution of critics and dissidents.

Positionality, Ethical Considerations and Critical Scholarship

When explaining what my research is about, I was often asked what my personal stance is on

[47] See Chapter 1, Table 12. Vision 2030 Umrah-related target and strategic objectives under 'Vibrant Society'.

what Saudi Arabia is doing in terms of its tourism policy. Many a times, I could hear a hint of disappointment or accusation in the tone of some of those posing the question. I have been asked if I am taking a critical stance, or how I was comfortable writing any positive feedback about Saudi Arabia's strategies and policies, given its human rights record. Others have asked if the changes advertised by the Saudi state are real and meaningful and if they have any positive effect on the country's human rights situation. Yet others are really surprised and disappointed by Saudi Arabia, and interpret its actions towards more social liberalization as a betrayal of Islam and of the country's Arab and Islamic leadership roles. I was also often reminded that the country has not taken real political reform and that the essence of Saudi Arabia is the same, a country that does not respect human rights and is a non-democracy. Finally, I have personally questioned whether my investigation, analysis and recommendations have been self-censored for personal gain purposes (the possibility of working in or for Saudi Arabia in the future) and the safety of my interviewees and myself.

In response to these questions, I argue that whenever possible, I have adopted the position of a critical scholar. My dissertation is infused with elements of critical scholarship. Klaus Brummer has advocated for adopting a more critical foreign policy analysis [FPA] that incorporates "additional critical ideas, concerns, and priorities" to "render FPA scholarship (even) more sensitive to and cognizant of power structures and resulting processes of subordination and exclusion, and […] also make the field more practically engaged and politically relevant" (Brummer 2022, 8-9). He suggested doing so by "systematically incorporating additional insights from critical theories, most importantly by further broadening the actors under examination, paying attention to the effects of as well as the people who are affected by foreign policy, and expanding its practical engagement" (Brummer 2022, 8). I incorporated these features into the dissertation, whenever possible. I also thinly used some of the themes of poststructuralism and constructivism to provide guidance for the critical approach.

The way I approached this research from its very beginning was with the mindsets of both an international relations [IR] scholar and a policy analyst. As a policy analyst, and particularly one who was interested in both tourism and foreign policy, I wanted to know how tourism could support foreign policy. As mentioned in the introduction of the dissertation, I had worked in tourism for several years, and was frustrated by what I analyzed to be the lack of strategic planning linking marketing efforts to strategic country goals in my own home country. I was also worried by the absence of a clear effort to construct and propagate a new international persona for my country in response to Saudi Arabia's efforts. I was worried about Saudi Arabia's ability to create and promote tourism products that could easily compete with those offered by Jordan in terms of originality, scale and quality of experience. I was even more concerned with its new nation branding efforts chipping at the competitive advantage of Jordan, where Jordan had for decades presented itself to the West as a moderate, open, welcoming, modernizing state among conservative competitors. I wanted to understand more what Saudi Arabia was doing to change its image abroad, what image it planned to project, and how likely it was to be successful in that effort. So, my investigation was done not only from the perspective of a scholar who wanted to explore the link between Saudi Arabia's actions and its foreign policy goals, but also from the point of view of a Jordanian policy analyst who wished to understand the actions of a possible

competitor that threatened to create tremendous implications for the economy and international positioning of my own country.

As an IR scholar, I try to interpret the actions of states as they relate to their current and desired position in the world. Like most IR scholars trained in the western tradition, I studied mainstream IR theory before being exposed to critical theories. Therefore, my initial instinct was to look at the state as the agent, investigate to uncover the state's interests, and examine the state's actions to achieve its goals in the international system. This may explain why I chose to explore the international function and potential foreign policy implications of Saudi Arabia's tourism policy, rather than the tourism policy's immediate and future domestic contributions. It also explains my focus on the Saudi state as the agent, rather than exploring the contribution of tourism policy with other actors, like the elite, tourists, the private sector or the Saudi public, as agents.

I also adopted a critical perspective throughout the analysis process. While post-structuralism or constructivism were not employed as the main theoretical frameworks of the dissertation, I have borrowed from these critical theories their interest in the power of discourse in shaping international relations. According to David Campbell, discourse is "representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible" (Turan 2022, 139). Discourse does not only include language but also encompasses visual tools, signals and simulations. I share with post-structuralists the belief that discourses are intentional and are curated by elites. According to Michel Foucault, quoted in '*Critical Approaches to International Relations',* they are "controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by certain people" (Turan 2022, 139). A deciphering of actions, words, and events has been undertaken in this dissertation, in poststructuralist fashion, to uncover the relationship between the signals sent to Western publics through that discourse and the political interests of the state.

Choosing to look at the political implications of tourism policy is also in line with a critical approach. I am in agreement with post-structuralism's stance as described by Gozde Turan: "there is nothing which is not essentially political; only depoliticized things that need to be deconstructed to reveal the politics underneath" (Turan 2022, 143). Moreover, the dissertation showed how Saudi Arabia uses its economic power to manipulate narratives, by introducing and propagating a new narrative about itself and weakening the negative narratives circulating about it. This is in line with poststructuralists position that reality is "a product of power relations*"* (Machado 2022).

What about my lifelong personal position as a development practitioner committed to the concepts of human dignity and women's empowerment? How does that position reconcile with my work on this case study? Mainstream theories have been accused of "excluding certain actors or perspectives and bracketing forms of violence" (Machado 2022). It is claimed that realism, for example, renders violence on the domestic level (e.g., gender violence, civil wars, environmental degradation, *inter alia*) invisible by fixating our attention in states and interstate relations" (Machado 2022). Despite adopting a mainstream lens that focuses on interests of the state, I have

also included the stories of individuals and the suffering they are subjected to in at least one of the chapters.

Throughout the research and analysis phases, I have sought to represent faithfully the accusations made against the Saudi state in Western media as well as by human rights institutions. I also included stories and names of some of the women and men who have been affected by the Saudi state's actions, as reported by these sources, rather than just give general statistics. In the limitations section of this chapter, I also showed how the stories of these individuals were reported in a way that served the goals of the reporting news outlets. Including that information in the dissertation was an attempt to show a balanced position, and also to show how individuals get caught up in narrative wars between competing sides in the international system. Those are individuals who were protesting the attempt at their marginalization by the state. They were persecuted by the state for exposing the injustices perpetrated against them and against other citizens. The exposure of their presence, action, and persecution by human rights groups and social and traditional media has also been used as a tool of international pressure on the Kingdom. Including the stories of individuals, particularly those who have been sidelined by the forces of the international system, is an approach of feminist critical IR. Cynthia Enloe, for example, has advocated against the exclusion of the study of the contributions of and the effects on those who have been in the "margins, silences and bottom rungs" when examining international politics (Enloe 2004).

Moreover, I have reported the planned and implemented reforms made by the Saudi state to improve human rights. As reported in the dissertation, the Saudi state has already abolished many restrictions on women's movement, travel, work, and dress, and has codified some women's rights in the civil status code. The state has also taken drastic measures (like the incarceration of tens of Royal family members at the Ritz Carlton on corruption charges) to fight corruption and restore the citizens' faith in its desire to change the way things are done in the Kingdom. In its economic strategy document, Vision 2030, the state made commitments to improve the treatment of foreign workers, to empower women economically, to empower the non-profit sector, and to improving the business environment[48].

As per analysts, "the success of Saudi Arabia's diversification plans depends on changing its image abroad in order to attract foreign investors. This requires showing continued commitment to anti-corruption and reform" (Interviewee #10 2023). In the case of Saudi Arabia, efforts to change its image have included making reforms in the fields of human rights, economics, tourism related legislation, as well as civil and criminal law, among others. This dissertation has unpacked the way Saudi Arabia has been using tourism policy to influence the narrative circulating about it in the West, and possibly provided a blueprint to other nations wishing to do the same. I have pondered the ethicality of providing this information and decided that countries seeking to emulate the Saudi model of using non-traditional tools of public diplomacy to alter

[48] See Table 3 in Appendix of Chapter 1- The Relationship between Vision 2030 Pillars, Plans, Vision Realization Programs, and Strategic Objectives.

their image abroad may also wish to consider similar legislative and human rights reforms to enable that image change.

In conclusion, when reporting the efforts of Saudi Arabia to manipulate and change its image abroad, am I acting ethically? I believe I have strived toward an ethical approach to scholarship. I have done so by attempting to capture relevant data with integrity and honest reporting; exposing my own positionality, adopting a balanced presentation of different viewpoints by showing the negative actions of the state as well as its efforts at reform and change; adopting several aspects of the critical scholarship approach; and adhering to the McMaster Research Ethics Board protocols to protect my interviewees. Throughout the research and writing process, I have not censored myself in the hope of ensuring future employment. My research has made the foreign policy field "more practically engaged and politically relevant" as per one of Klaus Brummer's recommendations for making the FPA field more critical. Most importantly, I have adopted a critical scholar's stance by exposing the possible use of tourism policy by the Kingdom for the purpose of intentional manipulation and change of dominant narratives, and the power resources it has used to do so. In all future research and writing on the topic, I will continue to seek ways to adopt a critical scholar stance and abide by my commitment to seek ethical approaches to scholarship.

Conclusion

The dissertation showed that the Saudi tourism policy launched in 2019 could be interpreted as a public diplomacy instrument designed to alter the country's image among publics of Western nations. Saudi Arabia has used its tourism policy in a manner similar to public diplomacy tools aimed at altering a state's image among foreign public audiences. The Saudi state has capitalized on the capability of several components of its tourism policy to reach large numbers of audiences. This happened in person when tourists traveled to the country or when they attended events within and outside the Kingdom. It was also attempted by communicating with millions virtually through social media influencers, media coverage of events, and via advertising and public relations activities.

The steps taken by the Saudi state to alter its image among foreign publics using tourism policy were identified. They were found to be similar to those employed using the Nation Branding and Image Restoration tactics. The model summarising these steps was introduced in the dissertation under the name of the Narrative Control Mechanism

Tourism policy can be an effective public diplomacy tool. Its strengths include its ability to reach large numbers of people. The ease of using tourism policy to deliver intentional messages about the state's persona, objectives, and new realities is another advantage, especially that this could be done subtly and without looking like propaganda. Moreover, the appeal of events and other components of tourism policy to younger audiences creates a long-term return on investment.

The dissertation has focused on the contribution of tourism policy as a tool of public diplomacy. This does not mean that other important roles of tourism policy at the domestic and international

levels have been rejected. It was underscored in this research that a main motivation for pushing an aggressive tourism agenda by the Saudi state was contributing to diversifying the economy and reducing unemployment. Nevertheless, this dissertation underlined the potential of tourism to provide value in avenues other than the economy, foreign policy being a key example.

States that do not build on the capability of tourism to deliver diplomatic goals and only use it for domestic economic objectives do not employ tourism policy to its full potential. It must be remembered, however, that for a state to use tourism policy as a tool of public diplomacy**,** the tourism policy needs to be intentional, part of the state's foreign policy strategy, and both policy and messaging should be coordinated at the state level. It must be supported by the state's leadership; and the necessary financial, human and legislative resources must be invested to enable the tourism policy to be used as a public diplomacy tool.

Such efforts may be undermined if the state reverts to the actions and policies that created the original negative narrative. Therefore, the use of tourism policy and other public diplomacy efforts must be supported by continuous efforts at deliberate reform and change, to consolidate the new image propagated by the state using its public diplomacy tools. This would be an important factor in achieving the state's foreign policy goals, particularly that of altering the states perception among foreign publics.

- END -

Appendix of Chapter 8

Table 14- Global Freedom Scores for Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Canada 2023 & 2024 (Freedom House, n.d.-d; Freedom House 2022)

Global Freedom Scores[49]	**Saudi Arabia**		**Jordan**		**Canada**	
Year	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
Political Rights [out of 40]	1	1	11	11	40	39
Civil Liberties [out of 60]	7	7	22	22	58	58
Total score [out of 100]	8	8	33	33	98	97
Status Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free)	Not Free		Not Free		Free	

Table 15- Internet Freedom Scores published by Freedom House for Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Canada 2023 & 2024 (Freedom House 2022)

Internet Freedom Scores	**Saudi Arabia**		**Jordan**		**Canada**	
Year	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
Obstacles to Access [out of 25]	12	13	14	13	23	23
Limits on Content [out of 35]	8	7	17	17	32	33
Violations of User Rights [out of 40]	4	5	16	17	32	32
Total score [out of 100]	24	25	47	47	87	88
Status Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free)	Not Free		Partly Free		Free	

[49] Political Rights encompasses three subcategories: electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and functioning of government. Civil Liberties contains four subcategories: freedom of expression and belief; associational and organizational rights; rule of law; and personal autonomy and individual rights. (Freedom House, n.d.)

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Interviewee #5, VP of Studies for an American think tank, January 10, 2023.

Interviewee #6, Former Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, January 11, 2023.

Interviewee #7, International branding expert, March 13, 2024.

Interviewee #8, Tourism development expert based in Saudi Arabia, November 10, 2023.

Interviewee #9, Retired American Diplomat, May 9, 2024.

Interviewee #10, Former Jordanian Minister of Economic Affairs, July 2023.

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