

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20237925

THE ROLE OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN PROMOTING THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA (2015-2025)

Eman Ibrahim Alzuaq¹, Rashed Ahmed Alrasheed²

¹*Institutional Affiliation: Applied Science University, Bahrain
Email: 20230130387@student.asu.edu.bh*

²*Institutional Affiliation: Applied Science University, Bahrain
Email: rashed.ismaeel@asu.edu.bh*

Received: 07/02/2026
Accepted: 08/04/2026

Corresponding Author: Rashed Ahmed Alrasheed
(zainrashedeen@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of Saudi cultural diplomacy in advancing the Kingdom's foreign policy by promoting national identity and highlighting the richness of Saudi culture to global audiences. It aims to assess the impact of cultural initiatives on shaping Saudi Arabia's international image and strengthening its regional and global standing within the framework of Vision 2030. Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, the study uses a questionnaire administered to an international sample of 398 participants to measure perceptions of the effectiveness of Saudi cultural diplomacy. Findings indicate a high level of agreement (90–96%) on the positive influence of cultural diplomacy in enhancing foreign policy, improving the Kingdom's global image, and fostering international cooperation. The study concludes with practical recommendations to expand cultural events abroad, adopt immersive digital technologies, and reinforce global academic and cultural partnerships.

KEYWORDS: Saudi Arabia, Cultural Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Vision 2030, International Image, Soft Power.

1. INTRODUCTION

Saudi national identity plays a crucial role in strengthening the Kingdom's foreign policy objectives. Cultural diplomacy has become a strategic tool for promoting Saudi identity on the international stage through cultural initiatives such as Riyadh Season and the Red Sea International Film Festival (De Maer, 2025). These cultural initiatives aim to enhance Saudi Arabia's soft power and international presence, aligning with the Kingdom's Vision 2030.

This study aims to analyse the role of Saudi cultural diplomacy in supporting foreign policy goals between 2015 and 2024. As well, it determines the impact of international cultural initiatives on global public opinion and their contribution to enhancing the image of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the international community.

Amid these shifts in Saudi foreign policy, the state's cultural diplomacy faces several challenges, including the need to balance cultural openness with the promotion of national identity within the international system. These challenges are compounded by other issues such as escalating regional competition and the volatility of global public opinion. Despite the existence of numerous studies on Saudi foreign policy, most have focused solely on theoretical discussions or the context of the state's external strategic interests, leaving a significant gap in the practical assessment of Saudi cultural diplomacy from the perspective of the international community.

The study focuses on demonstrating the contribution of cultural initiatives to promoting national identity and improving the Kingdom's international image. It also seeks to answer three key questions:

1. How does cultural diplomacy contribute to consolidating national identity among foreign audiences?
2. To what extent do cultural initiatives influence the Kingdom's international standing?
3. How can cultural and educational cooperation be leveraged to build positive perceptions of the Kingdom globally?

Methodologically, a quantitative approach was used to analyse participants' awareness of Saudi cultural initiatives across various countries. This approach helps identify the strengths and challenges of Saudi Arabia's cultural diplomacy practices and enables researchers to provide evidence-based insights for developing more effective cultural diplomacy strategies.

This research offers practical contributions to the

field of international relations studies by presenting an analytical model linking national identity and cultural diplomacy. While numerous studies (De Maer, 2025; Alkatheeri & Khan, 2019; Konopka & Strykhotzkyi, 2021) have addressed Saudi foreign policy, this study is unique in that it transcends theoretical discussions and provides policymakers, research centres, and experts with a practical assessment of the impact of cultural diplomacy on the Kingdom's image in the international community, its increased cultural and economic appeal, and the implications for its foreign policy objectives.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Constructivist theory has emerged in international relations in recent decades as one of the most influential intellectual approaches to analysing issues and phenomena, particularly in light of the major transformations witnessed by the global system. Unlike traditional approaches, such as neorealism and institutional liberalism, which focus on material factors like power and interest, constructivism emphasizes that understanding international reality depends not only on military or economic balances, but also on the meanings conveyed by international actors through mutual interaction (Wendt, 1999).

This theory, originally developed within sociology and social theory, was influenced by the ideas of thinkers such as Émile Durkheim and Anthony Giddens, before being transferred to the field of international relations by Alexander Wendt, who is considered the true pioneer in introducing constructivism to this field. In his seminal work, *A Social Theory of International Politics* (Wendt, 1999), Wendt presented a different conception of the nature of the international system. He argued that the structure of relations between states is not determined solely by the anarchy of the system or the distribution of material resources, but is socially constructed through shared meanings that emerge from interaction. His famous quote, "Anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt, 1999), succinctly summarizes this perspective, which posits that the nature of international relations is not fixed or predetermined, but rather flexible and subject to the management of actors, their norms, and their identities.

Constructivist theory offers several fundamental concepts, most notably that identities and interests are not predetermined but are gradually formed within social contexts. It also argues that state behavior cannot be separated from the culture and

collective norms that frame its actions. Wendt supported this view by distinguishing between material structure and social meaning, explaining that the threat in international relations does not stem from the weapon itself, but from the state's perception of that weapon within its relations with the other party (Wendt, 1999). In developing these hypotheses, Finnemore (1996) made a significant contribution to clarifying the role of international norms in shaping state behavior, demonstrating that states sometimes act out of a desire to comply with norms, and not solely according to their material interests (Finnemore, 1996). From another perspective, Katzenstein (1996) analyzed the relationship between cultural identity and security policy, indicating that national culture may determine the pattern of response to external threats as much as considerations of hard power.

Although constructivist theory overlaps in some of its concepts with the subject of cultural diplomacy—in terms of its focus on identity, norms, and social interaction—a distinction must be made between them. Constructivism provides a general explanatory framework for understanding how states' behavior and external image are shaped by the meanings of identity and culture. Cultural diplomacy, on the other hand, is a practical and functional tool within foreign policy, embodying these meanings in practice through cultural initiatives and activities.

This study uses constructivist theory to understand how Saudi Arabia employs its cultural symbols and national identity to enhance its international reputation. It also helps analyze the study's hypotheses regarding the impact of cultural diplomacy on foreign policy, specifically that cultural interactions serve as a means to reconstruct mutual perceptions and expand the scope of Saudi soft power within the international system.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, it is noteworthy that since 2015, the Kingdom has increasingly relied on cultural diplomacy as part of its strategy to enhance soft power and represent its identity to the world. This makes constructivist theory a suitable framework for understanding this shift, as it provides conceptual tools for understanding how cultural initiatives contribute to the reproduction of "national identity" and the strengthening of a state's position in the international system, not through hard power, but through normative symbolic influence.

Modern Saudi foreign policy can be interpreted from a constructivist perspective through the role of national identity and social norms in guiding its

cultural decisions and initiatives. For example, the Riyadh Season events, the Al-Ula Cultural Festival, and international cultural exchange programs represent a practical embodiment of employing national symbols and values to construct a new image of the Kingdom based on cultural openness and civilizational interaction, reflecting the shift of Saudi identity from the local sphere to the global arena. From this perspective, constructivist theory explains how internal cultural norms are used as soft power to reshape external perceptions of the Kingdom and enhance its international standing.

This study did not adopt traditional theories such as realism or liberalism, given their focus on material power and economic interests, neglecting the symbolic and cultural dimensions that constitute the essence of cultural diplomacy. In contrast, constructivist theory provides a more suitable framework for understanding how cultural identities, norms, and values contribute to shaping Saudi foreign policy directions during the period (2015-2024), in line with the goals of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 to enhance soft power and cultural openness.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review critically examines recent scholarly contributions (2021-2025) addressing cultural diplomacy, foreign policy, and the interaction between them, with a particular focus on the Saudi case. The review is organized thematically rather than descriptively, enabling analytical integration instead of mere summarization. Three main thematic strands are identified: (1) cultural diplomacy as a soft power strategy, (2) foreign policy transformation under Vision 2030, and (3) studies integrating cultural diplomacy with foreign policy and national identity. Through this structure, the review identifies conceptual, methodological, and empirical gaps that justify the current study and clarify its original contribution.

3.1. Cultural Diplomacy as a Soft Power Strategy

A number of studies have focused on the concept of cultural diplomacy and its role in enhancing a country's image abroad and highlighting national identity through cultural events and programs. These studies have shown that culture represents an important tool of soft power, which contributes to improving a country's standing and increasing positive interaction with other societies.

The study by Konopka & Strykhot'skyi (2021), titled "Cultural Diplomacy of the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia in the Context of the Vision 2030 Strategy Implementation," aimed to analyze the specifics of this diplomacy by tracking levels of cultural development in the Kingdom. It highlighted the role of newly established institutions, such as the Ministry of Culture and the Misk Art Institute, in expanding cultural activity. The study employed a qualitative approach, analyzing official documents (the Saudi Cultural Vision and Vision 2030) to clarify the role of soft power. The results showed that cultural diplomacy is a pivotal tool for promoting Saudi values and improving its international image, with a particular focus on religion and religious tourism as key instruments. However, the study pointed to a research gap concerning the lack of quantitative evidence on the impact of these efforts on foreign policy and international public opinion. It also highlighted the need to study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the continuity of cultural and tourism projects and future strategies in this field.

In addition, the study by Alkatheeri & Khan (2019), titled "A Perspective on Saudi Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy," also addressed soft power and cultural diplomacy as key foreign policy tools for enhancing the Kingdom's regional and international image. It aimed to analyze Saudi Arabia's use of diverse cultural and societal tools, including universities, research centers, governmental and non-governmental organizations, educational exchange programs, media, and sports.

A recent study by researcher Israa Abdulaziz Al-Zaid (2025), titled "Elite Trends Towards the Future of Saudi Arabia's Cultural Diplomacy in Light of Vision 2030 - A Foresight Study," focuses on elite perspectives regarding communication efforts in this field. The study aimed to anticipate the expected development paths of this diplomacy through expert opinions, using the Delphi Foresight methodology. This methodology was applied to a sample of 36 experts in two phases: open interviews followed by closed questionnaires. The results showed that hosting international events is the most effective tool for enhancing the Kingdom's global image, alongside the growing digital presence of cultural programs and initiatives on various platforms. The results also indicated that the majority of experts expect Saudi cultural diplomacy to witness greater expansion and development in the future, thus strengthening the Kingdom's position on the international stage. However, the Al-Zaid (2025) study focused solely on elite opinions and did not examine international public opinion. Furthermore, it lacked quantitative analysis to measure the direct impact of these efforts,

which opens the door for future studies to address this aspect.

In another recent study by researcher Mutlaq Al-Mutairi (2025), titled "The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Building a Nation's Image - Student Diplomacy as a Model," a study of international students at King Saud University aimed to explore the contribution of the Saudi educational experience to enhancing its global image. The study employed a qualitative approach using focus groups with 12 international students from diverse backgrounds. The results showed that these students already held a positive image of the Kingdom, linked to its religious and cultural significance, and that their educational experience reinforced this image, which they then shared with their home countries through social and media networks. The findings also confirmed that education constitutes a strategic tool of soft power employed by nations to strengthen their international presence. However, a research gap existed due to the limited sample size, confined to a single university, and the absence of quantitative analysis to measure the broader impact of the international students' experience. This necessitates future studies with larger and more diverse samples.

From a different perspective, Lulwa Aman Abdullah's (2024) study, "The Role of Saudi Electronic Newspapers in Promoting the Kingdom's Vision 2030," focused on monitoring the Vision's themes, programs, and content as reflected in the newspapers Okaz and Asharq Al-Awsat. The study employed a media survey methodology using content analysis of a sample of 815 newspapers and relied on the Media Richness Theory as its theoretical framework. The results showed that the theme "A Thriving Economy" was the most frequently used in data journalism to promote the Vision, followed by "An Ambitious Nation" and "A Vibrant Society," while cultural and artistic themes ranked lower. The results also indicated that textual information supported by data was the most commonly used format, while infographics and video graphics were less frequently employed. The study confirmed that the primary objective of data journalism was to showcase the Vision's achievements and enhance the public image of Saudi Arabia, with a particular emphasis on its economic dimensions. The research gap was that the study was limited to only two newspapers and did not include other media outlets, such as independent digital platforms or international media. Furthermore, it relied on content analysis without expanding to measure audience impact or assessing audience reception of the media content.

Most previous studies agree that cultural diplomacy is an effective tool of soft power in enhancing a country's international image and influencing global public opinion. However, these studies differ in their temporal and geographical scope, as well as in their focus on theoretical or applied aspects. In light of this, this study distinguishes itself by attempting to link cultural diplomacy with Saudi national identity, on the one hand, and the strengthening of foreign policy, on the other, during the period 2015-2024 – a connection not directly addressed in previous studies.

3.2. Foreign Policy Transformation under Vision 2030

A second thematic strand focuses on Saudi Arabia's foreign policy transformation since 2015, emphasizing economic diversification, regional leadership, and strategic autonomy. These studies generally frame Vision 2030 as a structural driver reshaping foreign policy priorities.

The study by Alsubaie et al. (2024), titled "Saudi Arabia as a Regional Collaborator (2015-2022)," focuses on the religious, political, economic, and security dimensions that have shaped this role. The study aimed to explore the factors that have contributed to strengthening the Kingdom's regional standing and to highlight Saudi Vision 2030's role in reshaping its foreign policy. The Alsubaie et al. (2024) study employed a combination of inductive and descriptive-analytical methodologies, in addition to a case study approach, to analyze the major shifts in regional relations. The results showed that the Kingdom has emerged as a pivotal player in the region, with its religious standing, economic weight, and security role contributing to its enhanced political influence. International and regional transformations have also had a clear impact on shaping this role. The Alsubaie et al. (2024) study recommended strengthening the Kingdom's regional political role in line with the goals of Vision 2030 and leveraging new developments to solidify its presence in the regional environment. However, a research gap emerged in the absence of quantitative analysis to measure the impact of Vision 2030 on foreign policy, and in the limited focus on non-traditional tools such as cultural and economic diplomacy as levers for enhancing regional standing.

A recent study by researcher Saeed (2025), titled "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy Shift: Vision 2030 and Beyond," focuses on the economic dimension as the primary driver of these changes. The study indicated that the Vision was not merely a domestic development plan, but a strategic framework that

reshaped foreign policy priorities by emphasizing economic diversification and reducing dependence on oil. The study also highlighted that internal reforms, including legislative modernization and social liberalization, were directly linked to the new foreign policy directions. It explained that Saudi Arabia adopted a more neutral and pragmatic approach to international issues, based on economic interests and cooperation with major powers such as the United States, China, and Russia. In his study, Saeed (2025) also discussed the Kingdom's role in enhancing its regional standing by supporting efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region. The findings concluded that post-2016 foreign policy became more closely tied to economic objectives, while maintaining the Kingdom's traditional religious and political dimensions, thus creating a blend of diplomatic neutrality and economic proactive engagement as a key pillar of its future vision. However, a research gap lies in the study's failure to integrate quantitative measurement tools to assess the actual impact of the transformations brought about by Vision 2030 on the Kingdom's international position. Furthermore, it did not dedicate sufficient space to analyzing the role of newly developed soft power tools, particularly cultural diplomacy, in bolstering Saudi foreign policy orientations.

From a different perspective, Hashim's (2024) study, "The Dynamics of Saudi Strategy Towards Reshaping Geopolitical Influence Practices in the Middle East," focused on how the Kingdom has strengthened its regional position through new policies that blend traditional security measures with modern economic and cultural dimensions. The study aimed to clarify how the Kingdom has leveraged its economic power to solidify its position as an influential regional power. It employed a descriptive-analytical approach, analyzing regional policies and practices in light of Vision 2030. The findings revealed that Saudi Arabia has sought to balance its religious and symbolic dimensions with its political interests, particularly regarding regional issues such as Yemen, Syria, and Iran. Furthermore, it has adopted a pragmatic and flexible approach in dealing with major powers like the United States and China to achieve greater strategic independence. Hashim's (2024) study concluded that these changes are not merely a circumstantial response, but rather a long-term project to redefine the Kingdom's position within the regional system. The research gap lies in the limited connection between these transformations and soft power tools, necessitating studies that link Vision 2030 with the dimensions of cultural diplomacy.

The study by Pratiwi and Muslikhati (2024), titled "Implementation of Saudi Vision 2030 towards Saudi Arabia's internationally open tourism industry," also addressed this gap. It explained that declining oil prices prompted the Kingdom to seek sustainable economic alternatives, leading to a focus on tourism as a pivotal sector for achieving economic growth. The study emphasized developing tourism components such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation, in addition to creating new destinations in cultural and adventure tourism. This aims to solidify the Kingdom's image as a global destination that transcends its traditional religious character. Pratiwi and Muslikhati's (2024) study also highlighted government efforts to attract local and international investments through the establishment of funds such as the Tourism Development Fund and the launch of major projects like NEOM, the Red Sea Project, Al-Ula, and Qiddiya. Furthermore, the study employed a qualitative methodology using secondary data from literature and official sources. The findings concluded that tourism has become a strategic tool for achieving Vision 2030, contributing 10% of the GDP and attracting 100 million tourists annually by 2030. This reflects the radical shift in the Kingdom's economic policy and its role in enhancing its international image.

Overall, foreign policy studies converge on the idea that Vision 2030 represents a turning point in Saudi international behavior. Yet, cultural diplomacy remains under-theorized, often treated as secondary or symbolic rather than as a measurable policy instrument.

3.3. Integrating Cultural Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

A smaller but growing body of literature explicitly integrates cultural diplomacy into foreign policy analysis, highlighting its role in shaping international influence.

In another study by Jayanti (2024), titled "Soft Power through Pilgrimage: Analyzing Saudi Arabia's 2024 King Salman Omra Program in Indonesia," the study focuses on the cultural and religious dimension of the program. It examines the invitation extended to Indonesian religious leaders, academics, and media figures to perform Umrah at the Kingdom's expense, reflecting the integration of religious diplomacy within foreign policy. The study employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing documentary and content analysis of secondary data from government reports, academic articles, and media sources. The results showed that the program contributed to enhancing the Kingdom's global

image and consolidating its leadership of the Islamic world, in addition to opening avenues for cooperation in education and trade. The study also explained that religious diplomacy represents a pivotal channel in Saudi foreign policy within the framework of Vision 2030, particularly in key countries like Indonesia. However, a research gap exists in the lack of broader testing of the impact of these programs on Indonesian public opinion, relying instead on qualitative analysis without incorporating quantitative tools to measure the actual influence.

In a recent study by De Maer (2025), titled "The Saudi Arab Identity, Foreign Policy and its Relation to its Cultural Diplomacy," the study aimed to explain the relationship between Saudi national identity and foreign policy by employing cultural diplomacy as a strategic tool within Vision 2030. It also analyzed how cultural, artistic, and sporting events, such as Riyadh Season, the Red Sea Film Festival, and the bids to host Expo 2030 and the 2034 FIFA World Cup, contribute to enhancing the Kingdom's global image and supporting its foreign policy. The author adopted a descriptive-analytical approach, reviewing the Kingdom's policies and cultural projects with an international dimension and linking them to shifts in foreign policy orientations. The results also showed that cultural diplomacy strengthened national identity and contributed to representing the Kingdom as an open and influential regional power on the global stage, while also providing complementary tools to traditional political and economic diplomacy. The study indicated that these efforts solidified Saudi Arabia's international presence, but simultaneously revealed challenges related to sustainability and the ability to reconcile traditional identity with the demands of global openness. The research gap was highlighted by the need for quantitative and field studies that measure the impact of these activities on global public opinion and the Kingdom's image among different populations.

These integrative studies confirm the strategic relevance of cultural diplomacy but simultaneously reveal a persistent methodological gap, particularly regarding measurement and audience-based analysis.

3.4. Research Gaps and Contribution of the Current Study

After reviewing previous studies related to the research topic, it becomes clear that these studies have addressed multiple dimensions related to cultural diplomacy and foreign policy. It is important

to identify their contributions, and pinpoint any research gaps.

The review of previous literature shows that the topics of cultural diplomacy and foreign policy have received increasing attention in recent years. However, most studies have addressed each variable in isolation, without establishing an integrated framework that clarifies the interactive relationship between them in the contemporary Saudi context. Most research has focused on analyzing general theoretical or political dimensions, while cultural and identity aspects have not received sufficient attention in explaining the transformations that the Kingdom's foreign policy has undergone since 2015.

The studies in the first section have shown that cultural diplomacy has become an effective tool of Saudi soft power, through the cultural, artistic, educational, and media initiatives launched within the framework of the Kingdom's Vision 2030, thus enhancing its positive global image. However, most of these studies were descriptive or qualitative in nature, limiting their ability to accurately quantify the actual impact of these initiatives on foreign policy.

Foreign policy studies, on the other hand, confirmed that Vision 2030 represented a strategic turning point in the Kingdom's orientations, as it reshaped its foreign policy priorities by integrating economic and security dimensions. However, the cultural dimension often remained marginalized, despite its vital role in building and solidifying Saudi national identity as a means of international influence.

Regarding studies that combined both variables, they revealed that Saudi culture and identity have become part of the tools of foreign policy, through the use of international events and major cultural programs to represent the Kingdom as an open power with a balanced cultural presence. However, these studies, despite their importance, lacked quantitative and field evidence demonstrating the impact of these efforts on global public opinion. Based on the above, this study aims to fill a research gap by applying a quantitative analytical approach using SPSS software. It employs descriptive statistical analysis tools such as frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations, in addition to Cronbach's Alpha to verify the reliability of the research instrument. Thus, the study seeks to provide a precise scientific analysis of the relationship between cultural diplomacy and Saudi foreign policy during the period 2015–2024, highlighting how Saudi national identity, after 2015, became a strategic tool in supporting foreign policy

and enhancing the Kingdom's standing and image in the international community.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Study Population

The study population consists of individuals of various nationalities, randomly selected from different countries around the world, without requiring any prior knowledge of Saudi cultural diplomacy. The study population in this research represents a general international audience, without specifying a particular demographic group, with the aim of measuring general perceptions of Saudi cultural diplomacy. This group was chosen because it represents international public opinion, the target audience of the Kingdom's cultural diplomacy efforts. Their opinions are an important indicator of the success of Saudi cultural initiatives and programs in building a positive image of the Kingdom and highlighting its national identity. Furthermore, the diversity of their cultural backgrounds contributes to a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the impact of Saudi cultural activities in enhancing its international presence and supporting its foreign policy.

4.2. Study Sample

To ensure the clarity and ease of understanding of the questionnaire items before its generalization, the researcher conducted a pilot study with 15 participants proficient in both Arabic and English. This was done to verify the clarity of the questionnaire questions and the soundness of the electronic instrument's design. This procedure is a necessary methodological step to ensure the validity and suitability of the instrument for the research context. It helps to identify any potential ambiguities in the wording or translation and enhances the instrument's validity and reliability before its generalization to the target population. Methodological literature indicates that a pilot sample size of 10-30 participants is sufficient to test the instrument's validity and clarity (Creswell, 2014).

This initial trial demonstrated that the questionnaire was clear and easy to use, although it required some minor adjustments to the wording of a limited number of items to ensure their clarity and accuracy. As a result, the instrument, in its final form, became more suitable and readier for application to the main study sample. The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for estimating samples in large or non-enclosed populations, which indicated a minimum appropriate size of 384 individuals at a significance

level of 0.05 and a 95% confidence level (Cochran, 1977). See Appendix 1. The primary study sample consisted of 510 participants, selected using an open-label sampling method via social media. Data were collected between July 26, 2025, and October 9, 2025.

After reviewing and refining the responses, 52 incomplete responses 10.20% and 7 responses deemed invalid for analysis 1.37% due to random or inconsistent answers were excluded. Additionally, 53 responses from Saudi participants 10.39% were excluded because the study aimed to gather international public opinion. Accordingly, the researcher adopted a sample of 398 international participants, representing 78.04%, to ensure the adequacy of the number and to achieve appropriate representation of the international study community out of the total responses amounting to 510.

4.3. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample:

This section reviews the demographic characteristics of the study participants, which helps to create a clearer picture of the nature and distribution of the participants, thus contributing to a more accurate interpretation of the results. These characteristics include: gender, age group, and continental representation.

The number of male and female participants was almost equally distributed, with males comprising 55.78% and females 44.22%. This reflects a relative balance in gender participation, enhancing the representation of diverse viewpoints from both sides.

The 18-30 age group had the largest number of participants at 49.25%, representing nearly half of the sample. This was followed by the 31-40 age group at 29.40%, then the 41-50 age group at 12.06%, while the 51-60 age group represented 4.27%. The over-60 age group comprised 5.03%. This distribution indicates that the majority of participants belong to the youth demographic, reflecting the dynamic nature of the study sample and its ability to express contemporary trends in understanding cultural diplomacy.

The study participants were distributed across multiple continents, with Asia having the largest representation 48.24% of the total sample. This is unsurprising given its vast geographical area and population, as well as the presence of several Arab and Asian countries with growing cultural ties to Saudi Arabia, such as Bahrain, Oman, and China. Europe followed with 22.11%, then Africa with 19.60%. North America accounted for 5.28% of participants, and South America for 5.53%. Australia had the lowest representation at only 1.00%, likely due to its geographical remoteness.

This geographical and demographic diversity

highlights the comprehensiveness of the research sample and its international scope, which supports the credibility of the results and gives them a global dimension consistent with the nature of the study's subject matter, which is related to cultural diplomacy.

4.4. Quantitative Descriptive-Analytical Approach

Accordingly, the descriptive-analytical approach was chosen as it is the most suitable for the nature of this study's objectives. It helps describe and analyze the international public's perceptions of the cultural diplomacy pursued by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This method involves observing the phenomenon as it exists in reality and then analyzing it based on data collected through an electronic questionnaire. This approach also contributes to providing an accurate picture of the level of awareness and impressions among participants, which allows for the interpretation of the results within a systematic scientific framework and their connection to the study's themes, questions, and hypotheses.

The instrument was designed as a bilingual form within a single template, with the Arabic text appearing on the right and its corresponding English translation on the left for each item. This ensured clarity of meaning and accurate comprehension for all international participants from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The quantitative approach was used to analyze the study data, relying on the SPSS statistical software, to extract results and process the responses received from the sample.

The statistical analysis included the following:

1. Determining frequencies and percentages for demographic data.
2. Calculating the arithmetic means of the questionnaire items to measure participants' attitudes.
3. Calculating the standard deviation of the questionnaire items to measure participants' attitudes.

This analysis contributes to obtaining accurate results that support the answers to the study questions and the verification of its hypotheses.

To measure the reliability of the study instrument, IBM SPSS Statistics 22 was used. The reliability test showed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.866, indicating strong internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003). The validity was supported by triangulation with previous studies and official reports on the role of cultural diplomacy in promoting the foreign policy of the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia, which enhances the reliability of the results.

Although the sample size was suitable for achieving the study's objectives, the geographical distribution of participants was not entirely balanced, with the majority of responses concentrated in Asia and Europe, compared to representation from other continents such as South America and Australia. This may be considered one of the most significant limitations of this study, given the potential for geographical bias influencing the results due to the disparity in the number of participants from different regions.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Engagement with Saudi Cultural Activities and Knowledge of National Culture

The majority of participants (62.81%) had never attended Saudi cultural events or initiatives outside the Kingdom, while only (37.19%) indicated they had attended such events. Those who answered "yes" mentioned that their participation was concentrated in prominent international events such as Expo Dubai 2020 and Expo Tokyo 2025, in addition to attending Saudi National Day and Founding Day celebrations, whether within universities, institutes, or through events organized by Saudi embassies abroad.

This is reinforced by the arithmetic mean of 1.372 with a standard deviation of 0.484, indicating a general trend among the sample towards a low level of attendance at Saudi cultural events. However, there is a clear consistency in the participants' responses, reflecting that engagement with Saudi cultural activities abroad still needs to be expanded and sustained. The majority of participants rated

their knowledge of Saudi culture as basic 49.50%, followed by intermediate knowledge 25.38%, then "I don't know anything" 14.07%, while in-depth knowledge came in last 11.06%. This is a positive indicator that the international audience has a preliminary understanding of Saudi culture without delving into its intellectual and historical dimensions, reflecting a gap between national identity and the Kingdom's image abroad.

This is further confirmed by the mean score of 2.335 and the standard deviation of 0.853. The mean indicates a moderate level of knowledge, while the standard deviation reflects a relative variation in participants' responses based on factors such as geographical location and the degree of direct access to Saudi cultural events. This underscores the importance of continuing cultural efforts to deepen international understanding of Saudi culture.

5.2. Promoting Saudi National Identity in Global Arenas

Promoting national identity is a core pillar of Saudi cultural diplomacy abroad, as it directly reflects the social structure of the Kingdom's image and identity as perceived by others. This is based on the theoretical framework of constructivism in international relations, which explains the formation of a state's identity and standing through frequent interaction and communication between actors, not solely through elements of material power. In this context, Saudi cultural initiatives can be viewed as symbolic and cognitive tools that contribute to reshaping people's perceptions of the Kingdom and presenting it as an open and civilized actor with a distinctive cultural identity.

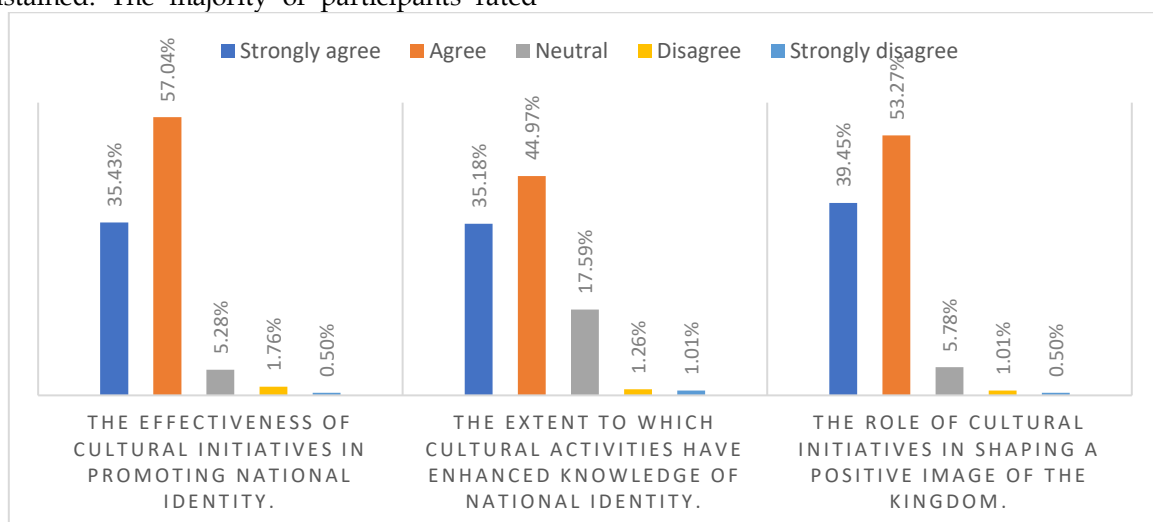


Figure 1: Participants' Perceptions of Cultural Initiatives and National Identity.

The overall agreement rate (92.47%) fell under the "I agree" category, followed by the "strongly agree" category, indicating a high consensus that the cultural initiatives undertaken by the Kingdom are an effective tool for promoting national identity internationally. This trend demonstrates the success of cultural efforts in highlighting the symbols and values of identity to the international public. This result aligns with the arithmetic mean of 4.249 and the standard deviation of 0.678. The high mean reflects a broad agreement among the sample regarding the effectiveness of cultural initiatives in strengthening Saudi national identity, while the low standard deviation indicates a homogeneity in participants' attitudes and a stability in their opinions. This supports the general trend toward the success of Saudi cultural diplomacy in consolidating national identity internationally.

In addition, 80.15% of participants selected the "I agree" or "strongly agree" categories, indicating that external cultural activities improved their knowledge of national identity. This means that the impact was not limited to promotion (displaying identity) but extended to a deeper understanding (understanding the elements and values of identity). This reinforces the hypothesis that international events (exhibitions, festivals, exchange programs) contribute to moving beyond mere symbolic exposure to acquiring a clearer knowledge of Saudi culture. The study results show that the majority of participants believe cultural initiatives are an effective tool for promoting national identity abroad, with an overall agreement rate of 92.47%. Participants also confirmed that cultural activities abroad contributed to improving their understanding of Saudi national identity 80.15%. These high percentages indicate a broad consensus on the success of the Kingdom's cultural efforts in highlighting Saudi national identity and introducing its authentic and evolving elements to people around the world.

5.3. Reshaping the Kingdom's Image Regionally and Internationally

Improving the Kingdom's image is a key objective of Saudi cultural diplomacy, representing a natural extension of the concept of identity building within the constructivist framework of international relations. According to constructivist theory, a state's image is formed in the minds of others through continuous social interaction and cultural exchange. Impressions and perceptions of states are built upon the meanings they convey through their actions and cultural symbols, not solely through their material or political power. In this context, Saudi cultural

initiatives and events contribute to reshaping the Kingdom's image as an open and innovative actor striving to promote cultural dialogue and solidify the values of understanding and human cooperation.

The results indicate that 92.72% of respondents agreed that Saudi cultural initiatives have contributed to shaping a positive image of the Kingdom internationally, reflecting a growing awareness of the effectiveness of these efforts in influencing global public opinion and enhancing the positive perception of the Kingdom as a dynamic cultural force. This result is reinforced by the mean score of 4.123 and the standard deviation of 0.808. The high mean indicates a generally positive trend among the sample regarding the role of cultural initiatives in improving the Kingdom's image, while the standard deviation suggests limited variation in perception among participants, reflecting a convergence of their views on the success of Saudi cultural diplomacy in building a solid and balanced international image.

The vast majority of participants 92% selected the categories "I agree" and "strongly agree," affirming that Saudi cultural initiatives are effective factors in consolidating a positive image. This reflects the success of cultural efforts in establishing the global impression of the Kingdom as an open and culturally innovative nation striving to build diverse bridges of communication with other peoples.

Moreover, 92.97% of participants confirmed that international cultural events, such as exhibitions and cultural seasons, have contributed to improving the global impression of the Kingdom. This demonstrates that cultural diplomacy has become an effective means of presenting the Kingdom in a modern light that reflects the values of openness and cultural dialogue. In the same context, (92.46%) of participants fell into the "I agree" category, followed by the "strongly agree" category, believing that Saudi cultural diplomacy has played a pivotal role in improving the Kingdom's image. This underscores a growing global awareness of the importance of the cultural dimension in shaping external perceptions and solidifying the Kingdom's position as an influential soft power in its regional and international environment.

5.4. Building a Positive International Public Opinion

This axis is explained in light of constructivist theory in international relations, which posits that a state's image and standing in the international system are constructed through social interaction and the exchange of meanings with other actors.

From this perspective, cultural diplomacy is a tool for building a positive international public opinion that reflects the social perception of the Kingdom resulting from its cultural interactions with other nations. These cultural initiatives and international cooperation contribute to reproducing new perceptions that highlight the Kingdom as an open

and progressive cultural actor striving to promote understanding and rapprochement between cultures. This translates the concept of the social construction of image and identity, as Wendt (1999) indicated in his analysis of the role of interaction and shared meanings in shaping identities and interests among states.

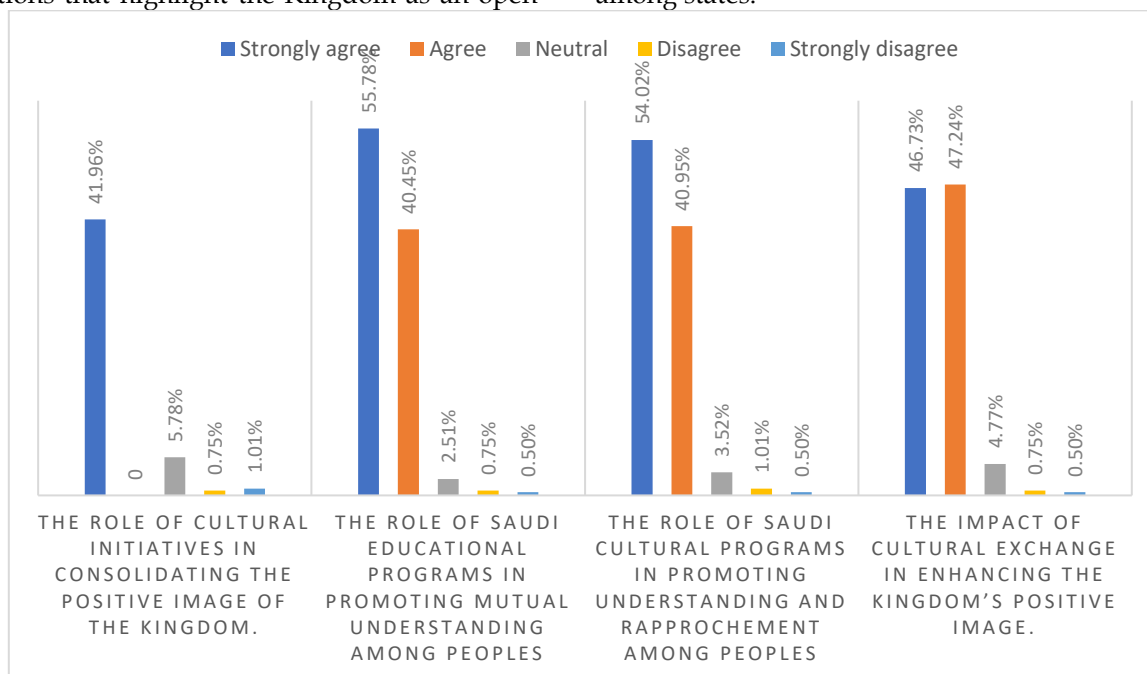


Figure 2: Perceptions of Saudi Cultural Initiatives, National Image, and Mutual Understanding.

Moreover, 94.72% of participants selected the categories agree, indicating broad agreement that Saudi cultural cooperation with countries around the world contributes to enhancing the Kingdom's international image. This result shows that Saudi diplomacy has become a platform for cultural interaction, contributing to strengthening the Kingdom's image as a nation open to other cultures and nations.

This result aligns with the statistical values, with a mean score of 4.408 and a standard deviation of 0.643. This reflects a very high and consistent positive trend in participants' opinions regarding the importance of cultural cooperation in improving the Kingdom's image, reflecting the effectiveness of Saudi cultural practices and their expanding international presence within the framework of Vision 2030. The results indicate that participants selected the "strongly agree" and "agree" categories, reflecting a general consensus that Saudi cultural diplomacy is an effective tool in enhancing the Kingdom's global standing. This demonstrates participants' awareness that cultural diplomacy has become a key element in building positive international public opinion towards Saudi Arabia

by utilizing culture, arts, and heritage to strengthen human connections and gain the respect and appreciation of the international community. The results of this section reveal a broad consensus among participants regarding the interactive role of cultural diplomacy in building a positive international public opinion towards the Kingdom. (94.72%) of participants agreed that Saudi Arabia's international cultural cooperation has contributed to enhancing the Kingdom's global image, reflecting a general recognition of the success of Saudi efforts in employing culture as a means of rapprochement and understanding between peoples. Furthermore, the majority of participants 86.68% indicated that Saudi cultural diplomacy has become a key tool in strengthening the Kingdom's global standing, demonstrating a growing awareness among the international community of the role these efforts play in building trust and appreciation for Saudi Arabia on the international stage. These high percentages indicate that Saudi cultural presence is no longer limited to knowledge dissemination but has become an effective means of shaping positive attitudes and supportive responses from global public opinion.

5.5. Expanding Cultural Communication with Non-Arab Countries

Given the role of educational programs and cultural initiatives in fostering intercultural communication with non-Arab countries, the following section examines how these initiatives have impacted the Kingdom's global image and contributed to building a positive international public opinion towards it. The importance of this section stems from the constructivist theory of international relations, which posits that relations between states are not based solely on material interests, but are also built through cultural and intellectual interaction and the exchange of social values among peoples. From this perspective, opening horizons for cultural communication between the Kingdom and non-Arab countries is an extension of the social construction of the Kingdom's image and identity in the international consciousness. Saudi cultural diplomacy contributes to the formation of networks of mutual understanding and intercultural interaction, which redefine the Kingdom's position in the global system as a cultural and humanitarian actor open to this diversity. This aligns with what Checkel (1998) indicated: that frequent communication and interaction between international actors contribute to establishing new patterns of shared understanding and behavioral convergence among them.

As summarized in figure 3, 96.23% of participants selected the categories "Strongly Agree" and "Agree," indicating a general consensus on the effectiveness of Saudi educational programs in promoting mutual understanding among peoples. This trend reflects a global awareness of the Kingdom's important role in education and culture in building bridges of human communication and fostering dialogue between civilizations.

The statistical values for this dimension, with a mean of 4.501 and a standard deviation of 0.638, reflect a very high level of agreement in the participants' opinions. This demonstrates a similar understanding among the sample of the importance of Saudi educational programs as a key tool of cultural diplomacy in building mutual understanding and strengthening international relations.

5.6. Consolidating Cultural and Diplomatic Partnerships

This section examines the role of Saudi cultural programs and events, such as the cultural weeks in countries like Albania (2025), Japan (2025), and

Greece (2024), in building and strengthening diplomatic and cultural partnerships with various countries. This is achieved through cultural interaction and the exchange of artistic and heritage expertise, fostering rapprochement between peoples and opening new avenues for international cooperation in the cultural field.

In light of constructivist theory, the relations between states are developed through social interaction and the exchange of shared values and meanings among international actors, not solely through traditional power. From this perspective, cultural and diplomatic partnerships represent one of the most important forms of this constructive interaction, contributing to the establishment of cooperation based on trust, understanding, and mutual respect. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's efforts in building international cultural partnerships serve as a practical model for this constructive perspective. These partnerships underscore the Kingdom's understanding of the importance of culture as a soft power capable of enhancing its international presence and expanding its network of relations with other countries within a framework of shared human and civilizational cooperation. This aligns with what Checkel (2005) and Wendt (1999) pointed out in their interpretation of the cycle of communication and interaction between shared identities and interests among nations.

In addition, 95% of participants selected the categories "Strongly Agree" and "Agree," reflecting a general consensus that Saudi cultural programs abroad effectively contribute to fostering understanding and rapprochement among peoples.

5.7. Enhancing the Kingdom's International Presence through Cultural Diplomacy

This theme addresses the role of cultural exchange between Saudi Arabia and other countries in enhancing the Kingdom's positive image by highlighting its heritage, customs, traditions, arts, and history as key elements in building soft power. It also aims to analyze the contribution of these exchanges to consolidating the Kingdom's global cultural standing within the framework of Vision 2030.

This theme can be interpreted in light of constructivist theory in international relations, which emphasizes that a state's position and identity within the international system are built through social interaction and the exchange of meanings and values with other actors, not solely through material power or traditional political tools. From this perspective, Saudi cultural diplomacy represents an effective

constructive tool that contributes to shaping the international community's perception of the Kingdom and enhancing its global presence. Through the symbolic and cultural interactions, it generates and re-establishes the Kingdom's image in the international consciousness as a civilizational force, open to dialogue and cultural diversity. This aligns with the findings of Wendt (1999) and Finnemore (1996) regarding the social role of culture in shaping national identity and international standing.

Moreover, (93.97%) of participants selected either "strongly agree" or "agree," indicating a consensus on the crucial role of cultural exchange in enhancing the Kingdom's positive international image.

Statistical values, with a mean of 4.390 and a standard deviation of 0.663, demonstrate a strong positive trend and clear consistency in participants' opinions. This reflects an understanding of the importance of cultural exchange as a strategic tool for improving perceptions and strengthening international standing. This result highlights the alignment of Saudi cultural efforts with the goals of Vision 2030 in building relationships based on mutual understanding and positively influencing global public opinion.

6. DISCUSSION

Based on the above findings, this directly supports the conclusions of the Konopka & Strykhotzkyi (2021) study, which affirmed that cultural diplomacy has become a key pillar in implementing the Kingdom's Vision 2030, contributing to improving the Kingdom's international image and enhancing global awareness of its cultural values. It also aligns with the findings of the Alkatheeri & Khan (2019) study, which highlighted the Kingdom's strength in balancing authenticity and cultural openness—a concept reflected in participants' responses regarding the success of Saudi initiatives in preserving identity while embracing international engagement. Furthermore, the current study's results support the findings of the Al-Zayed (2025) study, which indicated that international events and a digital presence are key tools in showcasing national identity. The De Maer (2025) study also demonstrated a partial connection to this theme through its analysis of mechanisms for utilizing cultural and artistic events to reintroduce Saudi identity internationally, thus reinforcing the study's conclusion that cultural activities serve as a means of building a renewed and positive image of Saudi Arabia.

In addition, De Maer (2025) confirmed that major cultural and artistic events and initiatives, such as Riyadh Season and the Red Sea Film Festival, contributed to enhancing the Kingdom's global image and re-establishing it as a rising cultural power. The results also align with Al-Assaf's (2020) observation that employing digital and media tools within foreign policy contributed to improving the Kingdom's image at both the regional and international levels. Jayanti's (2024) study showed a partial correlation, which intersects with the content of this axis regarding the use of cultural tools to solidify the image of the modern Kingdom. Field data has demonstrated that Saudi cultural efforts have become a key element in enhancing the Kingdom's positive global image, reflecting the success of Vision 2030 in achieving one of its goals: building a modern and balanced image of the Kingdom.

In addition, the study's findings are fully consistent with those of Saeed (2025), which confirmed that the shift in Saudi foreign policy towards economic and cultural openness has contributed to improving the overall international perception of the Kingdom. These findings also align with those of Alsubaie et al. (2024), which highlighted Saudi Arabia's growing regional and international role as an influential actor in the international system, thus helping to shape a positive public opinion regarding its policies and standing. Hashim's (2024) study, however, showed partial agreement with this axis, addressing Saudi Arabia's geopolitical strategy and its integration of security and cultural dimensions in its external influence. Nevertheless, it did not directly focus on international public opinion or global perceptions, which means its support for this axis is not fully realized.

These results align with the findings of Konopka & Strykhotzkyi (2021), who affirmed that Saudi cultural diplomacy, within the framework of Vision 2030, has become a key tool for expanding cultural and intellectual exchange with the world. They also concur with Alkatheeri & Khan (2019), who highlighted the Kingdom's ability to balance preserving its cultural identity with openness to global cultures. This is consistent with the findings of this research dimension, which demonstrated a growing awareness of the importance of this balance in building international relations based on mutual understanding and respect. Jayanti (2014), however, showed partial agreement with this trend, focusing on a specific religious dimension in engagement with Indonesia, without addressing global cultural

diversity. In contrast, Al-Mutairi's study (2025) differs from the results of this aspect, as it is limited to education diplomacy within the Kingdom without addressing international cultural communication with non-Arab countries

7. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Saudi cultural diplomacy is a fundamental pillar in strengthening the Kingdom's foreign policy. The cultural initiatives and programs implemented during the period 2015-2024 contributed to improving the Kingdom's international image, consolidating its national identity, and enhancing its regional and international standing.

In light of constructivist theory, the study shows that Saudi national identity formed a key element in shaping cultural and diplomatic orientations. This identity contributed to redefining national interests and expanding the scope of international engagement based on mutual respect and cultural openness.

The study also affirms that Saudi cultural diplomacy has become an essential component of foreign policy, aligning with the goals of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which has made culture a means of fostering rapprochement between peoples and building bridges of civilizational communication. Accordingly, the study concludes that cultural diplomacy represents a sophisticated model for embodying national values in foreign policy. The sustainable investment in culture will enhance the Kingdom's international presence and foster intercultural dialogue.

This study enriches contemporary literature on cultural diplomacy through its field-based analysis of the effectiveness of Saudi cultural initiatives in shaping the Kingdom's international image. It provides new insights for researchers and policymakers for understand culture as a strategic tool in foreign policy.

The study's findings affirm that culture is not merely a means of communication but a strategic pillar for reshaping the Kingdom's relations with the world amidst rapid global transformations.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, Lulwa Aman. (2024). The Role of Data Journalism in Saudi E-Newspapers in Promoting Vision 2030. *Scientific Journal of Journalism Research*, 27(1), 599-625. <https://doi.org/10.21608/sjsj.2024.356763>
- Alkathერი, A. R., & Khan, M. (2019). A Perspective on Saudi Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy. *Global Social Sciences Review*, IV(II), 20-26. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2019\(IV-II\).03](https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2019(IV-II).03)
- Al-Mutairi, Mutlaq. (2025). The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Building National Reputation: Student Diplomacy as a Model – A Study on International Students at King Saud University. *Journal of Media Research*, 73(1), 9-62. <https://doi.org/10.21608/jsb.2024.325634.1821>
- Alsubaie, A. S., Nour Azm al, L. B. M., & Dabkeh, R. Bin. (2024). Saudi Arabia as a regional collaborator (2015-2022). *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(1), 3137-3144. <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v14-i1/20776>
- Al-Zaid, Israa Abdulaziz. (2025). Elite Attitudes toward the Future of Saudi Cultural Diplomacy under Vision 2030: A Foresight Study. *Arab Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 49, 67-99. <https://doi.org/10.21608/jkom.2025.435451>
- Checkel, J. T. (1998). The constructivist turn in international relations theory. *World Politics*, 50*(2), 324-348. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0043887100008123>
- Checkel, J. T. (2005). International institutions and socialization in Europe: Introduction and framework. *International Organization*, 59*(4), 801-826. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818305050290>
- Cochran, W. G. (1977). *Sampling techniques* (3thed.). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- De Maere, J. (2025). The Saudi Arab identity, foreign policy and its relation to its cultural diplomacy. *Diplomatic World*, October 2025 Issue, 1-7.
- Finnemore, M. (1996). *National interests in international society*. Cornell University Press.
- Finnemore, M., & Sikkink, K. (2001). Taking stock: The constructivist research program in international relations and comparative politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4*, 391-416. <http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.391>
- George, D., & Mallery, P. (2024). *IBM SPSS statistics 29 step by step: A simple guide and reference*. routledge.
- Hashim, Firas Abbas. (2024). Dynamics of Saudi Strategy in Reshaping Geopolitical Influence Practices in the Middle East. *Tikrit Journal of Political Science*, 35(1), 1-25.

- Jayanti, A. (2024). Soft power through pilgrimage: Analyzing Saudi Arabia's 2024 King Salman Omra program in Indonesia. *Jurnal Transformasi Global*, 11(2), 223–242. Universitas Brawijaya.
- Katzenstein, P.J. (Ed.). (1996). *The culture of national security: Norms and identity in world politics**. Columbia University Press.
- Konopka, N. O., & Strykhtskyi, T. L. (2021). Cultural diplomacy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the context of the Vision 2030 strategy implementation. *Актуальні проблеми політики*, 67, 97–105.
- Pratiwi, A., & Muslikhati, S. (2024). Implementation of Saudi Vision 2030 towards Saudi Arabia's internationally open tourism industry. *Journal of Indonesian Social Science*, 5(1), 1–12. <https://jiss.publikasiindonesia.id/index.php/jiss/article/view/983/1687>
- Saeed, A. (2025). Saudi Arabia's foreign policy shift: Vision 2030 and beyond. *Social Sciences & Humanity Research Review*, 6(1), 55–70. <https://sshrr.online/index.php/4/article/view/121/89>
- Wendt, A. (1999). *A social theory of international politics*. Cambridge University Press.