



Saudi Vision 2030: Public Diplomacy Efforts Through Transfer of Top European Football Players to the Saudi Arabian League

Indra Tamsyah* | Muh Nizar Sohyb | Yuniarsih Manggarsari

INSTITUTION/ AFIILIATION

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sriwijaya, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia

CORRESPONDENCE

*Indra Tamsyah, Universitas Sriwijaya, Jln. Raya Palembang - Prabumulih KM 32 Indralaya Utara, Kabupaten Ogan Ilir, Sumatera Selatan 30662, Indonesia

Email: indratamsyah@fisip.unsri.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia is striving to reduce its dependence on state revenue derived from oil. In this effort, Saudi Arabia formulated Vision 2030, which serves as the framework for their economic reforms. This research aims to elaborate on Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy efforts to introduce their economic transformation plan. To obtain accurate answers, this research employs public diplomacy theory using a qualitative descriptive method along with secondary data sources. The research findings indicate that Saudi Arabia conducts public diplomacy in three ways. First, the management of news related to Vision 2030 is carried out by an agency called the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), which is owned by the Saudi government. Second, creating an official website and social media for Vision 2030 that contains comprehensive information related to Vision 2030 so that it can be accessed by the general public. Then, Saudi Arabia will also host the Great Future Initiative Campaign, which will begin in May 2024 and is planned to last for 12 months, with the main goal of fostering a strong partnership between Saudi Arabia and the UK in the fields of economy and development, as well as potential sectors. Third, Saudi Arabia is building good relationships with important and influential actors, in this case, the top European players who have moved to the Saudi Pro League. Players like Cristiano Ronaldo are a major attraction that helps promote Saudi Arabia in general, as well as several tourism projects being undertaken by Saudi Arabia as part of Vision 2030.

KEYWORDS

Public Diplomacy; Saudi Arabia; Vision 2030

INTRODUCTION

In April 2016, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced a reform plan called “Saudi Vision 2030”, which outlines a framework to free the Kingdom from its dependence on oil exports. The announcement was released by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in his interview with Al Arabiya, during which he stated that Saudi Arabia's addiction to oil has hindered the development of many sectors in recent years ([Official Website of PIF, 2016](#)). This serves as a strong reason for Saudi Arabia to undertake massive reforms in its economy.

The Crown Prince stated that the Vision 2030 is the roadmap for Saudi's development and economic goals. Through this framework, the country aims to increase its non-oil revenue from SR 163 billion to SR 1 trillion. This goal will be achieved by developing the tourism industry and creating special economic zones, investing in domestic military capabilities, and improving overall government efficiency ([Official Website of PIF, 2016](#)). The reforms introduced under Vision 2030 represent a significant and unprecedented shift for Saudi Arabia ([Abbas, 2020](#)). There are at least three main objectives that Saudi aims to achieve through Vision 2030, namely creating a dynamic society, building a growing economy, and becoming an ambitious nation ([Abueish, 2024](#)). Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is confident that this can be achieved because Saudi has 60 percent of its population under the age of 35 ([Abbas, 2020](#)).

To build a dynamic society and lay the foundation for economic prosperity, Saudi Arabia focuses on establishing strong foundations rooted in modern Islam, national pride, and Saudi heritage and culture, while also promoting world-class entertainment, sustainable living, and an efficient healthcare and social services system. The empowerment of women and the involvement of youth are also key priorities. To improve the quality of life in Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom prioritises physical, psychological, and social well-being. This includes hosting world-class entertainment events ranging from prominent concerts and art festivals to global sporting events ([Abueish, 2024](#)).

Saudi's major reforms will partly be realised through the pivotal role of the Public Investment Fund (PIF). The PIF is a public investment fund owned by the Kingdom, established in 1971, aimed at helping to establish companies related to fundamental interests for the economy. In March 2015, PIF subsequently gained greater autonomy and national strategic responsibility. The change that took place in PIF enabled the Saudi economy to experience high progress and made PIF a key player in realising Vision 2030 to positive and sustainable economic and social change ([Official Website of PIF, 2024](#)).

One of the priority sectors for Saudi Arabia in realising Vision 2030 is sports, selected for their potential to generate significant positive impacts on the country. According to [Dinnie \(2016\)](#), a country's positive image can improve when they succeed in winning or obtaining medals from a sports competition. Beyond winning sports competitions, a country can also build good relationships with a sports club, which can be realised by acquiring or sponsoring the club ([Bocquet & Dalakas, 2023](#)). In this regard, a country's positive image can

improve not only by winning sports competition or establishing good relations with sports club, but also by hosting large-scale sporting events ([Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002](#)).

The expenses incurred by the Saudi government for each player are quite substantial, ranging from transfer fees to the salaries received. This demonstrates the Saudi government's commitment to promoting both the Saudi Pro League (SPL) and the nation's global image by attracting a significant number of foreign players to compete in the country. This is also in line with the framework of Vision 2030 to maximise the potential of the tourism and entertainment sector as one of the sources of national revenue. In light of this background, this article aims to answer this question: In what ways does Saudi Arabia implement public diplomacy to bring up top European football players to the Saudi Pro League?

This article argues that Saudi Arabia has effectively employed diplomatic strategies to attract top European football players to the Saudi Pro League in alignment with its economic reforms, in three main ways: providing the latest information, creating communication channels and partnerships, and building relationships with top footballers. This article contributes to the existing literature on public diplomacy by examining Saudi Arabia's use of diplomatic strategies to attract top European footballers as a means of promoting its Vision 2030 economic reform agenda. By using public diplomacy theory within a qualitative framework, the study also offers insights into how states communicate economic transformation narratives internationally.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is based on the literature on public diplomacy, where various scholarly perspectives are outlined before selecting the most appropriate one. The word diplomacy historically comes from the word 'diploma' which has been used since the Greek era. This word refers to a document written on two sheets of paper that are bound together and given to the head of the mission and contains instructions for the purpose of the mission ([Brovina, 2013](#)). Since then, the word diplomacy has begun to develop and has various different definitions. According to R. P. Barston, cited in [Setiawan \(2016\)](#), diplomacy can be interpreted as an effort to manage a country's relations with other countries, or international actors other than the state. Diplomacy can also be understood as an effort by international actors to manage relations with the international community without using violence ([Cull, 2009](#)). It can be concluded that the core of diplomacy is the management of relations and communication between international actors without using military force.

Diplomatic activities from various international actors continue to develop and create new terms in these developments, one of which is public diplomacy. The use of the term public diplomacy began in 1965, pioneered by a law and diplomatic expert from Tufts University, Edmund Gullion ([Brovina, 2013](#)). Public diplomacy itself developed rapidly

during the Cold War, used as part of the efforts of the superpowers involved in the Cold War to gain support from the international community in the use of nuclear weapons and the ideological understanding of each country. Public diplomacy that was widely carried out during that period provided new knowledge for academics related to the practice of public diplomacy, as well as various tools and efforts made to convey messages from each country ([Gilboa, 2008](#)).

Unlike traditional diplomacy which focuses on managing relations with other international actors, public diplomacy focuses more on managing good relations with foreign publics. As an example, an interaction between the government of a country and the people in another country. The interaction carried out aims to convey an idea that is understood by a country and invite the wider community to agree on the idea ([Cull, 2009](#)). From the description, it can be understood that public diplomacy is a diplomatic activity that focuses on interaction with people from other countries to introduce ideas and concepts in order to achieve the same understanding regarding it.

To answer the research question, a concept is needed to examine the public diplomacy efforts carried out by a country, including strategies and their implementation ([Tiffany & Azmi, 2020](#)). Scholars in the study of international relations have formulated a theoretical framework that can be used to study public diplomacy steps by international actors. Some of them are Nicholas J. Cull, Geoffrey Cowan, and Mark Leonard. Each of these scholars have a different interpretation in formulating public diplomacy steps.

[Cull \(2009\)](#) formulated that public diplomacy can be done through five different steps, namely listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting (news). Listening is the earliest step in public diplomacy, where international actors collect data abroad related to opinions about them. The data that has been collected then becomes the basis for formulating public diplomacy policies that will be carried out. Advocacy is carried out by international actors by interacting and contacting the international environment, where they will introduce their ideas, ideas, or views to the community that is the target of public diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy is carried out by international actors by disseminating information about their culture to the community abroad, while also providing a way to access their culture abroad. Exchange diplomacy can be carried out by international actors by accepting foreign citizens to live and learn about their culture, and in return, they send their citizens to go abroad to study the culture of that country while bringing and promoting the culture of their own country. International broadcasting is the use of technologies such as the internet, radio, and television by international actors with the aim of conveying their interests, ideas, and thoughts to citizens of other countries ([Cull, 2009](#)).

Other scholars who formulated the steps of public diplomacy are [Cowan & Arsenault \(2008\)](#). They explained that there are three layers in public diplomacy, namely monologue, dialogue, and collaboration. In the monologue layer, the communication message is

delivered in one direction, directly by the actor conducting public diplomacy. Monologues can be done using various media, such as slogans, publications, and press releases, or can also be in the form of cultural products from the country conducting public diplomacy, such as books, logos, and mascots. The message conveyed in the monologue depends on the purpose of the public diplomacy; it can be an idea, concept, or campaign. The delivery of the monologue can be done continuously in the near term. The second layer is dialogue, where international actors create a forum for the audience who is the target of public diplomacy to communicate in two directions. The dialogue that is carried out is considered more effective in getting feedback from the audience, rather than just delivering information and messages in one direction. The last layer is collaboration, where international actors together with the audience who is the target of public diplomacy participate together in a project ([Cowan & Arsenault, 2008](#)).

[Leonard et al. \(2002\)](#) also formulated a theoretical framework to study public diplomacy steps. In the theory they compiled, there are three dimensions in public diplomacy, namely news management, strategic communications, and relationship building. News management is carried out over a short period, where a country manages communication regarding the messages it wants to convey on a daily basis. News management must be flexible, reactive, and connected to the government because it is done continuously in a short period of time. Strategic communication is conducted over a longer term, where a country undertakes a series of activities such as campaigns, establishes a number of strategic messages, and plans a series of activities over a year or more to reinforce those messages. Strategic communications require actors to have good communication skills, as well as planning, budgeting, and resource skills. A lasting relationship is established over a longer period compared to the previous two dimensions; a country will develop long-term relationships with individuals deemed important, for example, through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and building both real and virtual networks. Relationship building takes a longer time because gaining foreign public trust is not easy. ([Leonard et al., 2002](#)).

This article selects the theoretical framework formulated by [Leonard et al. \(2002\)](#) because it is considered most appropriate to explain the public diplomacy efforts undertaken by Saudi Arabia. This framework can explain how Saudi Arabia reports on the progress of projects carried out in order to realize Vision 2030, as well as Saudi's steps to communicate with the international community and strategic partners it has in promoting its transformation. It is also appropriate for explaining Saudi Arabia's efforts to build good relations with strategic actors who can help them convey their ideas and concepts.

METHODS

This article uses a descriptive-qualitative approach. According to Bogdan and Taylor, cited in [Moleong \(2017\)](#), qualitative method is defined as a procedure that produces data in the

form of descriptions through written words, images, and observed phenomena. Meanwhile, [Arikunto \(2010\)](#) argues that qualitative research is an observation of the behaviours and attitudes of people in the surrounding environment, followed by interaction with them and interpreting the environment from their perspective. [Pasolong \(2019\)](#) defines qualitative research as a process that explains and analyses an individual or group based on an event, phenomenon, thoughts, attitudes, and social activities in their surroundings. The qualitative descriptive method is used as an approach because it can explain research results and documentation in detail. The data sources used in this research is secondary data. This consists of data acquired through literature studies, books, journals, laws, mass media, and reports related to the research being discussed.

To address the research topic and gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation, this article utilized three distinct data collection methods to gather all relevant documents pertaining to Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy efforts. First is secondary observation, which involves observing and recording the subject of study through existing sources and data. This method can also be implemented by analysing various issues related to the research object through the observation of the conditions that occur, both formally and informally. Second is documentation study, which involves collecting relevant secondary data and information related to the research topic. The types of data collected can include letters, meeting notes, proposals, memorandums, announcement agendas, and reports on studies that have been conducted at the same location. Third, the data can also take the form of news clippings or articles in the mass media that are relevant to the research topic ([Sugiyono, 2016](#)).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section examines Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy efforts in realizing Vision 2030 through the case of top football player transfers to the Saudi Pro League, using the public diplomacy framework developed by [Leonard et al. \(2002\)](#). Public diplomacy is particularly important for Saudi Arabia, which is undergoing economic transformation through Vision 2030 and exploring new sectors to reduce its dependence on oil. In Leonard's theory of diplomacy, a country can conduct public diplomacy through three methods: news management, strategic communication, and enduring relationships.

News Management

News management is a public diplomacy activity carried out over a short period, where a country manages communication regarding the messages it wants to convey daily ([Leonard et al., 2002](#)). In the dimension of news management, the strategies employed by Saudi Arabia in disseminating news, whether through local or international media, will be explained. This news contains information that the international community must be aware of regarding Saudi Vision 2030, which they are currently working on. This strategy aims to

raise awareness and promote the goals and initiatives outlined in Vision 2030, which is a comprehensive roadmap for the future development of Saudi Arabia.

Media in Saudi Arabia is essentially under tight control from the Kingdom, and often provides support to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and King Salman, while negative coverage of the Kingdom is frequently overlooked ([BBC, 2023](#)). Independent media does not exist in Saudi Arabia because almost all media operates under direct government control. Even the private media that exists in Saudi Arabia follows the guidelines set by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) ([RSE, 2024](#)).

SPA is the first national news agency in Saudi Arabia, established in 1971 with the aim of being a media outlet that collects and distributes local and international news within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and abroad. The SPA is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Information, therefore its president reports directly to the Minister ([Eye of Riyadh, 2024](#)). SPA serves as a medium for the government to provide information to the citizens of Saudi Arabia as well as to people abroad. To accommodate news readers from abroad, SPA provides a website and an application that can be accessed in several languages besides Arabic, such as English, Farsi, French, Russian, and Chinese.

In line with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's mission to transform various sectors through Saudi Vision 2030, SPA is used as a medium to report on the developments of this framework. One of the first news publications related to Vision 2030 by SPA was the news about the approval of Saudi Vision 2030 by the Saudi Cabinet. This news was published on the 18th of Rajab 1437 Hijri, or April 25, 2016. The cabinet decision reported in the news pertains to several matters: first, the Economic and Development Council issued a decree regarding the approval of Saudi Vision 2030; second, the Economic and Development Council will establish the necessary mechanisms and regulations to implement this vision and follow up on it; and third, ministries and other government bodies – each according to their authority – must take the necessary steps to implement this vision in accordance with the mechanisms and regulations to be formulated by the Economic and Development Council ([Saudi Press Agency, 2016](#)).

After the news about the Saudi Cabinet's approval of Vision 2030, SPA reported on the same day about the ratification of Saudi Vision 2030 by the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the orders of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud ([Saudi Press Agency, 2016](#)). This is an official announcement by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the public regarding the ratification of Vision 2030 as the development roadmap for Saudi Arabia in the future.

After two reports by SPA regarding the approval and ratification of Vision 2030 by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, they continue to provide updates and news related to the developments of Vision 2030. The published reports include various congratulations and praises from several partner countries of Saudi Arabia regarding the launch of Vision 2030 by Saudi Arabia. Then, various activities such as foreign visits, cabinet meetings, and

investment plans related to Vision 2030 have also been reported by SPA. To date, there are more than 600 pages of news related to Vision 2030 published by SPA. In the dimension of news management, SPA has become one of the media outlets for Saudi Arabia that manages news to raise awareness and promote the goals and initiatives outlined in Vision 2030, which is a comprehensive roadmap for the future development of Saudi Arabia.

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is a public diplomacy activity conducted over a longer term, where a country engages in a series of activities such as campaigns, establishing a number of strategic messages, and planning a series of activities over a year or more to reinforce those messages ([Leonard et al., 2002](#)). In the dimension of strategic communication, the efforts taken by Saudi Arabia to campaign for issues it wishes to discuss will be explained, starting with taglines and advertisements to attract the interest of external parties to engage in communication with Saudi Arabia. Different from the dimension of news management, in strategic communication, Saudi Arabia's efforts involve a campaign to convey messages within Vision 2030. They carry out this campaign through various media such as official websites and social media (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Logo Saudi Vision 2030. Source: [Similar PNG \(2023\)](#)

One of the initial efforts made by Saudi Arabia to introduce Vision 2030 to the general public was by creating a logo as the identity of Vision 2030. This is very important because

according to [Luffarelli et al. \(2019\)](#), a logo can provide significant benefits for the brand that wants to be promoted. A logo can help attract consumer interest, differentiate from competitors, facilitate brand recognition, and influence investor decisions. The logo will also become a communication tool used everywhere. In addition, a logo can convey trust, pride, excellence, and integrity, as well as serve as a medium to convey a set of values without the need for lengthy explanations ([Young Entrepreneur Council, 2018](#)).

Then, one of the main media used by Saudi Arabia to promote Vision 2030 is an official website called Saudi Vision 2030, which is specifically designed to convey various information that the public needs to know regarding Vision 2030. This website is accessible in two languages, Arabic and English, to accommodate and facilitate the international community seeking information related to Vision 2030.

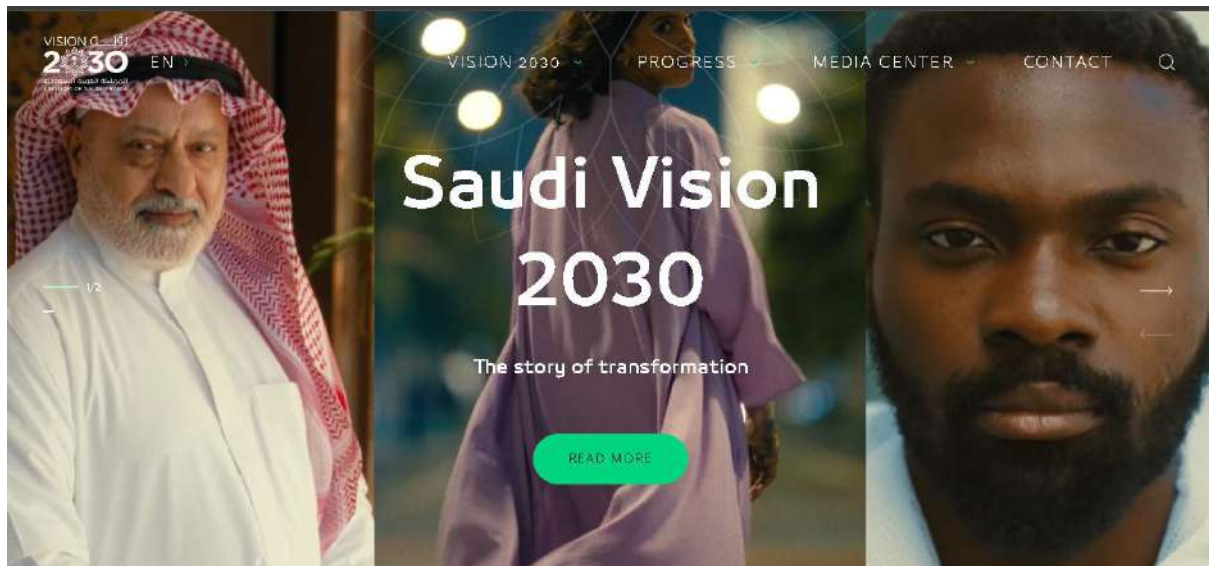


Figure 2. Official Website. Source: [Saudi Vision 2030 \(n.d\)](#)

This official website provides various information related to Vision 2030 and is accessible to anyone. There is a brief profile regarding Vision 2030, along with messages and ambitions related to the transformation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia conveyed by King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. In addition, there are programs that will be implemented by Saudi Arabia within the framework of Vision 2030, and information about the progress made on these programs will be updated periodically. This website also provides contacts that can be accessed based on each program within Vision 2030, making it easier for parties interested in collaborating with Saudi Arabia on the realisation of these programs.

In a brief description on the website, several focuses of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 are outlined, which include various aspects such as economic diversification, social development and cultural preservation, as well as government effectiveness. In addition, the

official Vision 2030 website contains complete information regarding the 44 main projects that will be undertaken by the Kingdom. These projects are divided into several sectors, such as housing, urban development, tourism, green energy, technology, sports, and the economy. Each project also contains information related to sub-projects and the goals that Saudi Arabia aims to achieve through these initiatives.

On the official Vision 2030 website, there is a link that can be accessed to reach several official social media platforms owned by Vision 2030, such as Twitter or X, Instagram, and Facebook. Using the hashtag #saudivision2030, Saudi Arabia is also disseminating information related to Vision 2030 through social media platforms. The projects currently being worked on and their developments are posted on their social media, but unfortunately, most of the posts are in Arabic, making it harder for the wider public to understand.

In addition to the three social media platforms mentioned above, Saudi Arabia uses YouTube to promote Vision 2030 through videos related to the motivations behind the formulation of Vision 2030, the pillars that are key to its realisation, and the projects that will be undertaken within Vision 2030. This account was created at the same time they announced their plans regarding Vision 2030 in April 2016. So far, the official YouTube account of Vision 2030 has uploaded more than 200 videos related to Vision 2030 and has over 18,000 followers. The videos uploaded by the official YouTube account of Vision 2030 pertain to projects being undertaken by Saudi Arabia in various fields, and there are also videos from relevant officials explaining the projects they are working on within Vision 2030.

Not only is Saudi Arabia promoting Vision 2030 online, but it is also conducting campaigns to promote Vision 2030 in person. One of the efforts being made is to host a campaign called "Great Futures," which took place in Riyadh in May 2024. This campaign lasted for 12 months with the main goal of fostering a strong partnership between Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom (UK) in the fields of economy and development, in line with the framework outlined in Vision 2030 ([Saudi Press Agency, 2024](#)).

Great Futures demonstrates how the UK can assist Saudi in realising Vision 2030. Several sectors that will be the focus include trade, investment, tourism, education, and cultural engagement. Great Futures will create opportunities for connecting the government with businesses through Saudi Arabia's highly ambitious major projects, and building long-term relationships. All of these collaborations began with Great Futures Riyadh 2024, which will then be followed by special sector activity programs throughout the year. The Great Futures Initiative conference was held at the King Abdullah Financial District (KAJD) with the mission of enhancing economic relations between Saudi Arabia and the UK. This conference is a joint project organised by the Great Britain and Northern Ireland campaign of the UK government in partnership with the Saudi government ([Alhamawi, 2024](#)).

England sent a delegation of over 450 participants to this conference, led by the UK Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden, with 70% of them visiting Saudi Arabia for the first time. The total number of participants from Saudi Arabia and England is around 1,500 people. Great Futures will continue with various events over the next 12 months, involving participation from innovative British companies to enhance partnerships in promising sectors ([Saudi Gazette, 2024](#)). The Saudi Minister of Commerce, Dr. Majid bin Abdullah Al-Qasabi, emphasised that more than 20 bilateral ministerial meetings and 50 panel sessions with 130 speakers have been held during the two-day conference. In addition, 13 agreements have been signed, and 10 workshops have been held with 400 participants focusing on initiatives related to the work of the Economic and Social Committee in 13 economic sectors. These sectors include tourism, culture, education, health, sports, investment, trade, and financial services ([One Arabia, 2024](#)).

From the perspective of the British government, Great Futures is expected to encourage trade and promote British business, education, and culture to a Saudi Arabian audience consisting of senior government officials and business leaders. This conference will primarily focus on two areas of collaboration between the UK and Saudi Arabia, namely innovation in research collaboration, disruptive technology, emerging clean technology, finance, and sustainable construction. Then, the quality of life sector includes art, fashion, media, education, sports, architecture, and tourism ([GOV.UK, 2024](#)).

Lasting Relations

A lasting relationship is a public diplomacy activity with the longest duration compared to the previous two dimensions. A country will develop long-term relationships with individuals deemed important, for example, through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and building both real and virtual networks ([Leonard et al., 2002](#)). In the dimension of lasting relationships, the strategies employed by Saudi Arabia in engaging with parties involved in Saudi Vision 2030 will be outlined, particularly regarding the transfer of top European players to the Saudi Pro League (SPL).

The transfer of the player was carried out by Saudi Arabia by providing financial assistance to four teams in the SPL through the PIF, which acquired 75 percent ownership of Al Ittihad, Al Nassr, Al Hilal, and Al Ahli. The Saudi Arabian government announced the plan as part of the Vision 2030 project ([Walid, 2023](#)). The Saudi government also stated in their press release that this acquisition further enhances participation in sports at the grassroots level ([Sim, 2023](#)). The arrival of top European players to the SPL began with Cristiano Ronaldo joining Al Nassr in December 2022. Ronaldo has been contracted by Al Nassr for two and a half years until June 2025 ([Romano, 2022](#)). There are no official details regarding Ronaldo's contract, but it is estimated to be worth over \$214.04 million ([Reuters, 2022](#)). The president of Al Nassr Club, Musalli Almuammar, stated that Ronaldo's transfer has inspired Al Nassr to achieve greater success, as well as inspiring the league, the country,

and future generations ([Al Jazeera, 2022](#)). Since Ronaldo's arrival in the SPL, more and more top European players have joined, especially the four clubs owned by PIF.

Table 1. List of Saudi Pro League Players Transfers

Club Name	Players Name
Al Ittihad	Karim Benzema, Jota, Fabinho, Romarinho, N'Golo Kante.
Al Nassr	Cristiano Ronaldo, Anderson Talisca, David Ospina, Marcelo Brozovic, Alex Telles, Seko Fofana, Sadio Mane, Aymeric Laporte.
Al Hilal	Ruben Neves, Moussa Marega, Kalidou Koulibaly, Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, Malcom, Neymar, Aleksandar Mitrovic.
Al Ahli	Edouard Mendy, Roberto Firmino, Riyad Mahrez, Allan Saint-Maximin, Gabriel Veiga, Frank Kessie.

Source: Drawn from [Sritharan \(2025\)](#)

The expenses incurred by the Saudi Arabian government for each player are quite substantial, ranging from transfer fees to the salaries received. The costs incurred to bring in top European players at the four clubs owned by PIF are estimated to reach \$742.9 million, or more than IDR 11.6 trillion ([Sritharan, 2025](#)). The largest expenditure was made by Al Hilal, amounting to £302.1 million. The figure is larger than any other club in the world during the summer transfer window of 2023 ([Sky Sports, 2023](#)).

As previously explained, the Saudi Arabian government stated that the transfer of top European players is part of the Vision 2030 project ([Walid, 2023](#)). They are investing in Saudi football with the ambition of making the SPL a top-tier football league. A reputable domestic competition not only places Saudi Arabia on the international stage but also theoretically strengthens the national team ([Johnson, 2023](#)). Publicly, the Saudi government stated that the investments being made are efforts to create investment opportunities, improve public health, and develop sports infrastructure ([Whitehead & James, 2023](#)). However, according to [Unwin \(2023\)](#), beyond just investment, Saudi Arabia also has ambitions to host the World Cup, with the possibility of bidding for 2030. Hosting the World Cup is a primary goal. It is very likely that Saudi Arabia will host the tournament in 2030 or 2034 because the World Cup is the most tangible opportunity for soft power. In addition, the internal work plan of the Saudi Football Association also ends in 2034. Not only in football, Saudi Arabia also intends to host 25 world championships in various sports in 2030 ([Whitehead & James, 2023](#)).

There are many goals that Saudi Arabia may want to achieve regarding the transfer of top players they are making. One conclusion that can be drawn is that Saudi Arabia's

actions are part of its broader effort to reduce dependence on oil, which is the main goal outlined in the framework of Vision 2030. As previously explained, Saudi Arabia is striving to empower and strengthen the participation of the private sector ([al-Zayani, 2021](#)). They will focus on investing in strategic sectors, such as entertainment, recreation, and sports ([Warrier, 2021](#)).

Among the many top European players brought to Saudi Arabia, one who has had the greatest impact is Cristiano Ronaldo. According to Sasi Kumar, former international player from Singapore and CEO of D+1 Sports, Ronaldo's move to Al Nassr is part of a larger agenda than just developing football in Saudi Arabia. Players like Ronaldo can capture the attention of the entire world and demonstrate that Saudi Arabia is becoming more progressive without needing to announce it openly, but can do so subtly. Ronaldo's arrival could also be a way for Saudi Arabia to attract investment and tourism ([Duerden, 2023](#)). Then, Neil Joyce, a football finance expert, stated that Ronaldo's presence would give Saudi Arabia the opportunity to become a hub for television and entertainment, while also promoting the country as a tourist destination ([Reuters, 2023](#)).

Ronaldo's arrival in Saudi Arabia is an effort by the country to build good relationships with individuals who are considered important and influential. This can ultimately enhance public appreciation for Saudi Arabia and create a positive perception, as players like Ronaldo will become ambassadors for Saudi Arabia in general, due to their popularity off the field ([Duerden, 2023](#)). The popularity and immense influence that Ronaldo has can be seen from the large number of followers on his Instagram account. Currently, he has over 620 million followers, making him the person with the most followers on Instagram ([Munson, 2024](#)). Ronaldo is also the only player who actively promotes the projects being undertaken by Saudi Arabia in Vision 2030 by visiting and posting about these visits on his personal social media. This has become a significant advantage for Saudi Arabia to gain widespread attention.

In May 2023, Ronaldo posted about his visit to the At Turaif district located in Diriyah and tagged the account visitdiriyah (see Figure 3). This place is the first capital of the Saudi Dynasty, located in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, northwest of Riyadh. In this complex, there are many remnants of the palace and urban complex built on the edge of the ad-Diriyah oasis ([UNESCO, 2010](#)). At Turaif itself was once the home of the Saudi royal family from 1744 to 1818. When Diriyah fell in 1818, the At Turaif district became a historical site, and it was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2010, highlighting the historical heritage it carries for Saudi Arabia ([Hasan, 2024](#)).

The Diriyah Gate Development Authority (DGDA) officially opened the Al Turaif district to the public in December 2022 and began welcoming local and international visitors to the historic district ([McKelvey, 2023](#)). In Vision 2030, Diriyah is one of the projects managed by the PIF with a value of \$62.2 billion. This city is expected to provide opportunities for tourists to visit, stay, work, shop, dine, and enjoy the heritage and culture

of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Diriyah will be designed as a sustainable city, focusing on water conservation, energy efficiency, health, cultural and heritage preservation, and resilience to climate change ([Official Website of Vision 2030, 2024](#)). Around 38 new hotels and resorts will be opened in Diriyah, including properties from major brands such as Ritz-Carlton, Park Hyatt, and Raffles. Then, there are also 6 museums, 26 cultural tourist attractions, more than 400 luxury outlets, and over 100 markets and bazaars that will be opened in Diriyah as part of the development plan for this historic city ([Chilton, 2023](#)).

With the opening of the historic site of Diriyah, Saudi Arabia hopes that this project will create new job opportunities and enhance employment prospects, as well as improve the living standards of the local community there. Then, Diriyah is also expected to raise people's awareness that Saudi Arabia can be a destination for tourism, culture, and recreation. Lastly, this project is expected to ensure financial sustainability without compromising the preservation of existing heritage and culture ([Official Website of Vision 2030, 2024](#)).



Figure 3. Ronaldo promoted Diriyah. Source: [Cristiano Ronaldo \(2023a\)](#)

In December 2023, Ronaldo also shared his visit to one of the tourist destinations that is part of the Vision 2030 project, namely AIUla (see Figure 4). Ronaldo tagged the accounts

alulamoments and experiencealula in the post. In that location, there is the archaeological site of Hegra, which is the first UNESCO World Heritage site designated in Saudi Arabia. At the Hegra archaeological site, there are well-preserved monumental tombs with ornate facades dating from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. Additionally, there are around 50 inscriptions and several cave paintings ([UNESCO, 2024](#)). The site of Hegra originates from the civilization of the Nabataean people, who controlled the trade routes for incense and spices through Arabia and Jordan to the Mediterranean, Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. This made Hegra one of the busiest international trade centres of its time ([Dikarma, 2020](#)).

The Royal Commission for AlUla in Saudi Arabia is committed to adopting a sustainable and responsible approach to urban, economic, and heritage development in the area. The combination of initiatives from archaeology, tourism, culture, education, and the arts is expected to help AlUla become a world tourist destination while preserving the natural character and history within it. By making AlUla a global tourist destination, Saudi Arabia will empower the local community by providing education, training, and skill development. This is also done to continue preserving the historical archaeological sites located in AlUla ([Official Website of Vision 2030, 2024](#)).



Figure 4. Ronaldo promoted AlUla. Source: [Cristiano Ronaldo \(2023b\)](#)

Saudi Arabia's efforts to build good relations with top European football players are one of the ways taken to promote Saudi Arabian football and Saudi Arabia in general. The country is willing to spend much money to build these relations, but are these efforts really effective?

The arrival of top European players has had an immediate impact on the Saudi Pro League (SPL), resulting in a significant increase in revenue from broadcasting rights sales. In the 2022-2023 season, there are 28 SPL international broadcasting rights contracts with an estimated revenue of \$710,000. A significant increase occurred in the 2023/2024 season where it is estimated that the agreed SPL international broadcasting rights contracts will increase fourfold. In addition, the coverage of SPL broadcasts has also increased, with 130 territories, including countries and regions ([Hellier, 2023](#)). Although there was a large increase in SPL broadcasting rights sales, this figure is still very far from the costs incurred by Saudi Arabia to bring in top European players. Domestically, the arrival of Cristiano Ronaldo also had the effect of increasing the number of spectators attending stadiums in Saudi Arabia. On average, Ronaldo's arrival has an effect of increasing stadium occupancy by 20% when he plays at home, while in away games Ronaldo has an effect of increasing 15% at the stadiums he visits ([Schreyer & Singleton, 2024](#)). While the effects have been relatively swift, it is important to note that Saudi Arabia's actions have also faced some criticism.

Addressing criticisms of Saudi Arabia's efforts

A senior academic at the Middle East Institute of the National University of Singapore, James Dorsey, said that Saudi Arabia's move to bring in many top European players is a good short-term move to put Saudi Arabian football on the world map. The arrival of many top European players has drawn attention to Saudi Arabian football. However, Dorsey said that this move must also be accompanied by a good long-term plan to maintain the attention that Saudi Arabia has received at the beginning ([El-Tabei, 2024](#)), because if Saudi Arabia continues to spend much money every year to bring in new players, of course it will be financially burdensome.

Saudi Arabia needs to plan well about the direction of their football league. If it is not planned well, then the great attention they have received previously will be in vain. The main aspect that needs to be considered by Saudi Arabia is the financial aspect. This is because they also continue to push for the development of mega projects with very large budgets. Several major projects that are being worked on in Vision 2030 have experienced obstacles and must make adjustments. Saudi Arabian Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan stated in December 2023 that several projects being worked on in Vision 2030 will be delayed due to adjustments to Saudi Arabia's economic situation. One of the mega projects called NEOM which is targeted for completion in 2030 will be delayed, and is estimated to be completed in 20 years. In addition, one of the projects that is part of NEOM, The Line, which was originally planned to be built with a length of 170 kilometers was reduced to just

over 2 kilometers. Among the causes of the delay in Saudi Arabia's projects in Vision 2030 is the lack of investors coming in ([Schaer, 2024](#)). Given this situation, the steps taken to build good relations with top European players need to be reconsidered and effective planning is needed so that it does not become a failed project.

Another criticism of Saudi Arabia's approach can be drawn from China's experience. Several years before Saudi Arabia started this project, China had also run a similar project but it did not go well. In 2012, Xi Jinping drafted a football reform plan. This was done because football was considered a very important field and one of the priorities of the Chinese government ([Gündoğan & Sonntag, 2018](#)). In the plan prepared by China, they targeted to re-enter the World Cup, host the World Cup, and win the World Cup. In addition, this plan targets China to become a world football power by 2050 ([McNicol & Raine, 2023](#)). In order to achieve this ambitious target, the Chinese government invited the private sector to collaborate. The private sector is considered to be an important part in implementing the plan prepared by the Chinese government. Various large companies invest their money in clubs in the Chinese domestic league ([Syahrozi et al., 2019](#)). These large funds then become capital to reform Chinese football and build the Chinese domestic football industry with the hope of making them a world football power, and generating large profits in the future ([Junior & Rodrigues, 2017](#)).

After gaining support from the government and the private sector, Chinese football began to make breakthroughs that at that time attracted the attention of football fans. Clubs from the Chinese Super League (CSL) began to bring in many top players from Europe, including Alex Teixeira who was recruited by Jiangsu Suning for \$54 million, then Hulk and Oscar who were recruited by Shanghai SIPG for \$60 million and \$65 million respectively. With the arrival of these big-name players, the CSL entered the top five leagues with the highest spending money in the world. In 2015-16, the CSL spent up to US\$451 million to bring in top European players ([McNicol & Raine, 2023](#)). Behind this decision, the CSL received a lot of criticism because the players who came to China were considered only looking for financial gain without providing long-term effects ([Richards, 2024](#)).

After several years of running, the CSL began to face many problems, some of which were poor financial management, allegations of high-level corruption, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The long-term pandemic caused the economy and property market to stagnate, resulting in a lack of funds from companies and developers affiliated with the Chinese government ([McNicol & Raine, 2023](#)). The pandemic also made investors lose interest in continuing to fund their clubs. Jiangsu Suning, the CSL champion in 2020, shocked their fans by announcing that they would withdraw from the CSL in early 2021 ([Richards, 2024](#)). In addition, many other clubs in the CSL are facing serious financial problems. Guangzhou Evergrande, in 2022, failed to pay their players' salaries in full. Chongqing Liangjiang, also failed to pay their staff's salaries. Wuhan Yangtze also withdrew from the league. Hebei FC even admitted to having difficulty paying their water and electricity bills ([McNicol & Raine,](#)

[2023](#)). The failure experienced by China in developing their football industry is based on several things, including poor financial management, clubs continuously experiencing deficits, and China's inability to expand the market ([Zhang, 2020](#)).

Saudi Arabia can learn many important lessons from China's failure. Bringing in big-name players certainly brings great attention from football fans at first, but Saudi Arabia must make the right plan so that the great attention can become an opportunity for a sustainable football industry. If it continues to be supported by the government but cannot generate profits and cannot become an independent industry, then the relationship that will be built with top European players will not last long and will not have a significant effect on Saudi Arabia's plans in Vision 2030.

CONCLUSION

Despite some criticisms that need consideration, Saudi Arabia has effectively employed diplomatic strategies to attract top European football players to the Saudi Pro League in three ways—news management, strategic communication, and enduring relationships—all of which align with the country's economic reform agenda. Saudi Arabia is indeed striving to transform its governance, social, and economic sectors through the Vision 2030 framework. The main goal is to break free from their dependence on oil. As a realisation of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is undertaking public diplomacy efforts to introduce various projects they are working on. The first step taken is to manage news related to Vision 2030, starting from approval, ratification, to the progress of the projects being carried out. The management of this news is carried out by an agency called the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), which is owned by the Saudi Arabian government. The second effort made is to create an official website and social media for Vision 2030 that comprehensively contains all information related to Vision 2030, making it accessible to the general public. Then, Saudi Arabia will also host the Great Future Initiative Campaign, which began in May 2024 and is planned to last for 12 months, with the main goal of fostering strong partnerships between Saudi Arabia and the UK in the fields of economy and development, as well as potential sectors.

The last effort made by Saudi Arabia is to build good relationships with important and influential actors, and in this case, top European players who have moved to the Saudi Pro League (SPL). Saudi Arabia's decision to bring in many top European players has had an instant effect, the sale of Saudi Pro League broadcasting rights has increased fourfold, and the stadium occupancy rate visited by Cristiano Ronaldo has also increased. However, Saudi Arabia needs to make a long-term plan that can increase their chances of building a sustainable football industry, because if it continues to be supported by the government but cannot generate profits and become an independent industry, then the relationship that will be built with top European players will not last long and will not have a significant impact on Saudi Arabia's plans in Vision 2030.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is fully funded by the Rector of Sriwijaya University based on decree number: 0012/UN9/[SK.LP2M.PT/2024](#), 20 Mei 2024

REFERENCES

- Abbas, F. J. (2020, April 19). *Unveiling Saudi Vision 2030*. Arab News. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1661491>
- Abueish, T. (2024, May 1). *Vision 2030: What are Saudi Arabia's overarching goals?* Al Arabiya. <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/saudi-arabia/2024/05/01/vision-2030-what-are-saudi-arabia-s-overarching-goals>
- Al Jazeera. (2022, December 31). *Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo joins Saudi Arabia club Al Nassr*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/31/portugals-cristiano-ronaldo-joins-saudi-arabia-club-al-nassr>
- Alhamawi, L. (2024, May 13). *Riyadh set to host GREAT Futures Initiative Conference*. Arab News. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2509391/business-economy>
- al-Zayani, M. (2021, December 16). *PIF Deputy Governor: We Aim to Focus on 13 Vital Sectors*. Asharq Al-Awsat. <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3362321/pif-deputy-governor-we-aim-focus-13-vital-sectors>
- Arikunto, S. (2010). *Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktek*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.
- BBC. (2023, September 1). *Saudi Arabia media guide*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703480>
- Bocquet, M., & Dalakas, V. (2023). Nation branding through sports: The impact of Qatar's ownership of Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) on Qatar's image by French soccer fans. *Atlantic Marketing Journal*, 12(1), 1-16.
- Brovina, N. (2013). Developments and Theoretical Approaches on Public Diplomacy. *GLOBAL CHALLENGE International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 1(2), 1-16.
- Chilton, N. (2023, February 22). *The latest 'giga project' aiming to transform Saudi Arabia*. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/saudi-arabia-diriyah/index.html>
- Cristiano Ronaldo. (2023a, May 6). *Indulging in history and gastronomy at @tatel.riyadh in @bujairiterrace with a stunning view of #at_turaif @visitdiriyah*. [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cr6jSkzLj7W/>
- Cristiano Ronaldo. (2023b, December 13). *Amazed by the extraordinary human and natural heritage of AlUla here in Saudi Arabia.SA*. [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/C0yfgYLo6EK/>
- Cowan, G., & Arsenault, A. (2008). *Moving from Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration : The Three Layers of Public Diplomacy*. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.
- Cull, N. J. (2009). *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*. Figueroa Press.

- Dikarma, K. (2020, December 21). *Hegra, Situs Arkelogis Tersembunyi di Saudi*. Republika. <https://www.republika.id/posts/12615/hegra-situs-arkelogis-tersembunyi-di-saudi>
- Dinnie, K. (2016). *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issue, Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Duerden, J. (2023, January 10). *The Cristiano Ronaldo effect: Saudi Arabia and Al-Nassr*. The New Arab. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/cristiano-ronaldo-effect-saudi-arabia-and-al-nassr>
- Duerden, J. (2023, January 19). *What does Ronaldo's signing for Al Nassr mean for Saudi Arabia?* | *Football News*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2023/1/19/what-does-ronaldos-signing-for-al-nassr-mean-for-saudi-arabia>
- El-Tabei, H. (2024, October 8). *From boom to budgeting as reality bites for Saudi football*. Al-Monitor: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/10/boom-budgeting-reality-bites-saudi-football>
- Eye of Riyadh. (2024). *Saudi Press Agency*. https://www.eyefriyadh.com/directory/details/3658_saudi-press-agency
- Gilboa, E. (2008). Searching for a theory of public diplomacy. *The annals of the American academy of political and social science*, 616(1), 55-77.
- GOV.UK. (2024, April 22). *UK and Saudi Arabia to host major trade expo - GREAT FUTURES - in Riyadh*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-saudi-arabia-to-host-major-trade-expo-great-futures-in-riyadh>
- Gündoğan, I., & Sonntag, A. (2018). Chinese football in the era of Xi Jinping: What do supporters think?. *Journal of current Chinese affairs*, 47(1), 103-141.
- Hasan, S. (2024, February 22). *Saudi Founding Day: 5 Things to Know About Diriyah, the First Saudi State*. Vogue Arabia. <https://en.vogue.me/culture/saudi-founding-day-diriyah-history-facts/>
- Hellier, D. (2023, August 10). *Saudi Football League Lines Up Deals to Broadcast Games Globally*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-08-10/saudi-football-league-lines-up-deals-to-broadcast-games-globally>
- Johnson, J. (2023, June 14). *Saudi Arabia transfers explained: Why stars like Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema, are picking the Pro League*. CBS Sports. <https://www.cbssports.com/soccer/news/saudi-arabia-transfers-explained-why-stars-like-cristiano-ronaldo-karim-benzema-are-picking-the-pro-league/>
- Junior, E. F., & Rodrigues, C. (2017). *The Chinese Football Development Plan: Soft Power And National Identity*. HOLOS, Vol. 5, 2017, 114-124.
- Leonard, M., Stead, C., & Smewing, C. (2002). *Public Diplomacy*. Foreign Policy Centre.
- Luffarelli, J., Mukesh, M., & Mahmood, A. (2019, September 12). *A Study of 597 Logos Shows Which Kind Is Most Effective*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2019/09/a-study-of-597-logos-shows-which-kind-is-most-effective>

- McKelvey, R. (2023, July 17). *Diriyah: Illuminating the hidden history of Saudi Arabia's first capital*. The National. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/2023/07/18/diriyah-history-saudi-arabia/>
- McNicol, A., & Raine, A. (2023, April 7). *Xi Jinping wanted China to be a global soccer power. What went wrong?* <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/07/china/xi-jinping-china-football-dream-fail-intl-hnk-dst/index.html>
- Moleong, L. J. (2017). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Pt. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Munson, O. (2024, March 1). *Who is the most followed person on Instagram? A rundown of the top 10*. USA Today. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2024/03/01/who-has-the-most-followers-on-instagram/72524222007/>
- Official Website of PIF. (2016, April 25). *Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reform plan announced | Public Investment Fund*. PIF. <https://www.pif.gov.sa/en/news-and-insights/press-releases/2016/vision-2030-reform-plan-announced/>
- Official Website of PIF. (2024). *Our History | Public Investment Fund*. PIF <https://www.pif.gov.sa/en/who-we-are/our-history/>
- Official Website of Vision 2030. (2024). *Project AlUla*. Vision 2030. <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/projects/alula>
- Official Website of Vision 2030. (2024). *Project Diriyah*. Vision 2030. <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/projects/diriyah>
- One Arabia. (2024, Mei 16). *Great Futures Initiative Conference Strengthens Saudi-British Economic Partnership*. One Arabia. <https://www.onearabia.me/local/saudi-british-partnership-great-futures-initiative-conference-011-33435.html>
- Papadopoulos, N., & Heslop, L. A. (2002). Country equity and country branding: Problems and Prospects. *Journal of Brand Management*, 294-314.
- Pasolong, H. (2019). *Teori Administrasi Publik*. Bandung: Penerbit Alfabeta.
- Reuters. (2022, December 30). *Ronaldo joins Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr until 2025*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/ronaldo-joins-saudi-arabian-club-al-nassr-saudi-state-tv-2022-12-30/>
- Reuters. (2023, January 19). *Saudi Arabia set to profit from Ronaldo move, says expert*. China Daily. <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/311058>
- Richards, P. (2024, October 20). *The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Super League: Lessons from a Spending Spree*. <https://www.ceotodaymagazine.com/2024/10/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-chinese-super-league-lessons-from-a-spending-spreed/>
- Romano, F. (2022, December 30). *Cristiano Ronaldo completes deal to join Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/dec/30/cristiano-ronaldo-al-nassr-saudi-arabia>
- RSF. (2024). *Saudi Arabia*. RSF (Reporters Without Borders). <https://rsf.org/en/country/saudi-arabia>

- Saudi Gazette. (2024, May 14). *GREAT FUTURES: Saudi Arabia and UK strengthen economic ties*. Saudi Gazette. <https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/642858/SAUDI-ARABIA/GREAT-FUTURES-Saudi-Arabia-and-UK-strengthen-economic-ties>
- Saudi Press Agency. (2016, April 25). *Cabinet Approves Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030*. Saudi Press Agency. <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/ca8521ac35>
- Saudi Press Agency. (2016, April 25). *Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030*. Saudi Press Agency. <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/c791e730f1>
- Saudi Press Agency. (2024, April 24). *Riyadh to Host 'GREAT FUTURES' Initiative between Saudi Arabia, UK on May 14-15*. Saudi Press Agency. <https://spa.gov.sa/en/N2088937>
- Saudi Vision 2030. (n.d). Official Website. <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en>
- Schaer, C. (2024, June 24). *Are Saudi Arabia's plans for a non-oil future too grand?* <https://www.dw.com/en/are-saudi-arabias-plans-for-a-non-oil-future-too-grand/a-69459554>
- Schreyer, D., & Singleton, C. (2024). Cristiano of Arabia: Did Ronaldo increase Saudi Pro League attendances? . *Contemporary Economic Policy*. 2024. , 1-11.
- Setiawan, A. (2016). *Teori dan Praktik Diplomasi*. Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta.
- Similar PNG. (2023). Logo saudi vision 2030. <https://similarpng.com/logo-saudi-vision-2030-download-free-png>
- Sim, J. (2023, June 6). *PIF takes ownership of four Saudi Pro League clubs as Aramco, Neom, Driyah Gate and Royal Commission for Al-Ula also buy in*. SportsPro. <https://www.sportspromedia.com/news/saudi-pro-league-pif-al-nassr-hilal-ittihad-ahli-takeover-privatisation-aramco-neom/>
- Sky Sports. (2023, September 8). *Summer transfer window 2023: Who has signed for Saudi Arabian clubs? Roberto Firmino, Karim Benzema and more*. Sky Sports. <https://www.skysports.com/football/news/11095/12920431/summer-transfer-window-2023-who-has-signed-for-saudia-arabia-clubs-roberto-firmino-ruben-neves-karim-benzema-and-more>
- Sritharan, J. (2025, January 14). *All Saudi transfers involving big-name players: List of stars to move to Pro League in Middle East*. <https://www.sportingnews.com/us/soccer/news/saudi-pro-league-transfers-players-list-middle-east/qbi0v7emehwfyvcfajrwyi7>
- Sugiyono. (2016). *Metode Penelitian Administrasi*. Alfabeta.
- Syahrozi, R., Kusumaningrum, D. N., & Pradana, H. A. (2019). Behind China sport industry development: Football. *JL Pol'y & Globalization*, 81, 36.
- Tiffany, A., & Azmi, F. (2020). Diplomasi Publik Indonesia melalui Penyelenggaraan Asian Games 2018. *Padjadjaran Journal of International Relations*, 1(3), 202-217.
- UNESCO. (2010, July 31). *At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1329/>

- UNESCO. (2024). *Hegra Archaeological Site (al-Hijr / Madā' in Ṣāliḥ)*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1293/>
- Unwin, W. (2023, June 7). *For Saudi Arabia, rush of star football signings could be its most effective tool* | Will Unwin. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2023/jun/07/saudi-arabia-star-football-signings-effective-tool-benzema-ronaldo>
- Walid, A. (2023, June 5). *PIF to take control of Saudi Arabia's four biggest clubs*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/4581869/2023/06/05/saudi-arabia-pif-pro-league/>
- Warrier, R. (2021, January 27). *Saudi PIF to focus on construction among 13 sectors in new strategy*. Construction Week. <https://www.constructionweekonline.com/business/270283-saudi-pif-to-focus-on-construction-among-13-sectors-in-new-strategy>
- Whitehead, J., & James, S. (2023, June 12). *Saudi Arabia, football's big disruptors. The story of the money, the motive and the hidden disputes*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/4600483/2023/06/12/saudi-benzema-kante-transfers/>
- Young Entrepreneur Council. (2018, November 30). *The Importance of Having The Right Logo*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2018/11/30/the-importance-of-having-the-right-logo/>
- Zhang, J. (2020). Problems and prospects: A study on the development history of Chinese football industry. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 37(sup1), 102-123.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Indra Tamsyah is a lecturer of International Relations at Universitas Sriwijaya. He has completed his Master degree in International Relations from Universitas Airlangga. His research areas include Saudi Vision 2030 (research roadmap 2024 - 2028), International Organization and Political Comparative Studies.

Muh. Nizar Sohyb is a lecturer of International Relations at Universitas Sriwijaya. He has completed his Master degree in International Relations from Universitas Gadjah Mada. His research areas include Middle East Issues and Transnational Society Movement.

Yuniarsih Manggarsari is a lecturer of International Relations at Universitas Sriwijaya. She has completed her Master degree in English Education from Universitas Sriwijaya. Her research area include English Education.

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Tamsyah, I., Sohyb, M.N., & Manggarsari, Y. (2025). Saudi Vision 2030: Public Diplomacy Efforts Through Transfer of Top European Football Players to the Saudi Arabian League. *Papua Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, 5(2), 237-260. DOI: 10.31957/pjdir.v5i2.4154