

Motorsport Branding and Strategic Market Positioning in Saudi Arabia: Infrastructure, Innovation, and Institutional Development under Vision 2030

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Abstract

Purpose: Sports has traditionally used as a social activity but today it is taking a new vital role of nation brand building and diplomacy. however, only a few studies have pursued this topic in the recent past. As sports fans become more identified with their respective favorite sporting activities, governments have identified an opportunity to influence the behavior to promote their national agenda. The current study aims at unravelling how mega motorsport events in Saudi Arabia have been leveraged for nation branding and economic diversification efforts.

Methodology: The study adopted a mixed-methods design, involving Saudi motorsport stakeholders, including fans. The survey was distributed through online channels, such as university networks and social media platforms relevant to motorsport communities in Saudi Arabia. In addition, structured interviews were conducted. The collected data was analyzed to assess the effectiveness of motorsport events in promoting the Kingdom's brand image, in line with Vision 2030.

Findings: The results indicated that motorsport events positively influenced the country's image in the global stage with most respondents indicating that the mega events portrayed the nation as innovative and progressive. These positive sentiments were associated with growing sports tourism and growing sports sponsorships. It also indicates that the sport has promoted the attainment of various targets in the vision

2030 repulsing the sportswashing claims levelled by critics and human right agencies.

Value of the study: This study expands the understanding of the economic and reputational ROI of mega sporting events. It would also contribute useful insights on marketers on strategies employable to influence fandom attitude and perception towards an nation or a given brand. management can analyze the importance of sports and fandom and how to leverage this identity can be channeled for the benefit of the brand.

Keywords: Motorsport, Vision 2030, Nation Branding, Soft Power, Fan Engagement, Sports Diplomacy, Economic Diversification, Event Sponsorship.

Introduction

Sports are currently the most crucial social activities in the modern era. Sports have not only played a social role but are also being commercialized to generate income for the participants and the host nation. As a result of perceived popularity and profitability, several sporting organizations and governments with significant investments in sporting infrastructure have arisen. This is because sports have ceased to be just a competition and are slowly becoming a tool for branding nations and states (Satish et al, 2024), as various sports become prominent. The fan base is growing globally, and governments are leveraging the opportunity presented by sporting events to become the center of media attention. Just like well-known sport personalities are used to promote the brand image of a product, in the same way, connecting sports to the branding of the nation or state is possible.

A superb example of a nation tapping into the soft power of sport is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The KSA is slowly shifting its focus from traditional economic activities to modernization as proposed in its Vision 2030 agenda. KSA is venturing into motorsport as part of its diversification efforts (Bodrick et al, 2025). KSA intends to transform from an oil-based economy to a knowledge-based economy (Satish,

2025). The transformation is carried out using the Vision 2030 strategy, which was formulated by Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, tasked with diversifying the nation's revenue sources and promoting long-term economic growth. The objective was to build a healthier, more prosperous, sustainable, and socially responsible future. Through Vision 2030, the KSA recognized the importance and potential of soft power (Kosorova, 2020). The KSA has identified the need to amass and increase its global influence. The government has turned to sporting events to project its image and values to the rest of the world. KSA has turned to Formula 1, the Grand Prix (2021), the Spanish Super Cup (2019), and the FIFA World Cup 2034. The nation has a solid strategic plan as the sport industry recognized the value of sponsorships and broadcast investments in solidifying the Kingdom's position on the global sporting stage. Sports are bigger than competitions and are about the larger narrative of global influence, culture, and diplomacy.

The introduction of motorsport in the KSA has not only benefited the local population through the creation of direct jobs for Saudis, 3,606 jobs out of the total 11,841 jobs, but the motorsports broadcasts have been consumed by nearly 2.2 billion households across the globe (Fareed, 2021). The broadcasts also attracted at least 350 million digital impressions, presenting a tremendous economic and cultural impact on the host country. The Kingdom is also consolidating all the current and future motorsport events under a single banner to maximize the benefits of this event to the nation, by increasing the operational efficiencies, including the production costs and commercial benefits. As motorsport events grow in Saudi Arabia, their fan base becomes more significant. Saudi Arabia is taking the initiative to lead the commercialization of these events by positioning itself at the center of the growing sport, leveraging its regional and global reach, and creating a positive association with the sport to enhance its visibility, generate a positive emotional connection with the regional fanbase, and attract sport tourism and investments. Hosting a successful motorsport in the future will help the kingdom position itself as modernized,

dynamic, competitive, and capable of managing complicated modern events. Additionally, the successful hosting of these events is expected to increase the nation's visibility to the regional and global motorsport fans. The excitement, glamor, and technological advancement associated with hosting the events are expected to be transferred to the Kingdom, creating a positive image founded on the perception of modernity and a positive business environment. Additionally, hosting these events has presented an opportunity for Saudis to showcase their culture and values to the international community through strategic marketing and branding efforts. Finally, the events have been used by multiple nations to foster National pride and unity among the citizens.

Problem Statement

While Saudi Arabia has invested heavily on infrastructure and other areas to support the motorsport events with the intent of shaping the nations brand image under the vision 2030, there are critics that argue that sports have been manipulated to promote sportswashing-which involves diverting attention from various negative practices by the government including human rights violation or the clime that says the Saudi Arabia is closed country. This paper aims to examine the motor sport events in the KSA and evaluate the extent to which the organizers have exploited marketing in the sports context to boost the brand image of the Kingdom or whether it serves as a means for reputation laundering.

Objectives

This paper intends to achieve the following objectives:

- Determine the ability of motorsport in influencing Saudi Arabia's brand image in the global stage
- Determine the achievement of motorsport events in promoting vision 2030 agenda
- Determine if there exist elements of sportswashing in Saudi motorsport events

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework:

This study is founded on the Social Identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) which states that individuals are driven by self-esteem and identity from their membership in social groups. The SIT theory explains how the various groups affiliations shape behaviors, attitudes and inter-groups dynamics. The theory explains how sports fandom functions as a salient social role which shapes the self-concept, individuals' behaviors and affiliations to the nation (Brown 2000). Scheifele et al, (2021) posits that emotions such as pride anger and joy are often experienced collectively and are often tied to their ingroups relative to their outgroups. Sports fans can experience collective joy whenever their teams win competitions and also collective anger if their team lose. These shared emotions can further strengthen social bonds and reinforce group identity. Brown (2000) posits that when fans share a strong social identity, they are more likely to cooperate and communicate effectively or offer support towards a common goal. Therefore, through social categorization, the motorsport fans identify Saudi Arabia as an ingroup which fosters a collective sense of pride and admiration. In light of this theory, it is assumed that for the Saudi Arabian motorsport fans, supporting events such as F1 or Dakar rally is not merely to satisfy their entertainment needs but it's a performative role that reinforces the national identity.

Motorsport on Saudi KSA Brand Image:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has used sport in the past to promote the diplomatic position, image, and economy of the nation. With this ambition entrenched in the Vision 2030 framework, the country aims to diversify its economy by shifting from overdependency on oil. Alarmri (2025) points out the role of sports in the development of the Kingdom's tourism sector. The Kingdom has aimed to improve its infrastructure and distribute sports events across the nation geographically. The

nation has registered about 189 sports clubs by 2023. The number of major sporting events increased from an average of 8 events in 2017 to 13 significant events in 2023, an annual growth rate of 47.5%. Consequently, the number of tourists has increased from 63 million to 84.5 million in 2023, representing an increase of 34%. The growth has had a direct impact on the tourism expenditure. These data reveal a clear relationship between sporting events in Saudi Arabia and the nation's corresponding branding as a suitable tourism destination. Thomas (2024) has suggested that Saudi Arabia has used sports celebrities to promote the "Welcome to Saudi Arabia" campaign. Various celebrities with huge online followings, such as Messi and Ronaldo, who boast a billion fans combined, were revealed. Saudi Arabia is targeting celebrities with a significant image on the global scene with the aim of converting their fan base into tourists visiting the nation. Babali (2022) suggests that despite being a newcomer in the field of motorsport, the nation has surprised many fans. As a result, motorsport will take the image of the nation to a higher level, where it enters the category of nations capable of hosting major motorsport events.

Table (1): The relationship between the evolution of sports clubs and tourism in the KSA – [Source: Alamri (2025)]

Years	sports clubs	Sporting events	Tourists Number's (millions)	Tourism spending (Billion dollars)
2016	133	8	63.1	39.6
2017	136	14	59.9	38.3
2018	141	22	58.6	37.7
2019	148	28	65.3	43.8
2020	152	31	46.2	16.9
2021	159	27	67.3	25.5
2022	170	83	73.1	35.5
2023	189	131	84.5	38

*Source: <https://www.argaam.com/ar/article/articledetail/id/1644388-1> \$ = 3.756 Saudi Arabian Riyals.

In light of this argument, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1. There exists a positive correlation between Saudi Arabia motorsport events and global perception of Saudi Arabia as modern, ambitious nations.

Sports as A Source of Soft Power:

Nations turn to sports because of their capacity to create a gentle effect that generates soft power on the world scene, El-dabt et al (2025). El-dabt et al (2025) identify a strategic shift from hard power to nation branding as coercive agents become increasingly unpopular in the rapidly evolving world. Hard power is dangerous in the modern era as it might erode trust and discourage foreign investments, tourism, and bilateral trade agreements. Since power is generated from attraction and persuasion rather than force, it is arguable that nations can generate non-coercive power by first positively framing the mindset, perception and emotions of the target audience in a way that influences their behaviours (El-dabt et al, 2025). There are four areas in which a nation must employ soft power, and these include tourism, trade, attracting inbound investments and encouraging public support because foreigners cannot be forced into visiting a nation, investing or even supporting the nation. Therefore, according to El-Dabt (2025), a nation's brand image building can be possible through four steps: influencing the behaviours of the target audience, engaging the people, increasing appreciation, and increasing familiarity. He provides the following definition for each concept involved in a nation's brand image building. In light of this argument, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H2. Motorsport events influenced foreigners' perception of Saudi Arabia as a regional sport power encouraging sports tourism

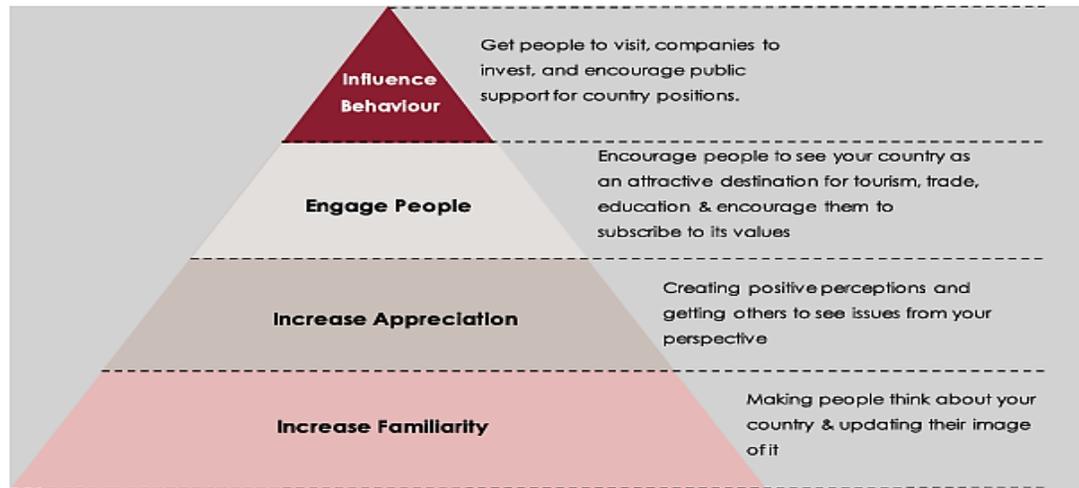


Figure (1): Behavior influence pyramid – [Source: El-Dabt et al. (2025)]

Sports as A Branding Tool:

The concept of sport diplomacy has been discussed in the same light as soft power theory and national branding interests. Richelieu (2021) argued that sport diplomacy entails the use of sports to influence diplomatic exercises and activities in the social and economic sectors on behalf of various governments. Branding a nation is a process that can create, monitor, evaluate, and proactively manage the image of the country and, in the process, improve the reputation of that nation among the targeted audience in the international arena. Satish et al (2024) and El-Dabt et al. (2025) suggest that branding a nation is based on the improvement of the image, reputation, and the position of the state, a process that requires a long-term strategy. As a result, nations that have recognized the soft power of sports have approached them as a promotional and economic unlocking tool, allowing them not only to promote their economic projects but also to project their image to the world by attracting great global attention.

Hosting mega-international sporting events enhances the image of the hosting country and consequently contributes positively towards the nation's branding efforts (Benouzerki 2024, El-Dabt 2025, Mendes, 2013). Benouzekri (2024) pointed out that sports can increase the brand of a nation. First, sports can highlight the nation's culture and values, showcase its natural beauty and infrastructure, foster national pride and unity, boost its reputation on the global stage, and attract pride and unity. In a similar tone, Richelieu et al (2024) argue that nations boost their brand images using sports. Sport diplomacy is heavily used to shape a nation's identity. The reason is that hosting such events not only strengthens national pride and unity but also contributes to national transformation and aligns with national branding goals (Li et al, 2024). Mega-sporting events can play a significant role in the nation's branding, promote public diplomacy through the construction of the national image, and strengthen emotional and social connections. Emotions and cultural emotions such as unity and pride are generated and shared out during mega international sporting events (Richelieu, 2021; Li et al, 2024). From this argument, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H3. The unique infrastructures, and mega Saudi motor sporting events have influenced the nations brand perception.

Motorsport's Place in Vision 2030:

The Saudi Arabian government have laid down strategies founded on sports, especially motorsport, which is a key pillar in the Vision 2030 strategy. Motorsport serves as a key tool for national branding, tourism promotion and youth engagement (Vision2030.gov.sa). The government has insisted on the importance of economic diversification using motorsports. Additionally, the Saudi government has laid down infrastructure to attract premium motorsport events, which includes the \$480 million Quddiya speed park. It has also created investments in the local ecosystem, such as social media campaigns and grassroots events to develop the local

talents (Jameel, 2022). Some of the key technological advancements in Saudi motor sports aligning with the SDG goals include the hybridization and electrification of racing vehicles to enhance efficiency and environmental sustainability. From the reviewed literature, the following hypothesis was reached.

H4. Motor sporting events are aligned with the vision 2030 agenda.

Methods

Document Analysis:

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the contribution of motorsport in shaping the brand identity of Saudi Arabia on the global stage. Thus, to develop a clear picture of how motorsport events are a source of soft power for Saudi Arabia and how this power is slowly building the nation's brand image, the paper examines the available literature on the topic of nation brand image building. The available literature on Saudi Arabia's strategy is also discussed. The author also employs semi-structured interviews to unveil the extent to which motorsport events have shaped the brand image of the country since the program started, as well as what improvements Saudi Arabia needs to strengthen the nation's brand image. These documents will help the researcher uncover meaning, develop an understanding of the topic, and discover insight that is relevant to the research problem (Merriam, 1988). The primary focus for reviewing the literature will be on official government documents and reports touching on the nation's long-term vision and its respective brand-building strategy using sports, especially those touching on motorsport. The papers reviewed in this study included comparative studies pitching the KSA motors' sport performances against those of Italy and the Americans by comparing their events and potential in brand image building, media publications such as a recent article. Policy briefs and press release magazines provided helpful insight into the developments and end goals of organizing the motorsport events in KSA.

Data Collection Method and Target Population:

Although the documents accurately represent the government's position during the past five years, they provide only partial insight into the dynamic and rapidly changing context within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. To address this shortcoming resulting from outdated information and provide the current changes as they are, Semi-structured interviews are used to obtain primary data, which is critical in unravelling the socially constructed realities and perspective of the target population (Kahsif and Adunuwara, 2024). The semi-structured interviews consist of several questions to be covered and guide the interview session. The structured interviews were conducted on 69 participants. Quantitative data was collected between the second and third quarters of 2025. The participants were comprised of Saudi Arabians and motorsport fans, promoters, and organizers from all regions, aged mostly between 18 and 35 years. The target population was sampled based on their interest and participation in the motorsport events taking place in the Kingdom in recent years. The interview sessions were conducted using Google Surveys. Although 69 participants are a small sample, the population size is sufficient to provide sufficient insights into the subject matter under investigation. The sample consisted of key stakeholders, including event organizers, marketers, regulators and fans.

Data Analysis and Interpretations:

IBM SPSS and Microsoft Excel were the tools used to facilitate the statistical analysis and data manipulation. These techniques were used since they facilitate thorough analysis, present reliable results, and enhance strategic decision making. Hair et al (2019) support data analysis using SPSS by concluding that SPSS provides practical tools and techniques that are effective in analyzing and interpreting multivariate data. SPSS also handles a wide range of data and runs a wide range of advanced statistical analyses, according to Keller (1993). SPSS tools are practical in

segmentation analysis and necessary for conceptualizing brand loyalty, which is the central theme of this research. The Keller's brand resonance pyramid is used to map the fan engagement and brand resilience. Descriptive statistics are tools in SPSS that are used to measure the awareness score. The data was analyzed and reported based on the Saudi Arabian Vision 2030 brand strategy and innovation framework, which assessed how the Saudi Arabian branding strategy using motorsport aligned with the national development goals, such as Vision 2030. Finally, the data was pitched against the SDG 9, which insists on the need for resilient infrastructure, sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation. Additionally, the data was analyzed and interpreted based on SDG 12, which pertains to sustainable resource use, waste reduction and eco-efficient event management efforts.

Findings

Quantitative Analysis of Fan Experience and Digital Engagement:

In order to investigate the connection between digital involvement and the perceived fan experience, the cross-tabulation analysis was employed based on the responses of 69 participants. Those variables were the number of times the respondents interacted with Saudi motorsport-related material on the internet and how they rated the fan experience at the events. The findings display significant trends and offer valuable quantitative information.

Table (2): Shows cross tabulation

How would you rate your Fan experience at motorsport events? * How often do you engage with Saudi motorsport content online? Crosstabulation

			How often do you engage with Saudi motorsport content online?					Total
			A few times a year	Daily	Monthly	Never	Weekly	
How would you rate your Fan experience at motorsport events?	Adequate	Count	3	0	1	0	1	5
		% within How would you rate your Fan experience at motorsport events?	60.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%	100.0%
		% within How often do you engage with Saudi motorsport content online?	14.3%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	7.1%	7.2%
	Enjoyable	Count	6	3	1	6	4	20
		% within How would you rate your Fan experience at motorsport events?	30.0%	15.0%	5.0%	30.0%	20.0%	100.0%
		% within How often do you engage with Saudi motorsport content online?	28.6%	37.5%	7.1%	50.0%	28.6%	29.0%
	Exceptional	Count	3	4	7	2	5	21
		% within How would you rate your Fan experience at motorsport events?	14.3%	19.0%	33.3%	9.5%	23.8%	100.0%
		% within How often do you engage with Saudi motorsport content online?	14.3%	50.0%	50.0%	16.7%	35.7%	30.4%
Memorable	Count	9	1	4	2	4	20	
	% within How would you rate your Fan experience at motorsport events?	45.0%	5.0%	20.0%	10.0%	20.0%	100.0%	
	% within How often do you engage with Saudi motorsport content online?	42.9%	12.5%	28.6%	16.7%	28.6%	29.0%	
Underwhelming	Count	0	0	1	2	0	3	
	% within How would you rate your Fan experience at motorsport events?	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	100.0%	
	% within How often do you engage with Saudi motorsport content online?	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	16.7%	0.0%	4.3%	
Total	Count	21	8	14	12	14	69	
	% within How would you rate your Fan experience at motorsport events?	30.4%	11.6%	20.3%	17.4%	20.3%	100.0%	
	% within How often do you engage with Saudi motorsport content online?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

The participants stating that they accessed the Saudi motorsports content daily, weekly, or monthly had increased chances to score their experience as “tremendous” or “memorable”. In particular, among those who interacted every day and every month, half rated their experience as having been “Exceptional”. In contrast, more than one-third of weekly respondents posted the same response. Conversely, participants with little or no interaction online were more likely to report a less positive experience with the majority preferring to choose either the "Adequate" or "Enjoyable”, and all responses that have been considered to be targeted as “Underwhelming” have been established by individuals who never or only occasionally experienced online activity related to motor racing.

The test result of the Chi-square test (21.746, $df = 16$, $p = 0.152$) was not significant at the 0.05 level. This implies that the relationship observed is a result of chance. However, it is worth mentioning that 88% of the cells displayed lower expected counts than 5, which implies the lack of possibilities because of sample size and skew of the cell distribution. Still, the trends observed point to consistency with the directionality in the model introduced by Keller, Brand Resonance Model, where online communication increases the level of emotional relatedness and contentedness. These insights indicate that unceasing digital engagement, in the form of drawn-out campaigns, social content, and virtual fan experiences, may augment the attachment and fan conception. Albeit the statistical shortcomings, the above quantitative fantasy promotes the view of digital engagement as a critical force behind the positive brand experience within the Saudi Arabian motorsport sector, where positive movement will emerge.

Table (3): shows Chi-Square output

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.746 ^a	16	.152
Likelihood Ratio	23.870	16	.092
N of Valid Cases	69		

a. 22 cells (88.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .35.

Cluster Analysis Summary:

The respondents were segmented using the hierarchy cluster analysis based on their perceptions in relation to Saudi Arabia's motorsport branding. This was aimed at discovering the underlying audience characteristics by aggregating the people who showed common responses on the primary thematic variable, including brand image, cultural integration, technological innovation, digital engagement, and fan experience. The method of probing was Squared Euclidean Distance with proximity and Average Linkage (Between Groups), which provided the process of grouping. According to the schedule on agglomeration, only one significant increase in value of coefficients was noted between the stages of 67 and 68 (26.50-33.15), which indicated that the required number of clusters was three. Based on this, three different clusters were defined among the respondents with the help of the SPSS Save Cluster Membership option.

The first cluster accommodated the most significant portion of the sample, and it was characterized by consistent and high ratings in areas associated with branding perception, technological innovation, and digital engagement. These participants are described by a high level of affinity towards participating with Saudi Arabia in

modernization and acceptance of digital campaigns and motorsport excellence. They can also be so-called Tech-Driven Advocates -people who accept the motorsport industry as a symbol of innovation and progress, and they respond powerfully to digital branding. The moderate scores covered most of the variables in the second cluster but valued cultural experiences and fan event satisfaction specifically. Being less keen on technology and the digital media, this segment enjoyed the local identity mode of motorsport events. They are also defined as the best of describing non-migrants, Culture-First Observers, because they are in line with the traditional identity of the country and are into cultural storytelling of events and experiences. The third cluster recorded abysmal scores in all themes, namely innovation, cultural branding, and digital engagement. This population group can be either those less interested in or less likely to trust the branding campaigns of motorsport. The fact that they respond in such a manner implies little emotional or experiential attachment to the events. This category is known as the Sceptical Respondents.

Generally, three valuable audience segments can be identified through cluster analysis based on the Saudi motorsport environment. These lessons will form a practical foundation on how to message toward these groups in the future: driving home the message of innovation and prestige to those already in is in as the tech-driven advocate, boosting cultural richness to the observer who is only getting to know them, and re-converting the skeptic via some form of personalized message or experience in the future. The clustering will be beneficial in supporting a detailed interpretation of the perceptions and the emotional reactions of various groups of people on the dynamic Saudi Arabian motorsport brand.

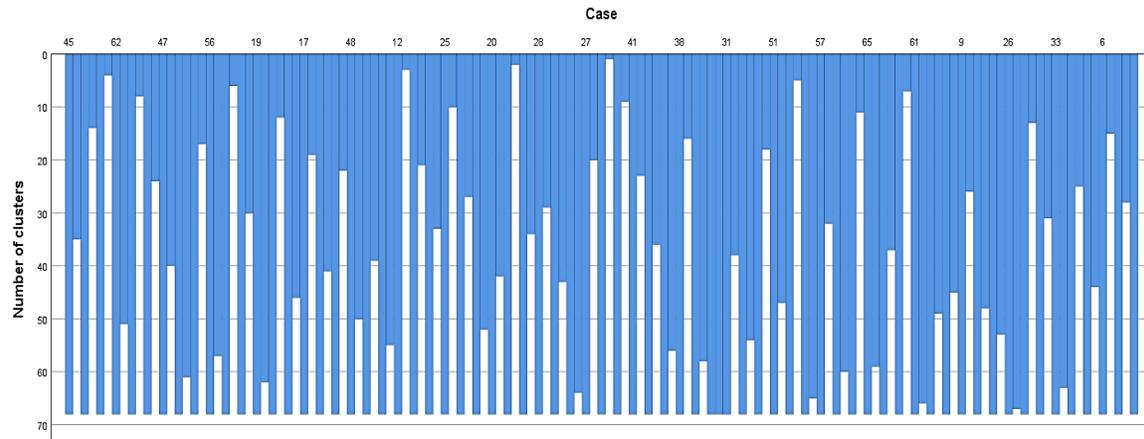


Fig (2): shows the cases fluctuation Source: Authors own creation.

Regression Analysis:

The effect of factors that have been found to be related to the perception of modernization of Saudi Arabia in motorsport has been measured using multiple linear regression. A change in the perception of Saudi Arabia as modern and progressive country was the dependent variable. Independent variables consisted of:

- The frequency of using Saudi motorsport content on internet.
- Perception on technological innovation in Saudi motorsport.
- Quality of organization and professionalism compared to other motorsport destinations.

The regression model was not statistically significant, $F(3, 65) = 0.748$, $p = .527$, and, therefore, the underlain set of predictors combined did not have a significant impact on the perceived level of modernization. The explained variance in the dependent variable was very low at 3.3 percent ($R^2 = 0.033$) and the adjusted $R^2 = 0.011$ implying that the model had little explanatory strength.

These findings suggest that, in the given sample, neither event professionalism nor technological innovation, as well as content engagement, have a strong predictive value regarding the perceptions of modernization. These components are crucial aspects of motorsport branding, but their effect and combination can be insufficient to influence the broader views of the national development, unless they are complemented with the other situational or emotional influences, the national cultures orientation, or predispositions.

These data corroborate the previous conclusion made on the basis of the correlation data that audience perceptions are complex and probably depend on factors that cannot be addressed in the present survey. This brings to fore the challenge of using motorsport as a branding tool, and the importance of developing a more holistic approach, that would be integrated among infrastructure, marketing, and cultural representation.

Table (4): shows regression analysis output

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.183a	.033	-.011	1.389	.033	.748	3	65	.527

Predictors: (Constant), Compared to established motor sport destinations, how would you rate Saudi Arabia on the organisation and professionalism factor? How often do you engage with Saudi motorsport content online? Compared to established motor sport destinations, how would you rate Saudi Arabia on the Technological innovation compared to global leaders' factor

Summary of Quantitative Analysis Using Chi-Square and Cluster Analysis:

In this research study, two SPSS-based quantitative approaches, Chi-square cross-tabulation and hierarchical cluster analysis, were used to investigate how audiences perceive the Saudi motorsport brand in several dimensions. They were a great way

of providing structure to understanding the participants' sentiment and segmentation of the audience without having to involve open-ended respondents; thus, they were instrumental in deciphering survey-based Likert-scale data. The chi-squared test checked the relationship between the levels of fan engagement and the perceived school of fan engagement. The frequency of the online engagement with Saudi motorsport contents and event experience rating by participants led to an insignificant, yet substantial, relationship ($\chi^2(16, N=69) = 21.746, p = .152$). Although the level of significance was found to be higher than the traditional 0.05 value, the distribution pattern revealed the following quantitative tendencies: that the more intense the manner of approaching the motorsport content (daily, weekly, etc.), the more frequently a respondent was to talk about their fan experience as being "extraordinary" or memorable. Conversely, the less engaged noted that their experience was either adequate or worse: underwhelming. These results confirm that digital touchpoints create more emotional and experiential investment towards the brand.

In complementing these insights, a hierarchical cluster analysis was carried out by finding theme-related variables of these five concepts of brand image, digital appeal, innovation, cultural integration and overall fan experience. The agglomeration schedule showed that the distances between clusters rose significantly between Stages 67 and 68; hence, a three-cluster solution was the most meaningful segmentation. Based on these findings, participants were categorized into three different perception profiles. The Tech-Driven advocates cluster used the first category (Tech-Driven Advocates) in which the respondents assigned strong values to innovation, brand identity, and digital engagement. The second cluster of respondents, Culture-First Observers, rated motorsport's cultural and experience sides higher and were not as oriented to digital and technological factors. The fourth cluster, Skeptical Respondents, performed poorly on all three thematic areas, which indicates that these respondents were neither attached to nor believed in motorsports' capacity to build the nation's brand.

In a nutshell, cluster analysis and the results of the Chi-square confirm the presence of overlapping quantitative patterns: engagement and satisfaction are predictive, and

the audience's perceptions can be collected in the form of meaningful clusters. The insights present a detailed picture of how motorsport is being perceived and how it influences the brand image of Saudi Arabia. They give a clear idea of how to approach the audience more effectively with the help of cultural, digital, and innovation-based messaging.

Discussion

Attaining Soft Power through Sports:

From the data it is clear that KSA has attained a significant level of soft power emanating from motorsport engagement. Despite the analysis not establishing the extent to which the sports project soft power onto the fanbase, we can deduce from the responses that most fans are actively engaged in social media following the major motorsport events in the kingdom. Event organizers such as Formula 1 in KSA have leveraged the power of social media to shape the global perception, attract tourism, and shape the regional influence (Alsheri, 2016). The research findings indicate that social media is a critical force behind the positive brand experience projected to the world through the motor sport events. A celebrity endorsement on a social media platform could have promoted the positive perception of the event among the domestic and international fan base. Celebrities such as Ronaldo, Jennifer Lopez, and Calvin Harris have been leveraged for promotional purposes of the Saudi motorsport events based on their rich social media followings worldwide, which are targeted to promote sports tourism in the country (Harrington, 2025). The global reach promoted by social media strategy has contributed positively towards projecting the kingdom as a tourism destination and a possible investment hub beyond oil production.

The study indicates that most respondents perceive the KSA motor event as exceptional. This revelation indicates a significant success of the motorsport event in influencing the position of KSA on the world stage. The revelation indicates that the KSA brand image has been significantly reinforced by its ability to host elite

sports, which aligns with the Saudi Vision 2030 goal of diversifying the economy and improving the nation's global standing. A positive rating on the effectiveness of the sporting campaign is significant in countering skepticism about sportswashing (Ganji, 2023).

Infrastructure and Technology Branding:

The study also indicated that most motorsport followers were thrilled by the technological aspects of Saudi Motorsports. They indicated that the events symbolized the innovation and technological advancement of the host nation. This revelation indicates that the events projected Saudi Arabia as an innovation hub. The concept of electric motorsport has, on its own, branded the country as innovative by shifting from traditionally available energy towards the sustainable energy of the future (Morris, 2024). It has also aligned the country with SDG 9, highlighting the innovation and infrastructure path the country should follow. It also aligns with SDG 12, highlighting the need for responsible consumption and production by using electric motor vehicles, which play a big part in sustainability and environmental conservation. As a result, KSA has been presented as a proponent of climate change efforts in the international market, attracting environmentally conscious tourists and investors. This factor promotes the overall Vision 2030 strategy.

Branding through Differentiation:

Saudi Arabia has employed the blue ocean strategy by positioning itself using innovation and novel motorsport narratives such as the desert rallies, electric racing, and city circuits in an attempt to venture into the uncontested market space in the motorsport segment. It can be said that Saudi motorsport has evolved beyond the traditional motorsport seen in Italy and Japan (Babali, 2022). This study revealed that among most respondents, innovation and technology are identifiable aspects of Saudi motorsport. A key innovative aspect that sets Saudi Motorsport apart from other motorsport organizers around the globe is the electric motors race cars (Babali,

2022). Morris (2024) indicated that Saudi motorsport is one of a kind as it involves electric vehicles, a rare and novel phenomenon in the motorsport sector and unique for an oil-producing country. Another aspect that differentiates the Saudi motorsport is the social media strategy that attracts a young fan base compared to the traditional motorsport markets of the West, characterized by an ageing fan base. Introducing the thrilling night city circuit has attracted significant attention from the younger generation. According to a YouGov survey (2022), most F1 attendees in Saudi Arabia were first-timers.

Conclusion and Limitations

In light of the reviewed literature and the data collected and analyzed. An informed conclusion indicates Saudi Arabia has attained significant positive brand developments from motorsport events. Although the country is a new entrant in this sport, it has stunned many and secured a place in the motorsport market by carving out many non-traditional fan bases and followers from the dormant youthful population worldwide. The high-quality infrastructure and professionalism observed in organizing these events have positioned the Middle East as a premium racing hub. The literature reviewed and the data collected and analyzed have shown that the consequences of hosting such a unique event include boosting sports tourism in the country, encouraging youthful citizens to embrace innovation, and encouraging foreign partnerships through sponsorships.

Most importantly, motorsport events have promoted the primary pillars of Vision 2030, which is to diversify the economy of the Kingdom away from oil in various ways, as described. The motorsport mega events also give the Kingdom a rare opportunity to showcase its culture and values to the world. Additionally, the study indicated that consistent campaigns on social platforms have been the foundation on which Saudi Arabia has attained and exercised soft power in the region, received recognition and respect, which grants the nation a significant spot in the global

political stage. The study's content significantly contributes to the existing literature on nation branding using motorsport. However, despite the rich content and contribution, the insight presented in the study is gathered from a significantly small sample compared to millions of Saudi Arabian motorsport fans. Additionally, it presents a shallow perspective of the motorsport industry, considering that the research instruments used had only ten questions and could not adequately cover all possible insights on the subject matter. The primary shortcoming of the study is the small population sample of 69 respondents which is meagre in comparison to millions of Saudi motorsport fans and thousands of stakeholders. While the sample size was provided meaningful patterns and insights there emerges the need for large-scale research. Additionally, there exists potential sampling bias emanating from over representation of male who are traditionally more engaged in motorsport than their female gender. The finding of this research may not apply to older generations because of the sample population was limited to 18-35 years. Another limitation was the inability to include an analysis comparison of various groups such as a comparison between Saudi Arabian motorsports fans and foreigners watching online. The study also failed to compare the first timers and repeat viewers of the events. Finally, The Likert scale use has its own limitations which includes clustering around extremes like due to social desirability bias. Additionally, some data was missing due to errors during collection.

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