Public Diplomacy and Soft Power:

A Case Study of Saudi Arabia's Image Projection in the UK

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Abstract

Globalisation and the information technology revolution have transformed the way that diplomacy is practised. Traditional diplomacy, which has been commonly conducted between official representatives of governments, is no longer the sole source of communications that governments use to gain political influence and advantages. As an extension of traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy targets the general public in a foreign country (Melissen 2005, p. 9). A number of countries use public diplomacy to project a positive image, including presenting information to overcome the impacts of incidents that have damaged their reputations. Saudi Arabia has faced negative image perceptions, especially in the UK and other Western countries (Al-Ahmady, 1995), (Al-Qarni 2006, 2007). This study aims to enrich the scientific debate on public diplomacy by examining the public perception of Saudi Arabia and to provide practical recommendations on improving its public image, especially in the UK. It is hoped that the critique of current public diplomacy policies will benefit legislators and policymakers across the world in addressing negative image perceptions.

Recent studies on the impact of public diplomacy on a country's public image have tended to focus on great power states; there is scant literature on effective public diplomacy from regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia, and the extent to which public diplomacy can be used to improve a regional power's image, hence the need for this study.

This thesis study suggests that Saudi Arabia needs to reinforce and secure its foreign relations, especially with great powers, by explaining itself more effectively in order to be better understood and to increase cooperation with the outside world to promote universal values and world order. Saudi Arabia also needs to be more transparent to the outside world, not through propaganda, but through a true reflection of its reality, which will need to be developed by accelerating domestic reform. It is therefore recommended that Saudi Arabia continue its ongoing public diplomacy efforts towards improving its image but should also consider more-creative approaches and strategic planning to pursue this objective.

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Declaration of Authorship

This is to confirm that the thesis entitled **'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power: A Case Study on Saudi Arabia's Image Projection in the UK'** is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of East Anglia. This work has never been submitted for any other academic institution for the purpose of obtaining academic credit. All quotations and sources have been duly acknowledged.

Najah Al-Otaibi

July 2019

Chapter 1

Introduction – Background to the Study

1.1   Overview

For the past 20 years, there has been growing interest among international governments in utilising public diplomacy tools as a way of securing national interests. Different states use different forms of public diplomacy for different reasons. However, at its heart is the desire to project the most positive images of their countries. They believe that the best possible images will assist them in achieving political and economic targets or will reduce the impacts of specific negative incidents that may have damaged their countries' reputations. Saudi Arabia is no exception.

Saudi Arabia's journey with public diplomacy started more than a decade ago, with the kingdom adopting it as a result of many crises that had tarnished its global image. These initial public diplomacy initiatives included contributing to humanitarian causes, sending hundreds of thousands of students to study overseas and even launching a global interfaith dialogue for advocating religious tolerance – despite having no diplomatic relations with Israel. The question arises: has this been successful? Has Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy succeeded in mitigating the country's negative image among Western states such as the United Kingdom (UK)?

These initiatives have rarely been studied, especially in the UK. Therefore, this study hopes to fill this gap by examining the strategic thinking behind the public diplomacy campaigns of Saudi Arabia, a country that is considered a non-Western major regional power, and how its public diplomacy has been developed and projected in order to enhance the country's public image in the UK. An analysis of non-Western case studies will illustrate and in due course inform an analysis of the kingdom's programme.

This study is important because Saudi Arabia as an entity and part of the wider Gulf region wields enormous political, religious and economic power over many countries in the West. The UK–Saudi Arabia relationship in particular is significant due to Saudi Arabia's geopolitical importance to the stability of the Middle East region

and countering terrorism. The Saudi Arabia–UK partnership is also important because of the UK's leading role in promoting universal values using its own 'soft power', its overall global stature and its powerful media institutions. In addition, the UK's support is essential for Saudi Arabia's national and international interests because the UK exerts an unparalleled influence in economic, political and cultural spheres.

In April 2016, to banner headlines and wall-to-wall TV coverage, Saudi Arabia launched the transformational plan 'Vision 2030'[1]: a national strategy that set the pathway for Saudi Arabia's future beyond a full dependency on oil as the main source of national income. His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, known to many now as 'MBS', promoted the vision. The strategy aimed to ensure a vibrant society with strong roots, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation underpinned by adherence to Islamic values. The vision introduced plans for the future of society, the economy, business and government. However, it did not elaborate on how Saudi Arabia intended to address its image deficit. This study aims to address that with an in-depth analysis and critique of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy programme. This will contribute to the academic debate by better informing legislators and policymakers in Saudi Arabia on successfully implementing proper strategies and projecting a better image.

Recent studies on the impact of public diplomacy on a country's public image have tended to focus on great power states such as the United States (US), looking at its strategic public diplomacy to counter anti-Americanism in the Middle East (El-Nawawi, 2006) or Asia (Lim, 2005). However, there is little academic research on the effective public diplomacy embraced by major regional powers – countries that exert power within a geographic region (such as Saudi Arabia) – and the extent to which public diplomacy is being used to improve such countries' images.

Other areas that have received little academic attention include public diplomacy within the context of a country's domestic policies, as the majority of studies pertaining to the issue have tended to focus solely on foreign policy and its impact on public diplomacy initiatives. This research seeks to fill this void in the literature by developing an argument that demonstrates how domestic policy decisions may affect public diplomacy, as detailed later in this chapter.

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[1]   Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030 *http://vision2030.gov.sa/en*.

Public diplomacy is an extension of traditional diplomacy in which states pursue their foreign policies and interests. Fundamentally, the two concepts can be distinguished in the following way: traditional diplomacy represents engagement between officials of states, whereas public diplomacy addresses populations in foreign countries. Tuch (1990, p. 3) defines public diplomacy as:

A government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, for the purpose of advancing its national goals and policies.

Cull (2009) contends that the two concepts differ in terms of actors, which can be any entity beyond the government. He suggests: Public diplomacy is an international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public (Cull 2009, p.12)

I expand on these definitions substantially in the next chapter. The aim here is to give a preliminary understanding of the issue at hand.

1.2   Research Aim

With the aim of enhancing the ongoing discussion on the impact of public diplomacy on a country's image, this thesis studies Saudi Arabia's image in the UK to identify the extent to which public diplomacy can improve a country's image once it has been damaged by a specific incident or incidents, as well as the factors that support or hinder achieving such goals.

Saudi Arabia is an important case study for many reasons. It suffers from a particular image deficit in the West, which was exacerbated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks when it was revealed that 15 of the hijackers were Saudis (*Blanchard* 2010, p. 42). Events went from bad to worse, reinforcing perceptions that the kingdom embodied terrorism and a lack of human rights. Such events included the shooting of a BBC cameraman and the grievous injury to correspondent Frank Gardner in 2004 by a Saudi follower of al-Qaida in Riyadh (Moreton 2014), as well as the sentencing of Karl Andree, a British expat in Riyadh, to 350 lashes for having alcohol in 2015 (Hope, 2015).

Saudi officials are well aware of such negative perceptions but place them historically. For example, former Saudi ambassador to the UK, Prince Turki Al-Faisal,

said in a special interview for this study [2] that the negative image of Saudi Arabia in the West was set in stone and had been for centuries. However, despite his awareness, he did not explain the reasons why the country has suffered from such a negative image and refused to be drawn into a discussion on whether or not Saudi Arabia or its policies were part of the problem. Therefore, the objective of this research is to address this paradox by examining the public diplomacy of Saudi Arabia and assessing whether it has been effective in addressing its image deficit, as well as the factors involved in supporting or obstructing the achievement of such goals. This will be achieved by identifying the measures that were undertaken by Saudi Arabia to improve its image in the UK between 2005 and 2015, followed by an empirical survey of participants based on relevant data, as detailed in Chapter Five.

This particular period was significant because most public diplomacy efforts were expanded in response to the traumatic events of 11 September 2001. It was also a transitional period in Saudi Arabia's policy because the county witnessed relative social openness and political reform in the domestic arena, coupled with a proactive 'soft power'-based foreign policy seeking realistic peace solutions to Middle East conflicts such as the Arab–Israeli stalemate and also promoting interfaith dialogue.

1.3   Public Diplomacy in the 21ˢᵗ Century

I expand on both incidents significantly in the next chapter, although it is worth recalling some key aspects of public diplomacy initially here as well. Although public diplomacy emerged as an independent discipline over five decades ago, it has only recently taken on a more prominent role both in academic discourse and as a strategy to achieve state foreign policy objectives, as illustrated in the literature by prominent scholars such as Manheim (1994, p.4), who refers to public diplomacy as 'government-to-people' diplomacy and argues that it is the government's effort to influence foreign public opinion "for the purpose of turning the foreign policy of a targeted nation to its advantage".

It can be argued that the rise of public diplomacy directly coincides with advances in technology and the shift in the post-9/11 geopolitical agenda towards security, democracy, economics and soft power. The debate on public diplomacy is

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[2]   Interview was conducted face to face at Corinthia Hotel in London, UK on May 2016.

dominated by the Western experience of the major power countries, mainly that of the US with its post-2001 focus on addressing anti-Western sentiment across the Arab world such as (Rugh, 2006), and (Ezell, 2012). There is a scant amount of literature on effective public diplomacy that focuses on the major powers within other geographic regions. Saudi Arabia, for instance, is often ignored when it comes to assessing the extent to which public diplomacy has been employed to improve its image. For example, Burnham (2013), whose paper studies Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy after 9/11, focuses on the kingdom's image in the US in the light of two particular initiatives. However, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive examination, analysing the Saudi approach to conducting public diplomacy and its impact on its overall image through a number of initiatives undertaken specifically in the UK (see *Chapter Four*). The last study that looked at the Saudi image in the UK (Al-Ahmady, 1995) is now considered too old to describe the UK public's opinion on Saudi Arabia. Hence, there is a need for a fresh study to complement previous ones.

1.4   The Role of Soft Power in Public Diplomacy

The rapid pace of change in technology, the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001, and the advent of new media have resulted in public diplomacy rising to the forefront as a strategy that goes hand in hand with the concept of soft power, a term coined by the American scholar of international relations Joseph Nye (2004) to describe the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion (Nye 2004, p.1). The concept is an alternative to the concept of 'hard power', which involves a government's use of economic or military force to control others (Nye 2004, p.4). The term in many ways is directly correlated to public diplomacy's attempt to confront non-armed threats or 'the war of ideas'[3] and perceptions.

Saudi Arabia is a distinctive case study to examine Nye's soft power concept in public diplomacy practice to obtain the outcome of improving the country's image, given its use of both soft power and 'hard power' resources. These resources are directly linked to Saudi Arabia being one of the wealthiest nations in the world,

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[3]   The term '*War of Ideas*' is defined by Antiulio J. Echevarria, Director of the US Army's Strategic Studies Institute, as "a clash of visions, concepts, and images that serve a political, socio-cultural or economic purpose and they involve hostile intentions". *War of Ideas and the War of Ideas* (2008), Create Space Independent Publishing.

possessing over a quarter of the world's petroleum reserves (OPEC, Saudi Arabia Figure and Facts 2018), and having a strategic location in a large landmass that encompasses the birthplace of the Islamic religion and the holy places of Mecca and Medina. Although some of the above might be considered to fall under 'hard power', Saudi Arabia has an advantage in advancing its foreign policy interests through a combination of hard power and soft power resources as a form of smart power [4] (see *details in Chapter Three*).

However, while Saudi Arabia has been quite successful in exerting soft power through religion, especially by hosting 19 million religious visitors to Mecca a year (Arab News, 2018), it has recently begun to use its soft power potential to improve its image. For example, the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KACIID) was launched in 2012 to support the rapprochement process between people of various cultures and religions.[5] This shows how Saudi Arabia has begun in the 21st century to think of the universal aspects of religion to address people beyond the Muslim world. This new development makes it timely to examine the role of soft power in Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy initiatives to positively influence its image.

Soft power became an important asset for public diplomacy because of the ideological nature of the terrorist attacks in the West, the ensuing war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Western standoff with Iran and North Korea. These events have largely rendered traditional diplomacy and military intervention as outdated and not always effective in quelling ideological security threats to liberal democratic Western states. Indeed, as historian E. H. Carr (2001, p.102) once wrote: "Power over opinion is no less essential for political purposes than military and economic power; it is always associated with them".

Public diplomacy seeks to influence public opinion and perception of a country through a variety of means, including media, art and cultural programmes; sporting events; and educational exchanges. Advertising and marketing campaigns focused on 'branding' have become widely used by states to reach out to foreign publics, thanks to the contributions of scholars such as Peter Doyle (1989) and Simon Anholt (2016)

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[4]   According to Nye, 'smart power' is the strategy of balancing 'hard power' and 'soft power' to accomplish foreign policy goals. Nye, J. (2004). Soft Power and US Foreign Policy, Routledge.
[5]   King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KACIID), *https://www.kaiciid.org* [Accessed 20 June 2019].

who developed strategies for enhancing the role of public diplomacy by promoting a certain national identity image.

1.5   The Rise of New Media as a Tool of Public Diplomacy

The rise of social media has placed greater emphasis on horizontal forms of communication such as Facebook, Twitter and the all-encompassing blogosphere. Classical tools of communication such as newspapers, radio and television are no longer the sole methods of engaging with the public. Social media platforms have allowed government officials and diplomatic offices to engage with foreign populations and respond quickly to events. Examples of officials furthering their understanding and usage of social media, to spread their views on policy areas, can be found with the former US President Barack Obama, who had as a president nearly 27 million followers on Twitter (George & Stephen, 2013). Other prominent examples showing the increasing importance of social media to diplomacy include several key foreign ministers, such as the Swede Carl Bildt, who took to Twitter to answer tweets from his followers, or even the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), who tweeted live updates during the Gaza War in 2012 (BBC, 2013/b).

This shift in public diplomacy can be put into perspective through the words of the Greek diplomat Nikos Christodoulides (2005), who argues that social media is changing today's political landscape:

> *The Internet can be considered by governments as a unique diplomatic instrument. Through its proper use, they can 'advertise' not only their positions on different issues, but also promote their ideas worldwide. Such a function, if used in the right way, helps the embassy, and as a result the state that it represents, to create a positive image in the host state.*

The ability to communicate a state's culture and values serves as an extremely important soft power component towards achieving successful public diplomacy in the modern technological era. For example, the UK's key public diplomacy institution, the British Council, uses the fundamental source of UK culture of the English language to make people in foreign countries think more favourably towards the UK by learning its official language, thus increasing understanding and support for its policies. The British Council's definition of public diplomacy highlights this goal: "Public

diplomacy is work aiming to interact and build relationships with individuals and organisations overseas in order to improve perceptions of, and strengthen influence for, the United Kingdom" (Public diplomacy Third Report Session 2005-2006, 2006, p.15).

The UK is one of several countries that have adopted strategic public diplomacy in the 21st century. It has developed its public diplomacy strategy by setting up a public diplomacy board to manage and assess the operations. This is in conjunction with the efforts of the Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO), which aims to engage people and institutions across the world through channels such as the BBC World Service, the British Council, and a number of scholarships and fellowship programmes (Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons, 2006).

Following the rise and proliferation of terrorism, the impact of the financial crisis, and the emergence of WikiLeaks[6], which leaked sensitive documents exposing government policies and attitudes, it is no longer possible for governments to control the means of communication entirely or the flow of information and thus public opinion. Therefore, countries redoubled their efforts to project good images to the world by allocating resources and funds to implementing strategic public diplomacy as a tool for nation branding, image projection and reputation management. The phenomenon of public diplomacy is not just the reserve of certain great powers or Western states; it can be witnessed in developing and small states too. Brazil, for instance, which is widely known for its exotic culture, Samba dance and carnivals, has taken advantage of new regional and economic blocs within a redefined multipolar geopolitical system that is no longer hegemonic or bipolar. Brazil has done so by developing a unique strategy to reinvent its image by focusing on advancing its social development and its reputation as an economic trading powerhouse (Kakonen, 2013). Conversely, along with its global reputation in technology, South Korea has long aimed to adopt Nye's concept of soft power to 'win the hearts and minds' of people across the world through investing in its popular music and drama. South Korea has been highly successful in exporting its films and television shows across the world, even to the Middle East (Moiet, 2016). Most recently, it achieved an indirect boost to its image projection through PSY's ground-breaking pop smash hit 'Gangnam Style',

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6   WikiLeaks, is a news website that was launched in 2006 to released confidential reports and government documents.

which topped global music charts and was at the time the most watched YouTube video. While the popularity of the music video was a result of private enterprise rather than state-led public diplomacy initiatives, there was an indirect yet important correlation. The image perception of a country can indirectly be affected by events that transpire through popular media. While 'Gangnam Style' is likely to have had little to no long-standing impact on South Korea's public diplomacy, it momentarily helped raise and promote a positive image of the country, thereby indirectly aiding the public diplomacy objectives of South Korea. The notion of nation branding through public diplomacy initiatives should be viewed as an evolving process that will continue to progress and redefine itself.

It is important to note that the playing field for countries pursuing public diplomacy initiatives to improve their images is far from equal. For example, while popular music and drama have propelled the image of South Korea, the case is much different in Saudi Arabia.

1.6   Insight into Saudi Arabia's Image in the 21st Century

Saudi Arabia's national image in the West is often associated with oil, the extreme application of sharia law, and a lack of human and women's rights. The association with these strengthened following the 9/11 attacks due to the facts that Saudi Arabia was home to 15 of the 19 hijackers (Blanchard 2010, p.42), and over one hundred Saudis were detained in the US base in Guantanamo Bay (Fawn & Hinnebusch 2006, p. 154). A Gallup poll carried out in 2002 reflects the damage that the event caused to the image and reputation of Saudi Arabia: 53 per cent of Americans appeared to hold an unfavourable view of Saudi Arabia (Gallup, 2002). A subsequent analysis undertaken by Al-Qarni (2007) showed that the image of Saudi Arabia in the West had barely improved. His analysis, carried out on two British newspapers, found that negative coverage of Saudi Arabia outweighed any positive coverage towards the country by an alarming 5:1 ratio (Al-Qarni, 2007). The figures mentioned above should raise concerns about how people in the West perceive Saudi Arabia in the post-9/11 era (this perception is elaborated on in Chapter 5.)

Further evidence of Saudi's image problem in the West can be given. A 2011 survey commissioned by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, found similar trends. In this survey, 2,000 members of the British public were asked

to pick which country, from a list of 19, they viewed most favourably. Only two per cent chose Saudi Arabia, but when asked to identify which country they felt particularly unfavourably towards, 16 per cent picked Saudi Arabia (Niblett 2011, p. 8). When random members of the Spanish public were asked in 2013 if they believed that the Saudi government respected the personal freedoms of its people, 86 per cent answered no, with only six per cent agreeing that it did (Pew Research Center, 2014).

As is clear, it would be inaccurate to state that Saudi Arabia has not suffered from a less than fruitful image in the decades before 9/11. Not only would it be inaccurate but it would also be shortsighted to underestimate the perception problems that Saudi Arabia and other Arab states have faced in recent decades. This is confirmed in the works of the professor of political theory at King Saud University, Dr Saud Al-Tamami, who argues that the 9/11 attacks escalated the negative yet pre-existing attitudes latent in the Western conscience (Al-Tamami, 2012). This is an interesting phenomenon, given the West's increased dependency on Saudi Arabia's oil reserves. In spite of the West's crucial dependence on Saudi oil, it would be a stretch to suggest that Saudi Arabia could have used the asset of its soft power to its advantage in attempting to persuade the West of the country's innocence and non-involvement in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Accomplishing such a feat would have required the development of an effective strategic public diplomacy programme that was geared towards adequately addressing such unpredictable situations.

Historically speaking, as Ghareeb (1983) posits, the changing attitudes of the West towards Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arab world radically transformed with the Arab–Israeli conflict. He argues that this was an event that marked the turning point from which the Arab world went from being associated with exoticism, female belly dancers and the beauty of the pyramids to being perceived as a region of 'backward, dishonest, and lazy people' (Gareeb 1983 p.16). Moreover, following the Six-Day War of 1967, Arab rulers were characterised by the West as more corrupt than ever before. This image has seamlessly transposed itself onto the people and remains to this day. The negative and generalised misconceptions of the Arab world only worsened with the beginning of the Palestinian Liberation Movement in 1964, when the mediated image of international terrorism was invoked for the first time.

Al-Qarni (2007) expands upon this notion by identifying five linear stages of propaganda campaigns or 'manufacturing consent' that have targeted and impacted the image of Saudi Arabia since the 1950s. These stages are as follows:

1. First, the pan-Arab Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's targeting of the Saudi kingdom with the Sout Al-Arab radio station in the 1960s. He criticised the regime and described it as a 'backward' ruling system that was standing against his Arab unity project.

2. The second phase followed the Arab–Israeli war in 1973, after Saudi King Faisal decided to cut oil supplies to a number of Western states. Several media and policy institutions and civil societies in the West attacked Saudi Arabia for using petrol as a political weapon.

3. Relatedly, the broadcast of the film 'Death of a Princess' in 1980[7] was another incident that attracted negative publicity to Saudi Arabia. The film reports a public execution of a young Saudi princess and her lover in the capital Riyadh, which caused a cultural shock in the UK, showing Saudi Arabia's culture as backwards and heartless.

4. In the 1990s, the Iraqi regime criticised Saudi Arabia for hosting foreign troops while it occupied Kuwait. To do so, it used media campaigns that relied on a religious argument that prohibits non-Muslims from entering the Arabian Peninsula. The campaign won supporters inside Saudi Arabia, especially among religious and conservative people, some of whom were inspired to commit violent attacks in protest and opposition to the presence of Western troops in Saudi Arabia.

5. The fifth stage followed the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001. This phase represents the most critical for the Saudi kingdom due to the fact that Western media has constantly linked 9/11 and terrorism to the political, religious and educational system of Saudi Arabia. According to Al-Qarni, foreign journalists and the media were largely responsible for having facilitated a one-dimensional understanding of Saudi Arabia (Al-Qarni, 2007).

In addition to the media, the advent of the blogosphere and other Internet news sources has muddled the accuracy of some reports connected to the sharia-based law, educational system and human rights situation in Saudi Arabia. All of this, especially over the past two decades, has made Saudi Arabia especially sensitive about its

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[7] White, T. Ganley, G. (1982). Death of a Princess Controversy. University of Harvard. *http://www.pirp.harvard.edu/pubs_pdf/white/white-p83-9.pdf*. [Accessed 11 June 2019].

negative image in Western countries, and it has responded by undertaking a number of public diplomacy initiatives based on soft power assets since 2005, such as educating tens of thousands of its students abroad (Taylor & Albasri 2014), ramping up its humanitarian aid contributions and organising visits between King Abdullah and Pope Benedict XVI in Rome, despite Saudi Arabia having no diplomatic representation within the Vatican (Colombo 2013, p. 32). This shift towards conducting public diplomacy is the core of the discussion of this thesis and will be examined under the following hypothesis and questions.

1.7   Hypothesis and Research Questions

Through addressing the paradox that characterises the friendly relationship between the Saudi Arabian and UK governments on the one hand and Saudi Arabia's controversial global image on the other hand, this study seeks to show correlation between a state's loss of soft power and its policies. It specifically hypothesises that local policies often overshadow the positive outcomes of a country's public diplomacy initiatives. In other words, Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy practices cannot heal its suffering image, due to the government's unpopular domestic policies.

As the literature review will show later, scholars of international relations such as, of Nye (2004) Walt (2005) and Seib (2009), argue that domestic politics is typically an important part of the explanation for states' foreign policies, but this correlation has not been pro en in a comprehensive study (see *Chapter Two Literature Review*). In order to examine the validity of this argument further, this study examines the following main questions:

1- How effective is the Saudi public diplomacy in improving its public image in the UK? And what factors are supporting or hindering the achievement of this goal? It goes without saying that public diplomacy is an important instrument in bringing an understanding of the nation's ideals, policies and culture for the purpose of advancing a country's goals as well as policies, but how would that secure a positive image too? Has Saudi public diplomacy been able to shape the perception of people in the UK to look at the Kingdom favourably? The examination of this question is also important for the researcher to identify factors involved in achieving or hampering this objective, and whether these factors are mainly of domestic nature or a mixture of deliberate or inadvertent factors; be it political, cultural, or social. The analysis of such factors will

allow the researcher to test her hypotheses and thus fill in a gap in the literature that lacks a sound argument demonstrating how domestic policy decisions can affect public diplomacy goals. This particular area has received little academic attention in the discussion of public diplomacy within the context of a country's domestic policies, as the majority of relevant studies tend to focus solely on foreign policy and its impact on public diplomacy initiatives (details in *Chapter Two, Literature Review*). Nonetheless, the answer to the main question will be drawn from analysing the case of Saudi Arabia's public image in the UK in the light of the following secondary questions:

1. How does Saudi Arabia exercise its public diplomacy in the UK?
2. What is the role of soft power in Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy?
3. What soft-power-based measures of public diplomacy have been undertaken by Saudi Arabia in order to improve its image in the UK?
4. How favourable is Saudi Arabia's image in the UK in the light of these measures? And which elements have shaped this image?

These questions are selected to examine the wider scope of this study, which is Saudi public diplomacy's impact on its image and the factors shaping it. Saudi Arabia's assets of soft power and how they have been employed to achieve its public diplomacy to ensure a positive image is particularly important to understanding the Saudi strategy and mechanism more broadly. It contributes significantly to the discussion by scholars such as Joseph Nye (2004), Jan Melissen (2005), Paul Sharp (2009) and others whose input in this regard remained limited to Western countries and was never tested on Middle Eastern cases like Saudi Arabia. By identifying new approaches of Saudi public diplomacy, the researcher brings into attention other factors that may have been overlooked by studying Western countries only.

In this sense, it is significant to examine what public diplomacy activities Saudi Arabia has undertaken, using soft power tools, to improve its negative image in the UK. This will involve a critique of the Saudi approach through studying a number of government-sponsored initiatives and to identify the Saudi approach and mechanism of conducting public diplomacy. To assess how successful these endeavours have been, the discussion will be followed by an empirical examination of the Saudi overall perception among UK public opinion through a survey questionnaire

of selected participants. The answers to the questions stated earlier will enable the researcher to explain Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy and analyse whether or not it has been beneficial in improving the Saudi image in the UK. In addition, they will help, through exploring the undelaying factors shaping that perception, identifying the role of domestic policies in promoting or hindering the achievement of public diplomacy objectives. It is important, however, to note that the researcher supports the argument that the overall favourability of a country among the people of a foreign country can be an indication of its public diplomacy performance. We shall see this with further discussion in Chapter five.

1.8   Structure of the Thesis

This introductory chapter has provided an outline of how governments nowadays have an interest in utilizing available tools of diplomacy with the aim to secure national interests. Moreover, the Chapter sheds more light on the efforts undertaken by governments by engaging different strategies of public diplomacy in protecting their countries' interests believing that having a positive image overseas will eventually serve their political and economic goals. It is, therefore, crucially important to reduce the negative impact of incidents that may affect a country's reputation negatively. Most importantly is that this preliminary Chapter demonstrates how previous research, by focusing on powerful Western states only, provides little empirical evidence when it comes to new and different case studies.

In defining public diplomacy, the section holds that the term is mostly used to denote the collective processes that governments use in communicating with foreign publics in attempts to bring an understanding of the nation's ideals, institutions and culture for the sole purpose of advancing its goals and policies.

This Chapter justified using the case of Saudi Arabia in particular for this study due to the political and economic power it enjoys internationally as well as its religious influence on the Sunni Muslim world. The Chapter also discussed the study objectives in detail and tested its hypotheses in an attempt to draw a connection between a state's policies and its loss of soft power. The research question was discussed too as part of this Chapter while attempting to examine the role of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy in mitigating its tarnished image using different tools of soft power and the factors impacting its public diplomacy success in achieving its goal. The following Chapter

provides an in-depth appraisal of the concept of public diplomacy and why it has become a crucial element in the formulation and exercise of foreign policy over the past decade. It also presents the theoretical framework adopted in this study in more details and surveys the available body of literature in order to identify the gap in it.

Chapter three, on the other hand, examines the use of soft power in Saudi Arabia's diplomacy and analyses the extent to which it has been utilized in the past to achieve multiple foreign policy objectives. Additionally, the Chapter presents a historical overview of Saudi-Britain relations while bringing into attention the paradoxical nature of this relationship, and thus argues that although the previous studies emphasized this unique relationship, they have not clearly presented the role Saudi diplomacy in these bilateral relations. To fill this gap in the literature, this Chapter looks at the Saudi strategy in responding to the image crisis it faced in the UK and how it responded to it using both hard and soft power diplomatic tools. This is particularly important to enable us to gain an understanding of the historical evolution of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy theory and practice—an approach that is thoroughly discussed in the following Chapter.

Chapter four consequently analyses and critiques Saudi public diplomacy initiatives used to improve its image in the UK after a number of crises. It argues that the events of 9/11 contributed to the deterioration of relations between Saudi Arabia and the West but, on the other hand, pushed Saudi Arabia to introduce domestic reforms capable of confronting the proliferation of extremism and lack of freedoms on the home front. The focus of Chapter five is on examining the impact of such initiatives on Saudi Arabia's image among the British public. The Chapter provides a detailed outline of the methodology used for evaluating these activities. Moreover, the methodology of data collection and process of sampling, as well as research limitation, will be tackled. The Chapter also includes data analyses, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to assess whether and to what extent Saudi public diplomacy has been effective. Chapter six, the conclusion, provides a summary of the findings of the previous Chapters. It restates answers of the main research questions and highlights the contribution of this thesis in the diplomatic field. Lastly, it presents a number of recommendations for further enquiry and formulates a possible strategy for the Kingdom to adopt in its endeavour to improve its public image.

Chapter 2

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Study

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Public Diplomacy: Theory and Implementation

To begin with, it is worth noting that Edmund Gullion, former dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, coined the term 'public diplomacy' in 1965 to describe a government's influence over public opinion in a foreign country. He defined public diplomacy as follows: "The actions of governments to inform and influence foreign publics" (cited in McDowell 2008, p. 8). This original definition, plain as it is, was considered to serve as an extension of the emphasis of traditional diplomacy. According to Gullion, public diplomacy includes dimensions that go beyond the communications between state officials. One of these dimensions is the ability of governments to influence public opinion abroad in order to direct that country's government's policies in their favour.

The researcher argues that, for a long time, Saudi Arabia has implemented traditional diplomacy, where diplomats and official government representatives are the sole agents facilitating foreign relations. The low interest in employing other actors stems from the fact that the country's interests have always been secured with other countries through its economic wealth. Therefore, it did not feel the need to use other actors until recently and after facing a number of crises that damaged its image, as the previous chapter presented. This is why it is significant to examine the role of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy in mitigating its negative image among Western states such as the UK.

The classic way of conducting diplomacy has changed over the last decade (as this study will later explain) due to the rise of technology and the media focus on Saudi Arabia after the 9/11 attacks. Since then, Saudi Arabia has undertaken initiatives to influence foreign public opinion in a number of Western countries, such as the UK,

aimed at generating a more favourable image and moving beyond stereotypes (this shift will be elaborated on in the following Chapters).

Studying the shift from traditional to public diplomacy in non-Western contexts is important to enrich the scholarly debate by examining different models (countries) and identifying new public diplomacy approaches that may have been overlooked by previous studies of Western models.

Several studies have highlighted that public opinion holds power in politics. Forman (1996) argues that public opinion is "the sum of ideas held on social, economic and political issues by the general public". He suggests that public opinion is held very highly in today's liberal society, where politicians, citizens and the media can shape a government's decisions (Forman 1996, p.17). This has been explored by Visser, Holbrook & Krosnic (2007), who suggest that in order for a government to perform in a healthy democratic environment, it must engage and inform its citizens and consider their attitudes and preferences. They further add that there are a number of ways that a government can canvass the public to understand the issues of the day, including opinion polling, telephone and online surveys, and focus groups. Each public interaction can be quantified as a representation of the majority; subsequently, this information can be used to assess public opinion on a certain policy. This canvassing also occurs internationally when democratic governments pay attention to their images abroad in order to secure good international relations (Visser, Holbrook, Krosnick, 2007, pp.127-128).

The researcher will utilise the concept of surveying public opinion (as detailed in Chapter 5) to assess the role of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy in improving its image in the UK. One of the reports that have guided the researcher in this regard is a review of the UK's Foreign Affairs report on public diplomacy in 2006 'The Carter Review', which published recommendations for the effective evaluation of public diplomacy. The report stressed that measuring the effectiveness of public diplomacy is challenging, as public diplomacy activities are by their nature "indirect and long term" (Public Diplomacy Review, 2006). Therefore, it noted that the measurement should be aligned to the purpose of the activity (Wilding 2007, p.1). This study supports the argument that the main purpose of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy activities towards the UK in the last few decades has been to improve its image in order to maintain security and its alliance with the UK as the country that helped to secure the formation of Saudi Arabia. For this reason, assessing public opinion in the

UK will indicate whether these steps have been beneficial in achieving this purpose and where they could have been improved.

Ensuring favourability in public opinion is essential in democratic systems to achieve domestic stability and legitimacy. It is the same regarding foreign countries: foreign public opinion is important to achieving foreign policy goals. To show the importance of this, consider the public outcry that shone a spotlight on British beef during the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) outbreak in 1995. This was highlighted by Leonard, Small & Rose (2005) as an example of how public opinion in a foreign country can impact national interests. Such was the UK public's fear of contamination that the French government actually applied an export ban in response, despite the significant efforts of the industry to prove its safety.

Geopolitical developments over the last five decades have resulted in theorists redefining the term 'public diplomacy' in broader terms; this was especially the case during the Cold War, when an ideological conflict was evident between capitalism and communism in the global order (Richmond 2008, p.68). Indeed, public diplomacy became more associated with states aiming to improve their images to secure national interests.

The expansion of the definition of public diplomacy in relations to its 'actors' and 'means' is evident between scholars. For example, Sharp's (2009) definition of public diplomacy (as cited in Melissen, 2005, p. 11) suggest that the practice of public diplomacy is not just a pursuit of governments but also of other actors. Sharp's defines public diplomacy: "Public diplomacy the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented". However, his definition has left much confusion about what he meant regarding government actors – whether state-led actors or independent organisations – and the jury is still out. Cull 2009 has slightly overcome this issue by being clearer. He states that public diplomacy, is an international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public" The actor as he explained may be a state, multi-national corporation, non-governmental organization NGOs, international organization, or other player on the world stage (Cull 2009, p.12).

Snow's approach to defining public diplomacy was influenced by earlier work from Manheim (1994), who divided the concept based on two categories: 'people-to-people diplomacy', which involves citizens performing activities that are delivered through means such as cultural and education exchange programmes and mass media,

seeking to project a positive image of a state among foreign publics. The other category involves 'government-to-people' diplomacy, such as the government aims to influence foreign publics' opinions for the purpose of turning the foreign policy of a targeted nation to its advantage (Manheim 2008, p.14).

Manheim's (1994) differentiation between the two types fits well in the Western model, where private actors such as civil societies and citizens can freely be engaged and play a role to improve understanding of a country without the need to be directed by the government. Saudi Arabia's case does not fit within such a framework, as later chapters will show, due to the undemocratic nature of its political system and every official entity being government led, even those that are civil societies and NGOs. Additionally, official 'people-to-people diplomacy' must be typically backed or supervised by the government. Consider, for example, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program[8], a public diplomacy initiative by Saudi Arabia to educate Saudi citizens abroad. As Chapter 4 identifies, it is a form of what Manheim described as 'people-to-people diplomacy', yet, in reality, it is the government that facilitates and funds the programme to support its foreign diplomacy. Therefore, it is very important to study the case of Saudi Arabia, which reflects a non-democratic state with limited actors to conduct public diplomacy.

For this reason, it is appropriate at this point to note that the definition of public diplomacy employed to examine the Saudi case will combine different definitions in order to accommodate the varying yet unique character of Saudi Arabia's geopolitics and actors, as the definitions of Western scholars fit more the Western democratic model, where actors can play a public diplomacy role outside of the supervision of the government. Therefore, the following definition will be used to describe specifically the conduct of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy:

Public diplomacy is a government-led effort to utilise a strategic policy framework and employ various soft power-based tools, such as culture, education and religion, through selected actors to influence the thoughts and perceptions of people across borders in order to secure political interests.

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[8]   Ministry of Education. King Abdullah Scholarship Program
       https://www.moe.gov.sa/en/news/Pages/an74.aspx [Accessed 20 June 2019].

2.2 Previous Studies

2.2.1 Public Diplomacy vs. Public Relations

Studies have been carried out on the topic of public diplomacy by scholars such as Signitzer and Coombs (1992). The two theorists (as cited in Glassgold, 2004) offer considerable insight into the conceptual relationship between public diplomacy and public relations: two concepts that are linked yet very different in terms of their purposes. The theorists put forth the argument that the two concepts share strong similarities in terms of their objectives, such as building a positive image and using tools such as mass media. They further suggest that modern technology allows governments to influence public opinion using the same techniques, ultimately resulting in a conceptual convergence of the two fields (Glassgold, 2004). The Saudi case reflects this overlap, whereby the Saudi government often seeks quick and short-term results. The following chapters will delve into this in detail, but here it is worth considering Burnham's (2013) paper, which highlights this overlap in Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy post-9/11. The Saudi government hired a public relations firm for millions of dollars, which placed expensive pro-Saudi Arabia advertisements in major US newspapers to ease the impact of the events on Saudi interests in the US. Seeking a short-term recovery in its image, Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy (as discussed in Burnham's paper) was weak, as the message presented in these advertisements focused on denial of any responsibility for the 9/11 attacks, when the American public expected the Saudi government to honestly address the causes of the horrific events (Burnham 2013, p. 6).

2.2.2 Public Diplomacy vs. Propaganda

Another interesting debate surrounds whether public diplomacy is just a euphemism for propaganda. This can be seen in the work of Edward Murrow, former director of the US Information Agency (USIA), who focused on the credibility aspects of public diplomacy. He suggests that public diplomacy is dependent on state policy; without that connection, credibility cannot be achieved. Murrow contends: "To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful" (cited in McPhail, 2011, p. 90). It will be noteworthy to test later in the study if Murrow's notion of credibility holds true for Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy initiatives.

Equally, former diplomat John Brown (2003) sought to assess the boundaries that separate public diplomacy and propaganda, arguing that this is mostly decided based on their objectives, with public diplomacy implemented to provide a truthful exposition of a nation's policy and encourage international understanding while being attentive to the public by listening and displaying national achievements overseas. This is essentially at odds with his description of propaganda, which he contends seeks to force its message on an audience in a variety of ways, mainly through repetition, slogans, the oversimplification of complex issues and the misrepresentation of the truth. On this, Melissen (2005) observes that propaganda lacks credibility and thus cannot be as effective as public diplomacy in improving a country's image. He identifies a key reason for this: its historical association with manipulation and the deception of foreign citizens (Melissen 2005, p.17).

It is important to examine Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy activities under the light of the credibility argument, given the kingdom's controversial foreign and domestic policies, which will allow this study to either reinforce or challenge the credibility element argued by scholars of public diplomacy; Marrow, Brown and Melissen. One of the examples that will be discussed is Saudi Arabia's attempt to include women for the first time in its delegation for the 2012 London Olympic Games, which, despite being a welcoming sign of change, was perceived as lacking credibility, as women at that time were prohibited from being able to play sport. However, while propaganda has historically resulted in widespread misconceptions and criticisms of nations, Melissen (2005) contends that public diplomacy has been successfully used by many states to eliminate negative perceptions.

Beyond this, it is important to consider that not all countries deliver public diplomacy in the same way, and this is what makes it essential to study other countries' conduct of public diplomacy. Every country's public diplomacy is different for a variety of reasons, such as objectives, soft power assets and funding, and there are also differences in the challenges they face when practising public diplomacy (this is discussed in detail in the following section). For example, some countries face ethical issues that stem from cultural differences when they exercise public diplomacy. Melissen (2005, p. 3) cites the example of ethical issues pertaining to 'soft drugs' in the Netherlands to indicate that certain topics can be effectively addressed as part of the public diplomacy to reach certain nations, but this cannot be successful for all nations. The essence of Melissen's thought, which highlights the paradox of

promoting a nation's values through a public diplomacy mission, can also be observed in the analysis of the American diplomat Christopher Ross (2003), who argues that addressing different audiences requires using certain words and images. His point is reflected in the speech by the former US President Barack Obama in Cairo in 2009 and the way he carefully selected a special theme to explain the US's priorities towards Muslims by stressing his personal links to the Muslim world as a child (Al-Anini, 2009). Indeed, Ross (2003) identifies that successful public diplomacy should include the following pillars: inform, engage and influence foreign mindsets by being credible and consistent and engaging non-state actors. He states that public diplomacy must ensure the following:

1. There should be a clear understanding of the state's foreign policy that is not directed by hearsay or misrepresentations.
2. The state's fundamental values should be clearly and rationally explained within its documents.
3. The message should be communicated throughout government departments to ensure that it is clear and consistent in its dissemination.
4. The target audiences should be adjusted, as such audiences should be studied continuously.
5. Activities should be carried out through written and electronic media messages that are sent to a wider selection of audiences.
6. International communications and exchange programmes should also be taken into account.[9]

In the 21st century, a variety of studies have offered insights into the practices and institutional structures of state public diplomacy. In this regard, Jelisic (2010) drew attention to the experiences of the Western Balkans states in trying to join the European Union (EU) through strategic public diplomacy drives. He argues that despite efforts by the Bosnian government to showcase its reform in seeking to fulfil the EU membership requirements, the country failed to secure the desired goal because it could not challenge the negative image perception in most European minds relating

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[9] Ross, C. (2003). 'Pillars of Public Diplomacy: Grappling with International Public Opinion'. Harvard International Review, p.7. The pillars are summarised in the research paper of Gabriela, Z. (2013). 'The Role and Importance of Public Diplomacy: Romania Case Study in the Context of Integration into NATO'. University of Craiova, Romania.

to its perceived political instability. He contends that although the EU institutions were made aware of the country's reform achievements, the wider European citizenry perceive the country as associated with unrest and with non-EU values; therefore, it was a tough decision to support Bosnia's accession (Jelisic 2013, p. 38).

In addition to the Western Balkans example given above, a number of different case studies, which will be discussed below, have emphasised how countries can exercise public diplomacy for different goals and target audiences in order to shape their global images. These goals include, but are not limited to, garnering international support for their policies; solidifying regional and international leadership; and promoting foreign trade, investments and tourism. The following section will elaborate on this further.

2.2.3 Approaches to Public Diplomacy

Under the impact of globalisation, countries ranging from major to regional and even small powers have pursued different approaches to public diplomacy activities to suit their interests. Let us take as an example the US's well-developed public diplomacy strategy, which is driven by its foreign engagement with the world's issues. Since 1950, the US's public diplomacy has been advanced by special agencies, such as the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the US Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs (Arsenault, 2015). The growing interest of the US in developing its public diplomacy was linked to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center as this left a deep feeling among US officials that their traditional diplomacy was unable to ensure understanding of the US's policy or even explain it to people across borders (Fitzpatrick 2011. p, 6) This feeling was clear in President Bush's famous speech "Why do they hate us?"[10]. Consequently, the US administration invested heavily in its strategic public diplomacy budget, aiming to improve its image among foreign people, particularly from the Arab world. As a result, the US's public diplomacy after 9/11 focused on investing in mass media campaigns, including establishing the satellite television station Alhurra (meaning 'The Freedom' in Arabic) and the music radio station Saw (meaning 'Together'), with the aim of

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[10] 'Why do they hate us' is the question former US President George Bush asked America after 9/11 event. (2001). Transcript of President Bush's address. CNN. *http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/* [Accessed 6 May 2019].

advertising the US's values as democratic, individualistic, pluralistic and free (Perl, 2007).

On this front, Mohammed El-Nawawy's (2007) study on the effectiveness of US public diplomacy in the Arab world suggests that the US media attempts failed to achieve any measurable positive effects in improving the image of the US or the understanding of its policies in the Arab world because the message, which aimed to promote the US's democratic values, contradicted US foreign policies in the Arab world. This was especially the case with its invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, which resulted in increasingly negative opinions of the US among Arabs. However, the US's desire to reach the Middle Eastern audience appears to have changed as a result of this failure, and the US has opted to be disengaged from supporting democracy in the Arab world.

Some authors have focused on the public diplomacy experiences of states beyond the US such as Melissen (2011) who suggests that public diplomacy can even be practised by small countries for different reasons such as the Netherlands (Melissen 2011, p.14). Although Melissen's work has not covered any Arab countries located in the Gulf region, many of these states have adopted forms of public diplomacy. For instance, Qatar has used the popular Television channel Al Jazeera as a tool of soft power to help to build an image of the country that is democratic with freedom of the press at its core (Al-Khatib, 2013). Qatar's increasing focus on public diplomacy is intended to help to overcome the country's physical weakness pertaining to its (small) geography and demography. Indeed, Peterson (2006), as cited in Al-Tamimi 2012, suggests that small countries turn to public diplomacy for defensive reasons in the face of external pressures from their neighbours with great or regional power, which tend to impose their agendas on them. Small countries befriend larger powers and form alliances, or they use public diplomacy and nation-branding strategies. Against this backdrop, Al-Tamimi (2012) looked at Qatar's public diplomacy and nation branding and suggested that the geopolitical environment that had surrounded Qatar over the last three decades, including the Gulf War of 1990, as well as geographical disputes with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), had created fear among the Qatari government, which found itself compelled to develop strategies to strengthen sovereignty and survival. Moreover, during the anti-government protests that erupted in the Arab world in 2011 – the so-called 'Arab Spring' – Qatar strengthened its political agenda through the use of the Al Jazeera television channel, whose coverage

during the uprising played a major role in highlighting the plight of the demonstrators and their just cause. Al-Khatib (2013) argues that by using public diplomacy, Qatar portrayed a strong image that was unique to the region. Cultivating its international media presence protected the country from various Gulf conflicts. However, while the two Arab scholars Al-Khatib (2013) and Al-Tamami (2012) have discussed small countries' public diplomacy practices, it is surprising that Saudi Arabia, whose public diplomacy emphasises significant humanitarian aid and interfaith and intercultural relations, has not had sufficient coverage among scholars. This study will fill this gap by analysing this major regional power.

It is important to note that because of these limitations in the existing research on Saudi Arabia, the researcher has looked at similar cases, such as Russia, which shares some of the political characteristics of Saudi Arabia as a major regional power with oil wealth that is considered undemocratic and has an image deficit in the West. Still, it will not be able to replace what the Saudi case can offer, and the need to study it individually remains.

Indeed, an equally relevant example where public diplomacy was used to improve a country's image can be found in the case of Russia. From 2004 to 2009, Russian public diplomacy sought to rebrand its image in Europe through a series of image-building strategies. Keen to build up the image of Russia, the Kremlin allocated an enormous budget to image projection (Avgerinos, 2010). In the media, this included various campaigns and the launch of a new TV channel, Russia Today. There were also numerous academic scholarships available within Europe and the US, alongside several festivals that were held around the world, hosted by Russia's most genial entertainers and most popular athletes.

Despite these efforts, the initiatives were largely seen as a failure in improving the image of Russia. The reasoning behind this failure, as argued by Avgerinos (2013), is related to the stark disconnect that exists between what the Russian government does and says in the domestic arena and the image that the Kremlin tries to project to international audiences. This argument can be seen prominently in how the Russian government handled the case of the punk girl band Pussy Riot in 2012, and the global outrage directed at Russia's undemocratic political system (Dinnen, 2012). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the Kremlin's public diplomacy initiatives suffered a similar fate to the US example highlighted earlier in this study. Further, this highlights the significance of domestic policy in reflecting public diplomacy in order for a state

to improve its image perception. As noted by public diplomacy scholar Mitchell Polman (2016):

Public diplomacy is supposed to be about informing others about your society and how things work in a truthful and unvarnished fashion. It is not supposed to be about presenting a pretty picture or covering up warts. Public diplomacy cannot obscure a society's genuine problems or failings.

According to the political scientist Joseph Nye (2004), whom I discuss more below, the way to orchestrate a desired public outreach using diplomacy requires the adoption of a communication strategy that can explain domestic and foreign policy decisions. He warns that mistakes will be made when governments simply explain their strategies to citizens at home and fail to realise the impacts of their actions on their images abroad. This is an important idea that will be looked at in light of the hypothesis proposed earlier in this thesis.

2.3   Soft Power

In recent years, the debate among scholars and diplomats on public diplomacy has emphasised the importance of soft power in meeting a government's desire to influence foreign publics. The seminal work *'Soft Power': The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004) by Nye put forth the term soft power well in advance of the tragic events of 9/11. Nye argues that there are three ways that a state can accomplish foreign policy objectives: force with a threat, persuasion with payment or persuasion with attraction (Nye 2004. p,). He coined the term soft power to explain the third approach – the power that comes from attraction. In other words, it relates to a country accomplishing its foreign interest goals because others admire it. However, Nye's definition of soft power has been widely contested by scholars such as Mattern (2005) and Ramos and Zahran 2010 (cited in Saleh, 2011) for failing to theoretically distinguish between the 'hard' and 'soft' resources that are often attributed to a state's ability to influence others. Gray (2011) argues that hard power must remain the fundamental aspect of conducting foreign policy because soft power is inappropriate for policy and control trends because it relies heavily on personal perception of foreign countries (Gary 2011, p. ix)

Lee (2009) also challenges Nye for not distinguishing properly between the soft and hard elements of power and how soft power can never really be 'soft' when

exercised by powerful states like the US. Instead, he proposes that what actually distinguishes 'hard' and 'soft' resources is the method of employing power, arguing that 'hard power' resources can be used as a way to attract, as soft power resources can be seen as forced. The present researcher argues that Saudi Arabia offers a rare example that reflects Lee's critique; as later chapters will illustrate, the kingdom vacillates between using 'hard power' and soft power, specifically between using Islam and oil as sources of influence. However, even its hard power (oil) is always used for soft power purposes, for example making humanitarian aid contributions. Lee further notes that having soft power resources does not necessarily mean that they should be employed for soft power purposes. He states: "being able to exert soft power is dependent on being able to categorize and implement resources to persuade others to meet state policy goals" (Lee 2009, p. 2).

2.3.1   Sources of Soft Power

Scholarly discussion around the implementation of soft power and its benefits remains dependent on the reasoning behind such methods. Using 'soft power' resources denotes that the state wants more than simple image control or popularity. In this circumstance, Nye (2004) classifies three primary sources of soft power: cultural identity, domestic values and foreign policies (Nye 2004, p.11). However, even within this categorisation, the implementation of soft power is often varied. According to Nye, soft power comes from the attractive elements of a country's character, such as its culture. These can be societal knowledge, beliefs, morals, laws and customs. He argues that if a state's culture is attractive, this can form trust with people overseas; hence, governments could build on such value to reach political goals. (Nye 2004, p.7).

2.3.2   Culture

Within the context of culture, Hong (2011) describes public diplomacy as an act that promotes the national identity to impact public opinion. In this regard, Snow and Taylor (2008) looked at the efforts of states to foster pro-Western sentiments in times of conflict, ranging from the Cold War to the War on Terror. Their findings suggest that the US has used the exportation of its popular Hollywood films as a form of soft power to foster pro-West sentiment. However, as a conservative Islamic

country, Saudi Arabia is quite different, where cinemas and films were banned until not too long ago. Therefore, the country has focused on its religious soft power to gain support in the Sunni Muslim world for its policies, which often causes difficulty for Saudi Arabia to achieve the same objectives beyond the Muslim world. Indeed, soft power stems from existing values, but only those values that support democracy, universal ideals and human rights. These very powerful sources of attraction are highlighted by Nye (2004, p.7), who further argues that:

Countries that are likely to be more attractive in postmodern international relations are those that help to frame issues, whose culture and ideas are closer to prevailing international norms and whose credibility abroad are reinforced by their values and policies (Nye 2004, p.7),

2.3.3   Political Values

Conversely, according to Nye (2004) soft power can also exist in the form of a political system. When government policies at home and abroad seem fair and legitimate, this can lead to power (Nye 2004, p. 11). While Nye illustrated the racial segregation policy that occurred in the US during the 1950s, as an issue that undercut the soft power of the nation in Africa, several studies, including that of Walt (2005), and Seib (2009) have drawn a connection between a state's loss of soft power and its policies. Walt (2005) argues that the most beneficial solution for US public diplomacy post-9/11 would have been to correct its foreign policy, rather than to exert its soft power to cover up its negative image (Walt 2005, p. 119). Philip Seib, director of the Center on Public Diplomacy in the US, reiterates this sentiment by expressing doubts regarding the effectiveness of public diplomacy that lacks support from substantive policy initiatives: "Public diplomacy cannot proceed along its own path. It must be directly linked to policy and enhance that policy" (Seib, 2009). However, the impact of domestic policy on public diplomacy initiatives has received little academic research, this thesis aims to fill this gap by focusing on studying Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy to expanding the scholars' arguments on the importance of policies to ensure successful public diplomacy.

2.3.4　Non-State Actors

As argued earlier in this thesis, soft power can be developed beyond the direct role of the government. Hockings (2004) emphasises the role of NGOs and international businesses in using public diplomacy to sway public opinion and consumers in a way that is more influential than top-down directives ordered by central government. Other social scientists who have debated this include Cull (2009), Sharp (2009) and Melissen (2005, 2011), who have emphasised the role of non-governmental actors or NGOs and their part in facilitating soft power programmes.

At the beginning of the 21st century, many governments turned to such organisations to build trust and promote understanding in foreign countries, as opposed to official diplomats. Advocacy groups, businesses and educational establishments were found to be more likely to build trust and forge alliances. Nye's (2004) theory behind soft power is that in order to transform resources into power, a well-designed strategy must be in place to obtain the desired goals. Despite resources such as large populations, economic wealth, military forces and social stability, a government does not always get the outcome it would like – it needs a strategy that does not exclude other actors and is aided by innovative branding techniques. For example, the British government in the late 1990s undertook a well-known rebranding exercise, as Prime Minister Tony Blair sought to give the country a renewed identity (Leonard, Small & Rose, 2005). At the time, the Brits were accused of looking backward and being aloof. However, after a sophisticated nation-branding campaign to support public diplomacy was employed, Britain's image became much more dynamic, modern and multicultural (Leonard, Small & Rose 2005).

2.3.5　Nation Branding

The increased reliance on public diplomacy by countries has been facilitated by a number of conceptual developments in separate fields, such as marketing and public relations. In particular, the term 'nation branding' has gained significant traction and relevance, to the extent that it is now widely used by governments in reference to creating a favourable national image through marketing and communication.

An early definition of branding as a means of promoting a positive image was proposed by Doyle (1989), who put forward that "a successful brand is a name,

symbol, design, or some combination, which identifies the 'product' of a particular organization as having a sustainable differential advantage" (Doyle 1989, p. 77). Anholt built on this notion and coined the term 'nation branding' in 1996 to stress the fundamental importance that a nation's image plays in serving multiple national interests (Viktorin, Hecht & Estner, 2018, p. 245). In 2005, he developed the Good Country Index to measure the attractive and weak aspects of countries.[11] It considers elements such as culture, governance, people, exports, investment and immigration – thus assessing the effectiveness of a country's soft power. Saudi Arabia occupies a low rank among all the countries listed in the index, which raises questions about the effectiveness of its public diplomacy in projecting its soft power to foreign publics, which this study will try to demonstrate through examining its public diplomacy.

Before the Good Country Index was established, Manheim (1994) undertook what is now an old yet still relevant study to explore the branding strategies used by small countries to garner positive national brand images. His study, one of the very few on Middle Eastern countries, investigated how Kuwait sought to actively manage its image during a period marred by conflict by creating a quasi-governmental body to help to transform American opinions towards the country. The committee focused strategically on the contrasting values and governance between Kuwait and Iraq by highlighting the relative freedom of women in Kuwait in comparison to Iraq, as well as demonising Saddam Hussein by encouraging comparisons of him to Adolf Hitler in Western media.

It can be said that the recent trend in which countries are beginning to gravitate towards engaging in the practice of nation branding – with the hope that it will improve the image perceptions that foreign audiences have towards these countries – has driven many countries to use advertising and marketing techniques just as private companies do when looking to sell their products. This has resulted in a conceptual convergence between the roles of public diplomacy and nation branding in projecting a positive national image. Al-Tamimi (2012) argues that nation branding and public diplomacy have a complementary relationship. Nation branding seeks to raise awareness of a country's identity through innovative marketing and advertising techniques, while public diplomacy creates an understanding of that identity to achieve political goals

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[11]   The Good Country. (2019). About the good country index *https://www.goodcountry.org* [Accessed 6 May 2019].

(Al-Tamimi 2012, p. 27). This is because the nation-branding process places emphasis on elements of excellence and uniqueness in a state's identity, while public diplomacy focuses on the mutual elements that are shared by nations to reach out to other countries (Al-Tamimi 2012, p. 27).

To sum up, a variety of studies have investigated national images, emphasising the elements that are required to build a nation's brand. These elements include, but are not restricted to, the following:

1. The political will, meaning that the nation's leaders should adopt and approve the nation-branding strategy. Anholt (1996), who used to train heads of state and governments, contends that brand management should be included in national policy, not just implemented as a short-term campaign (Dinnie 2007, p. 20).

2. The commitment from executive and legislative authorities to developing a nation-branding plan of action. Governmental departments and bodies must work together to produce a harmonious and compatible environment for the realisation of this.

3. Paving the way for the enactment of laws to make the nation branding functional and successful. By including nation branding in a creative long-term strategy, it can capture the essence of the state and societal culture. Additionally, this message should represent the collective vision of society.

4. As the brand-building process requires a long-term commitment, ensuring collective participation is key. Figures from the wider community, such as academics, artists, religious figures and more, should be invited to participate.

5. Brand ethical considerations should be taken into account, acknowledging the limits of appropriateness when it comes to treating nations as brands.

6. Making resources and infrastructure available to all parties and helping them to effectively participate in the building of the national brand.

7. Utilising all channels and communication tools to deliver the message to citizens and to canvass public opinion.

8. Regular monitoring and evaluation to adjust the brand as determined via feedback, helping to create longevity in the minds of the public.

2.4   Problem Statement, Purpose and Objectives

Looking at the current literature surrounding public diplomacy, scholars have made significant contributions to expanding the theoretical debate on the role of public diplomacy in international relations, but this has generally been in the service of keeping the debate Western centred (in theory and empirical data); hence, there is a lack of a well-formed theoretical framework that can be applied to all countries. There is a need for scholars to expand the discussion in light of experiences in the Middle East (and elsewhere) – places with different geopolitical factors, political ambitions and, of course, cultures. The researcher believes that more research covering the Middle East and public diplomacy initiatives there will not only help in creating a better understanding of the world but will also lead to better conceptualisations of international relations more broadly. As a researcher from Saudi Arabia, I am well positioned to contribute in this area; my family's circumstances have allowed me to get in touch easily with senior officials such as the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the UK Turki Al-Faisal, who kindly agreed to give me a special interview in London. I was also able to reach out to other officials who were reluctant to speak to non-Saudi researchers. My bilingual abilities in Arabic and English enabled me to access English and Arabic material and to conduct interviews with both English and Saudi experts, which added depth and credibility to findings.

2.5   Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the concept of public diplomacy in both theory and implementation while also discussing the different reasons why countries choose to use it. There is a need to examine Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy in light of the theories discussed and where this country fits into these different perspectives. This will be specifically discussed in the following chapter in order to analyse the role that soft power plays in enabling Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy to improve the country's image.

This chapter has clarified that public diplomacy goes beyond communications between state officials, and we thus need to examine how closely this applies in the Saudi case and impacts its ability to influence foreign public opinion in the case of the UK. The chapter has highlighted the importance of public opinion in measuring the

success of public diplomacy. Most importantly, in today's world, public opinion shapers include but are not limited to politicians, citizens and the media.

A comparison between public diplomacy and public relations has revealed a conceptual relationship in that the two concepts may appear linked but are different in regard to how governments employ them. On the one hand, the emergence of advanced technology has also allowed governments to influence public opinion by using different techniques, thereby leading to a convergence of the two concepts. On the other hand, public diplomacy differs significantly from propaganda in that the former is dependent on state policies, which must be credible, while propaganda can misrepresent the truth.

Several approaches are used in public diplomacy, but studies in this field have remained largely Western centred. This is reflected in where the theorising is being done and the locations of the case studies used to develop theories. Widening the pool of case studies, in this case to include Saudi Arabia, will build on some more-recent trends in the field and enrich discussions among scholars.

Chapter 3

Section 1   Saudi Arabia's Soft Power and Foreign Policy

3.1   Overview

This chapter will present a general overview of Saudi Arabia's soft power, arguing that the country has been successful in implementing foreign policy objectives based on religious soft power in the Muslim and Arab world. Since the Arab Spring, we have witnessed a change towards some hard power tactics in its diplomacy. This was highlighted by the repression of the Bahraini uprising in 2011 (Mabon 2015, p. 72). Arguably, Saudi Arabia's policy might be aptly labelled 'smart power'. This can be traced back to the way that Saudi Arabia has used religion and oil revenues to garner support from local populations in a number of developing countries by building mosques and religious centres. Yet it is questionable whether it has been able to pursue a similar approach among non-Muslims in the West. While the use of oil has helped Saudi Arabia to become a friend and ally of Western governments, it has not enabled it to win over the publics of those countries with its past and indeed current soft power strategies. It remains the case that the citizens of Western countries have a negative image of Saudi Arabia (*See Section 1.6*). However, while Saudi Arabia is turning towards a new opinion policy, it is important to ask what public diplomacy efforts have been made to overcome this dilemma using soft power and whether they have had any significant impact, given that its domestic and foreign policy is driven by two key objectives: maintaining national security and maintaining regional leadership in the Middle East. This chapter will examine how Saudi Arabia has used its soft power assets to advance its foreign policy agendas and how these efforts have evolved over time to incorporate different approaches to public diplomacy.

Part two this chapter will examine Saudi Arabia's soft power in terms of addressing image crises, using the UK as a case study. It outlines the evolution of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy strategies using different approaches towards the UK in order to understand the various diplomacy tactics that have been used in response to certain incidents that damaged the country's public image.

3.2   Saudi Arabia's Soft Power

The changing phases of Saudi foreign policy are of immense interest to those studying international relations generally and Middle Eastern politics in particular. The current state of research focuses on the obvious disparity between the way that the government pursues its foreign and domestic policies. When looking at the changes in Saudi foreign policy, it is necessary to look at the country's geopolitical position and its roles in oil production and global counterterrorism. Furthermore, the stability of the Middle East lies at the heart of Saudi Arabia's main foreign policy objectives and the way that the kingdom seeks to balance different interests in a situation of general disequilibrium and power imbalances.

The current balance of power in the Middle East can be traced back to the 1973 oil embargo (Siniver 2013, p.4). During that time, Saudi Arabia became a regional leader in the Middle East and was seen as a promoter of Arab interests throughout the region. While its Islamic status could facilitate domestic and regional support, its role as the major oil producer meant that it could put pressure on the US to rethink its relations with the State of Israel (Siniver 2013, p.4).

3.2.1   Mediation

Over the past few decades, Saudi Arabia has taken on the role of mediator (Craze & Huband 2009, p.115). It has been able to do so by using its spiritual and political weight. Hence, Saudi Arabia has aimed to maintain the unity of the Arab people during a number of regional crises (Craze & Huband 2009, p.115). The positive role played by Saudi Arabia can be highlighted in the Lebanese Civil War of 1975 between Muslims and Shia (Wehrey, Karasik & Nader 2009, p.91). Here, Saudi Arabia was able to get the parties around a table to sign the Taif Agreement in 1989. By mediating between conflicting countries and parties, Saudi Arabia has hoped to protect itself from the threat of spill-overs (Cordesman, 2004).

Before the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia addressed foreign and domestic challenges by adopting a foreign policy grounded in a major soft power framework based on nonalignment and good neighbourly relations (Gallarotti, 2013). It prided itself on pursuing peaceful diplomatic relations in regard to neighbouring countries' internal matters. While it focused on strengthening its relations with Arab and Muslim countries, it also became a trustworthy ally of non-Arab super-powers. This requires

us to rethink whether it remains valid that foreign policy decisions can openly contradict domestic policies and still be successful, as some suggest that Saudi Arabia holds a double standard in which it asserts its Islamic and Arab support while at the same time standing beside the United States" (Patrick 2008, p. 27).

However, the idea of Saudi Arabia as a trustworthy ally interested in non-interference changed with the beginning of the Arab Spring revolutionary upheavals and calls for social freedoms and democracy in 2011. Saudi Arabia moved from a cautious approach to a more active and interventionist one (Mabon 2015, p. 72). The underlying reasons might be explained by the potential risks that these revolutions posed to its national security. To the surprise of many policy specialists, it repressed the uprising in Bahrain in early 2011 (Mabon 2015, p. 72). This highlighted the lengths that Saudi Arabia was willing to go to if it saw its national security threatened. Saudi Arabia's role was hence more overtly motivated by ensuring its own stability and sovereignty. It is plagued by a deep sense of insecurity driven by its sensitive yet strategic location in the Arabian Peninsula. It is an area dominated by political and military rivalries. Thus, the country uses its role as a regional player to rein in other countries that seek to influence the Middle East, such as Iran and Qatar.

3.2.2 The Role of Islam

This study follows Nye's (2004, p.11) thought of soft power elements, which stems from a country's culture, values and policies, yet the Saudi case demonstrates that aspects of a country's soft power can be driven by 'hard power' assets. This appears to be the case with Saudi Arabia's use of Islam and oil to further its public diplomacy, particularly the use of its theological interpretation of Islam to extend its capacity for regional leadership, supported by its oil wealth. In doing so, Saudi Arabia has been able to promote its foreign policy agenda in the best interests of local populations in the Sunni Muslim world. As the homeland of the two holiest places in Islam, Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia's leadership in the Islamic world is rooted geopolitically. At home, this has facilitated a level of tacit consent in most areas of life between religious and political leadership to a large degree.

Consider, for example, the Saudi flag, one can realize the domination of Islam in form and content. The declaration of faith – otherwise known as the "shahada", which declares the oneness of God and the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad – shows that Islam is the kingdom's primary component and is the main way in which

it relates to other countries. Concretely, this has manifested itself in different ways throughout modern history. For instance, during the Cold War, Saudi opposed the Soviet Union due to its 'atheistic' nature (Bowen 2014, p.10). Similarly, its interpretation of Islam has formed its opposition with countries such as Iran over the question of the Syrian Civil War based on sectarian considerations. Former Saudi King Fahad explicitly stated the congruence of Saudi Arabia's interests with those of the rest of the Arab and Sunni Muslim world when he said, "this kingdom's foreign policy… is linked to the interests of the Arab and Islamic world" (Al-Obathy, 2005).

Domestically, Islam is a source of political, social and cultural values as well as an important part of Saudi national identity. Simply, Islam rules every aspect of life. Thus, it could possibly be argued that underlying the religious soft power approach is a form of coercion, which could be deemed a type of hard power. In other words, the combination of soft and hard elements of power is a unique blend in Saudi Arabia's policy, which might constitute a form of 'smart power'. Different forms of power have been strategically employed to fulfil different objectives and to cement the primary role of Islam at home and abroad.

Yet religion should be regarded as an asset of soft power in so far as the Saudis consent to the ruling family's authority and their interpretation of Islamic laws. In fact, this type of rule has endowed Saudi Arabia with a level of credibility that no other country in the Middle East has. Part of this credibility is derived internationally through its role in providing the resources and infrastructure for the *hajj* (pilgrimage) that is performed by millions of Muslims from around the world every year (Cochrane, 2018). Saudi Arabia honours the Muslim tradition and its theological tenets through its deployment of financial and human resources for this annual pilgrimage (Cochrane, 2018). It has innovated crowd-control techniques to safeguard the health of pilgrims from more than 140 countries (Sleigh, Leng & Hong 2006, p. 272). This cannot be underestimated, given that the number of pilgrims tripled between the years 1970 and 2012, amounting to more than three million (Al-Arabiya, 2012). In 2011 alone, over $21 billion was allocated to the fourth expansion of the sanctuary in order to accommodate the increased number of pilgrims and ease their movement between the ritual sites (Butt, 2011). The complex nature of this task requires financial and economic resources, and Saudi Arabia has continued to provide these to the rest of the Sunni Muslim world. In fact, the majority of Saudis pride themselves on the fact that their country looks after Muslims from around the globe during the holy month.

Another form of soft power that has built up Saudi Arabia's credibility in the Sunni Muslim world is the establishment of organisations that support Islamic causes around the world. For instance, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is funded largely by the Saudi government, with some help from the other 56 member states, and is a prime example of an organisation that aims to protect Muslim interests worldwide (Oxford Business Group 2014, p. 78). The funding of these organisations and volunteer groups helps to promote Islam in poor countries. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, this practice of funding charitable endeavours was criticised by policy experts for supposedly funding al-Qaida-linked groups (Kaplan, 2006). While support continues, Saudi has responded to the accusations by tightening controls and supporting governmental institutions within these Islamic countries (Merritt 2010, p. 35). This again highlights the extent to which Saudi Arabia deploys a form of 'smart power'. This allows it to negotiate with the western countries while also maintain its close relations with Islamic Sunni states, which look to Riyadh for financial and moral support.

Outside of the Muslim world, the approach has been one of building mosques and financing Islamic centres in places with large Muslim populations. Today, there are more than 210 Islamic centres worldwide that Saudi Arabia has sponsored (Inge, 2016). Even in areas where the Muslim communities are not large, Saudi Arabia has built small mosques at 1,500 locations in across the world and 2000 Islamic Centres (Igne 2017, 28). It has been estimated that Saudi Arabia has donated between $70 billion and $90 billion since the 1970s to such projects (Bendle 2007, p. 4). This arguably constitutes an unprecedented level of soft power. The example of granting up to one million Swedish kroner in financial assistance to the Al-Salam School, in the city of Orebro, is another striking example of how Saudi Arabia aims to re ach out to Muslim communities in the West through its use of soft power (Sputnik, 2018).

Arguably, Saudi Arabia's support towards the Muslim Sunni countries arises from the sense of the Islamic unity, it is undeniable that that these contributions also advance Saudi Arabia's foreign politics overseas (Haynes 2007, p. 18). These practices are systematically different to those of the US, which seek to use forms of coercion and the deployment of military might to gain an advantage on the world stage. As a consequence, the kingdom has made significant use of soft power and 'hard power' to secure its political goals and overcome obstacles.

3.2.3   Financial Aid and Humanitarian Assistance

The majority of Western countries have embraced foreign aid as an instrument of soft power to accomplish their political and economic aims (*Borger*, 2012). As outlined in the previous section, Saudi Arabia's foreign economic aid goes to poor Muslim countries and those affected by disasters (Al-Yahya & Fustier, 2011). Yet, as a member of the G20, Saudi Arabia has allowed poorer nations to default on their loans. These defaults amounted to nearly $103 billion in 2013, and Saudi Arabia has waived more than $6 billion of debt owed by the least-developed countries (Okaz, 2018) and has donated $500 million dollars to the World Food Programme (AFP, 2008). The country contributes up to four per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) annually to foreign aid, which places it as the most generous country in the world if measured by the percentage of national income spent on aid (Al-Yahya & Fustier 2011, p. 4).

In this way, Saudi Arabia has gained a foothold in areas that for two centuries had been mainly under a Western sphere of influence. In doing so, it has extended its own influence in many poor countries. This is exemplified by Saudi Arabia's offering of a $220 million donation to flood-ravaged Pakistan in 2010 (Saudi Embassy in Washington DC, 2010). Here, Saudi Arabia surpassed the pledges of all the European donors put together - $209 million (Al-Yahya & Fustier 2011, p. 4). However, this is nothing novel, between 1975 and 2005, total Saudi grants to developing countries amounted to $90 billion (Al-Yahya & Fustier, 2011). This amounted to 3.7% of its annual GDP, which was higher than the UN 0.7 per cent GDP target for development assistance and four times the average achieved by member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Al-Yahya & Fustier, 2011).

There are not many countries that offer financial aid programmes to poor nations without receiving anything in return. Saudi Arabia's foreign aid seeks to win the 'heart and minds' of locals in these poor areas. However, there is no empirical evidence that the Saudi financial aid served the country's long-term or short-term interests. A prominent example that highlights the contradictory effects of financial aid is the Iraq–Iran War in 1988. Back then, Saudi Arabia financially supported the Iraqi army against Iran (Illahi 2018, p. 264). It aimed to stop the Iranian regime from making headway in the region after the 1979 revolution (Illahi 2018, p. 264). Nonetheless, this assistance quickly worked against Saudi Arabia when Iraq used

Saudi money to improve its military infrastructure and then attack the Arab Gulf states known as the GCC in 1990.

One of the rare studies on the role of the Saudi humanitarian aid as a means of soft power was conducted by Al-Yahya and Fustier (2011). They suggest that, currently, Saudi Arabia remains unable to capitalise on the high levels of aid it makes available to poor countries to improve the country's image beyond the Muslim world. They argue that one underlying problem might be the manner in which Saudi Arabia seeks to publicise itself and consciously mediates its soft power initiatives. Saudi Arabia does not publicise its foreign aid activities or tell the world what it is doing (Al-Yahya and Fustier 2011).

There is another reason that could be attributed to cultural factors, such as the Arabic/Islamic proverb: "Spend with your right hand what your left hand doesn't see." In other words, one should not publicise their own generosity to show off. However, Saudi Arabia's generosity in donations must be promoted to inform public opinion overseas so that they may understand the country better.

3.2.4   Oil as a Tool of Soft Power

As seen in the previous section, Saudi Arabia has been especially astute in balancing 'hard power' and soft power initiatives, which has enhanced its foreign policy. Saudi Arabia's oil wealth, although considered a 'hard power' asset, can be seen as a resource integral to its soft power strategy. With the world experiencing increasingly scarce resources, this will test the state's ability to manoeuvre in new environments and to meet the challenges of global instability and volatility. So far, its vast oil revenues have helped the country to increase its financial support as outlined above. Oil revenues are used as a strategic tool in its foreign policy and aid programmes, as it can use it to serve a soft power goal such as extend its influence and create unprecedented levels of dependence even in some of the strongest countries, such as the US and the UK.

This highlights the fact that other countries legitimise Saudi Arabia due to its large oil reserves and power over global oil supplies. Saudi oil reserves makes up a fifth of the world's total oil reserves (Hussein 2012, p. 29). Saudi Arabia's oil output was recently estimated in to be 9.25 million barrels per day (Tollitz 2005, p.18). These oil reserves have also allowed it to circumvent a familiar fate that has plagued many other Arab countries in the wake of the Arab Spring. In the immediate wake of the

Egyptian revolution, Saudi Arabia increased its own social welfare spending. This dampened the mood for protests within the country, and it did not have to resort to violently suppressing protest movements as other Arab leaders were forced to.

Moreover, shortly after Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak stepped down, Saudi Arabia took the lead to help the economy to recover and to orient it towards long-term investments. Saudi Arabia agreed to lend Egypt $5 billion to boost economy (Werr, 2013). Internally, the Saudi king proposed a massive economic and social benefits programme worth over $130 billion for Saudis (Laessing, 2011). In doing so, Saudi Arabia used its 'smart power' and lent a helping hand to those who would seek to defend its interests in Egypt, rather than leave the revolution-torn country's future to fate. It could even be argued that Saudi Arabia helped to curb the tide of revolution in the Middle East through financial support initiatives both internally and abroad.

Beyond the Arab and Sunni Muslim world, Saudi Arabia's oil reserves are of global importance, especially for the West, which is energy dependent and has few reserves of its own. Saudi Arabia is one of the founding members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and has long pursued an oil pricing policy that seeks stability to ensure sustained development of the Saudi Arabian economy and social welfare (Saudi Arabia Embassy in Washington DC, 2008). This has been described by King Abdullah Al-Saud the G20 summit in 2008, argued the following: "Our country's oil policy is based on balanced principles, taking into consideration the interests of both the producing and consuming countries" (Saudi Arabia Embassy in Washington DC, 2008). Accordingly, Riyadh has made sacrifices, such as maintaining further costly productive capacity amounting to about two barrels daily for the sake of promoting global economic growth that benefit the interests of all countries (Saudi Arabia Embassy in Washington DC, 2008).

Section 2　Saudi Arabia's Soft Power in Terms of Addressing Image Crises: A UK Case Study

3.3　Overview

This part outlines Saudi Arabia's diplomacy strategies using soft power employed towards the UK. The first section will present a historical overview of Saudi Arabia's diplomatic approach in dealing with two public opinion crises in the UK.

This is because it is particularly important to identify the various diplomacy tactics that have been used in response to incidents that have damaged the country's public image in the UK in the past and thus to set the context. It is also important to understand how Saudi's public diplomacy has evolved until the present day. The section will also review Saudi Arabia's strategy in dealing with two crises: the release of the film 'Death of a Princess' in 1980, and the 9/11 attacks. This section will argue that neither of Saudi Arabia's diplomatic approaches in these cases wholly succeeded in helping to repair its damaged image. However, these incidents caused Saudi Arabia to develop more-strategic public diplomacy based on soft power initiatives. Its current public diplomacy efforts aim to improve the country's image without the need to employ them as a response to specific incidents or crises – as has typically been the case in the past.

In order to convey the importance of Saudi–UK relations and why the UK has been used as a case study in this research, the next section will accordingly present the significance of Saudi–UK relations.

3.4   Saudi –UK Relations

3.4.1   Historical Background

The UK and Saudi Arabia have historically been great allies. Their relations go back a long way, to around the time of World War I. The Treaty of Darin was the primary device that saw the start of formal relations with the UK government (Winegard 2016, p. 264). The significance of this treaty in the history of the UK and Saudi Arabia's foreign relations is paramount because it signified the acceptance of the status of a British protectorate (Winegard 2016, p. 264). The Founder of Saudi Arabia King Abdulaziz also agreed, under the treaty, to join the war against the Ottoman Empire as a British ally (Leiken, 2012). This treaty also went down in history as the first to acknowledge the concept of negotiated borders.

The next milestone in bilateral relations was the Treaty of Jeddah, signed between the UK government and King Abdulaziz (Al-Rasheed 2002, p.48). This was signed in 1927, but the most effective detail that set the cornerstone for diplomatic relations came a year before this, with the UK being one of the first nations to recognise Saudi Arabia as a state (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in London, 2019) Saudi Arabia's independence was recognised and respected, and its sovereignty over

the Kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd was recognised. Saudi Arabia cemented these good foreign relations by opening a foreign embassy in London in 1930. This was even more significant, given the fact that this was only the state's second official foreign affairs body abroad. (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in London, 2019).

3.4.2   The Pillars of Saudi–UK Political Relations

The UK has a good political presence in Saudi Arabia, with an embassy in Riyadh, a consulate in Jeddah and a trade office in Al Khobar (UK Department for International Trade, 2019). Saudi Arabia has an embassy and a consulate in London, too. Globally, Saudi Arabia is a good ally to have for two main reasons: (1) out of all the proven oil reserves, Saudi Arabia possesses the second largest oil reserves (OPEC, Saudi Arabia Facts and Figures 2018), and (2) it occupies a strategic position geographically, hosting the two holiest places in Islam (Mecca and Medina), which gives it influence over Muslims all over the world. This has made it an important political ally for Western nations, including the UK. However, relations are strained by domestic hostility towards Saudi Arabia. Take, for example, when the UK decided to pay respects to the Saudi King's death in 2015 by flying its flags at half-mast on key buildings (Sparrow, 2015). These actions led to a very public backlash and open criticism of the UK's policy towards Saudi Arabia. It was felt that this condoned the human rights violations and suppression of democratic freedoms being committed by Saudi Arabia (Williams, Groves & Sime 2015). Politicians were quick to criticise this move too, citing Saudi Arabia's lack of basic women's rights and alleged promotion of extremist interpretations of Islam (Sparrow, 2015).

There was a lot of pressure on Saudi Arabia at the time because of the lack of freedoms in the country, as represented in the case of the Saudi blogger Raif Badawi.[12] Prince Charles raised this issue in a private meeting with the government of Saudi Arabia and received a "friendly response" (Spencer, 2015). However, Prince Charles's visit to Saudi Arabia, to reinforce relations, presented an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to take advantage of the press coverage to project Saudi Arabia's soft power of culture. This incident highlights the paradox of how Saudi Arabia's has lost opportunities to present its image in a good light, especially when addressing liberal countries (such as

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[12]   Raif Badawi was a 31-year-old Saudi blogger who was flogged because he raised concerns about the Saudi religious establishment on the Internet.

the UK), as the UK press decided to focus mainly on the case of the blogger. In the same year, a British citizen, Karl Andree, was another case that sparked outrage among the UK public, as well as many in the UK Foreign Office. The 74-year-old faced the prospect of public flogging because of his storage of homemade wine in Saudi Arabia, which attracted the sympathy of many human rights activists in the UK (Hope, 2015).

However, even before these incidents, which occurred in conjunction with preparing this thesis, Saudi Arabia and the UK's ties had been hit by constant scandals. One of the earlier scandals that blew up and became a big international problem was the UK television film 'Death of a Princess', which aired in 1980. This film tells the story behind the execution of a princess and her lover, who were punished for the crime of adultery (Section 3.8 will elaborate on this case.). This was viewed so negatively by the Saudis that the UK ambassador was expelled, and sanctions were imposed (White & Ganley, 1982). Since then, the UK government has faced criticism for turning a blind eye towards many incidents in Saudi Arabia, with human rights violations being at the heart of the criticism.

The Campaign Against the Arms Trade, or CAAT, as it is more commonly known, has been blunt in its criticism of the UK government for its arms sales to Saudi Arabia (Wearing, 2016). The CAAT believes that the real problem is not that the UK government has an approach with Saudi Arabia that it has not been able to explain to its people – the problem goes deeper than that. The real issue, according to the CAAT, is that the UK is turning a blind eye to human rights violations in the interest of arms sales (Wearing, 2016). However, from the Saudi side, the Saudi government has failed to engage with the UK press or explain its position; instead, it has used a tough policy by threatening the UK government with economic sanctions in order to control situations. It cannot be denied that from a political perspective, maintaining good bilateral relations between the UK and Saudi Arabia leads to benefits for both nations.

3.4.3   Trade and Counterterrorism

Trade relations between the UK and Saudi Arabia are of great importance. Saudi Arabia is the UK's primary trade partner in the Middle East. Saudi and UK companies have more than 200 joint ventures value of these ventures approximately $17.5 billion (Arab News, 2018). The year 2007 was a key year that cemented economic relations between the two countries due to a military agreement, as the UK

agreed to supply Saudi Arabia with Eurofighter Typhoons in a multi-billion-dollar deal (Pfeifer, 2009).

There was a kink in relations in 2006 over this understanding, when Saudi Arabia was displeased with the UK and voiced its opinion that it would not continue cooperating if the UK did not end its investigation into corruption allegations against the UK aerospace company BAE Systems (Leigh & Evans, 2006). This investigation was being conducted by the Serious Fraud Office over the Al-Yamamah arms deal. This investigation was eventually shelved, with national security cited by the UK government as the reason (Leigh & Evans, 2006).

Counterterrorism is another important issue that the two countries have often clashed on but have managed to maintain an important level of cooperation. Intelligence information is an important pillar that the UK values highly. The most telling strain between the two countries regarding this started because of a 2013 Parliamentary report[13], which looked into relations between the UK and Saudi Arabia. A year before, when the parliamentary inquiry was announced, Saudi Arabia was not pleased with the decision and announced its displeasure by clearly stating via the Saudi ambassador to the country that any such parliamentary inquiry would lead to negative consequences in bilateral relations between the two nations (Gardner, 2012). At the time the report was published, relations between the two countries were going strong, with Saudi Arabia being the UK's biggest market in the entire Middle East and Saudi Arabian investments in the UK being worth approximately £62 billion (Dunn & Holmes 2017, p. 14). Relations had grown especially strong in the past half a decade, with the UK granting export licences worth almost £4 billion in defence equipment contracts (Elgot, 2017). The UK Foreign Affairs Committee, however, was concerned with any supply of weapons to Syrian rebels from the Saudi government for the purpose of overthrowing President Bashar Al-Assad in the war that had ravaged Syria since 2011 (Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2013). Members of Parliament described Saudi Arabia as "part of the problem as well as part of the solution" when it came to counterterrorism efforts. The report also warned that ending

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[13] Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons. (2013). The UK's Relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Fifth report.
https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmfaff/88/88.pdf [Accessed 17 June 2019].

arms sales would lead to significant costs for the bilateral relations between the two countries (Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2013).

The UK government has often encouraged the Saudi government to make sure that there is greater monitoring of support or funding that goes to any extremist organisations. The UK government has not stepped in or interfered with any legitimate promotion of religious values by the Saudi government but has asked the government to make sure that such promotion does not end up promoting the causes of any extremist organisations (Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2013). More broadly, Syria has been a recurring bone of contention between the two countries, with the UK asking the Saudi government to provide an assessment of any action that the government is taking to prevent or monitor Saudi rebel groups. That Saudi should not fund or arm Syrian rebels has been a position that the UK has refused to budge from and has maintained a consistent message over.

However, the lucrative Saudi market has proven a big enticement for the UK government when it comes to dealing with the country. February 2014 again brought about a positive agreement, where BAE Systems agreed to provide 72 Eurofighter Typhoon jets to the Saudis (Neate, 2014). The net worth of these jets came to approximately £4.4 billion (Neate, 2014). This move, however, was also doused in controversy, with the book *Deception in High Places* (2014) proposing the theory that money reaching tens of millions of pounds was being collected by Saudi princes in exchange for awarding arms contracts to UK firms. The author of this book, Nicholas Gilby, claims that between 1989 and 2002, BAE Systems provided over $60 million of such commissions (both monetary and gifts) to the Saudis to aid contract awarding (Gilby 2014, p. 39). All of this is against the backdrop of Saudi Arabia seeing the UK as a key ally with which it is keen to strengthen relations beyond the military.

3.4.4   Cultural Relations

At the dawn of the 20th century, before the foundation of modern Saudi Arabia, British political envoys and orientalists travelled to the Arabian Peninsula and performed a pivotal role in organising Arab revolts to remove the Ottomans from the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant (Winegard 2016, p. 26). Many documented their experiences, writing about the beauty of the Arabian Peninsula's deserts, culture and Bedouin lifestyle (Al-Neami, 2013). For example, the British political envoy St John Philby wrote over ten books detailing his expeditions and his travel across the Empty

Quarter desert Rub' al Khali on a camel, proclaiming "I do not know anything more pleasant than travelling on a camel in a new land with a group of Arabs" (Sati, 2003).

Cordial diplomatic relations have been maintained to the present day. A number of UK diplomats have attempted to deepen the links between the two states through integration with the Saudi general public, such as Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, a former UK ambassador to Saudi Arabia.[14] His outings with Saudi friends were enthusiastically reported by local newspapers, quickly ingratiating him as a well-liked personality and nicknamed 'Abu Henry' by locals (Black, 2007). Official visits between representatives of the two states have often mixed diplomacy, spectacle and a degree of intimacy surpassing formalities. In particular, on trips to Saudi Arabia, the British royal family have engaged with the public beyond the requirements of diplomatic protocol. Princess Diana visited Riyadh in 1987 to attend a horse race, and the princess met ordinary mothers and handicapped children in the city's paediatric hospital (YouTube, 2010). More recently, former Prime Minister David Cameron was pictured meeting female law students to learn about the steps that Saudi women are taking towards equality (Jeffery, 2012).

The close relationship between the Saudi and British royal families is well documented. Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone, became the first Western woman to be invited by the Saudi royals to travel to Saudi Arabia in 1938 (Morris, 2011). Her trip to the Jeddah harbour and Mecca gate made history by opening up an environment not usually allowed to women (Morris, 2011). Saudi kings have regularly gifted exquisite pieces of jewellery to British royals, particularly Queen Elizabeth and Princess Diana, who have both been pictured wearing them at public events (Hodgkin, 2018). Moreover, members of the Saudi royal family have a number of close personal friendships with the British royal family (Freeman & William, 2014). Saudi Intelligence Chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan's close friendship with Prince Charles began when they attended an elite training school for British Royal Air Force officers. Bandar was one of only eight foreign royals to attended Prince Charles's wedding to Camilla Parker Bowles in 2004 (Freeman & William, 2014).

More than 30,000 UK nationals live and work in Saudi Arabia (Bradley, 2003). Although the cultures of the countries do not have many prima facie similarities, people-to-people interaction between the countries is nonetheless growing. Around

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[14]   Sir Sherard Cowper Coles was UK ambassador to Riyadh Saudi Arabia from years 2000 to 2003.

100,000 Saudi students studied in UK universities between the years 2005 and 2015 (British Embassy Riyadh, 2013). The predominant religion in the countries is different; yet more than 70,000 British Muslims perform *hajj* and *Umrah* every year (*Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons* 2013). Arguably, it is not the cultural differences between the two states (not just the UK and Saudi Arabia specifically, but between any two nations that have different cultures) that prohibit an understanding of the other's culture, but a lack of interaction. With governments forming bridges and the businesses of the countries interacting, cultural interaction is on the rise (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in London, UK 2017). Both countries have, for example, a shared experience of being victims of blatant terrorist attacks in the past ten years. This strengthens the bond between the two countries and binds their anti-terrorism efforts at the governmental level. Former Prime Minister Theresa May said in 2016:

> *Through our close co-operation on counter-terrorism we are succeeding in foiling terrorist plots and a range of threats against citizens in all our countries. For example, intelligence we have received in the past from Saudi Arabia has saved potentially hundreds of lives in the UK.* (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in London, UK 2019).

The importance of good cultural relations is often underemphasised, but the reality is that cultural relations between elites are the roots of good trade relations. While trade relations between Saudi Arabia and the UK are good, an analysis of these relations reveals that there is great official effort on the part of the UK government to increase trade further, though this effort is not equally matched by private individuals. This is often because of a lack of understanding or a misconception regarding what the Saudi lifestyle is and how their businesses operate. However, despite cultural relations not helping in overcoming such misconceptions, business-to-business ties remain important and is always much longer lasting than political ties. Saudi Arabia is aware of this and is keen to encourage the private sector to take the lead in trade. For instance, Saudi Arabia has huge regions where there is a concentration of solar power (Shalhoub, 2017). The government is further developing this resource, and UK companies with the appropriate knowhow can invest in Saudi Arabia, leading to benefits for both nations. Moreover, as Saudi Arabia is moving towards building a

knowledge economy, the UK could be a powerful ally in this endeavour. Vocational education is an important cornerstone of UK–Saudi cultural relations.

Overall, ties between the UK and Saudi Arabia can often become strained because of the different values they hold and the intrinsically different kinds of governmental systems. Liberalism versus conservative monarchism is a problem that rears its head very often. Even though bilateral ties between the two nations have been going on for well over a hundred years, the past 30 years have been the most challenging.

Needless to say, the Saudi–UK relationship is strong on many fronts, but this stems from the fact that the relationship is secured through elite ties, economic deals and security cooperation. Previous studies that have emphasised this unique relationship have not clearly presented the role of Saudi diplomacy in securing a positive image for the kingdom among UK public opinion. The following sections will fill this literature gap by discussing two cases: the film 'Death of a Princess' and the 9/11 attacks, focusing on their impacts on Saudi Arabia's image in the UK. These two incidents are important in the history of the Saudi–UK relationship and for this particular study to build an understanding of the historic evolution of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy practice and strategy, which are at the heart of this study and the discussion in the following chapters.

3.5   Death of a Princess

Saudi Arabia had its first taste of the image of its faith and culture being attacked in the UK in 1980, when two UK journalists produced a docu-drama film about the execution of a Saudi princess. In 1977, Princess Michael, granddaughter of the founder of Saudi Arabia, was executed for having a love affair while married. According to the film, the 19-year-old princess admitted committing adultery and was dragged to a public car park where she was shot in the head. Her lover's head was cut off immediately after she was shot (White & Ganley,1982). The docu-drama did not explicitly refer to Saudi Arabia or its royal family but used the word 'Arabia' to refer to where the event took place (Sasson, 2015).

Saudi Arabia during that period was largely unknown to the UK public, although it was part of the UK imagination through popular stories about Lawrence of Arabia. Still, for many, it was simply seen as a desert with oil somewhere in the Arab

world (Al-Ahmady, 1995). This is unsurprising in so far as the means of communication were not as developed as today in connecting the world and introducing one culture to another. However, it can be said that the country was better known in the political sphere, particularly as the driving force behind the hike in oil that almost bankrupted the British economy in 1973 (Al-Ahmady, 1995, p.131), yet less focus was given to cultural aspects and how the country was governed. Commenting on the impact of the film on the British public, Al-Ahmady (1995, p.131) states:

> *For the first time, something more like a distant awareness of the existence of a country called Saudi Arabia developed amongst the ordinary British public. By the time the affair was over, the ordinary British public had received some images of the country and its own political system and culture.*

The film was something of an 'eye-opener'. UK viewers' reaction to becoming aware of aspects of the social and political system in the kingdom – particularly how issues of sexuality and gender were governed under the strict application of sharia law – was one of shock (Al-Ahmady, 1995, p.134). Thus, the sharp differences in cultural and social customs between the two countries were made manifest in the film and caused a 'culture shock' among millions of UK viewers, many of whom thereafter perceived the Saudis as "brutal and heartless" (Al-Ahmady, 1995, p.134). The reaction to the film among the Saudi royal family was outrage: they considered it an insult to their policies and reputation (White & Ganley,1982).

Perhaps due to this outrage, Saudi Arabia's reaction to the film was tough, emotional and confrontational rather than diplomatic – a complete departure from the Saudis' traditional resort to negotiations, dialogue and reconciliation. This shift was illustrated by their issuing a threat that put pressure on the UK government to ban the film. The Saudis have also spent 500 million dollars on campaign to suspend the broadcast of the film (Jones 2001, p. 2423). When the government refused the demand, a diplomatic crisis developed and the UK ambassador to *Riyadh*, *James Craig*, was ordered to leave the kingdom (Jones 2001, p. 2423). The difference between the values and principles underlying governance in the UK and Saudi Arabia appeared clearly in the words of the British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington, who said he found the film "deeply offensive" and "wished it had never been shown", but "to ban a film

because the government do not like it, or even because it hurts our friends" was not an option for the UK government (White & Ganley,1982). The UK government's stance led Saudi Arabia to apply a number of economic restrictions, such as suspending the issuing of *visas* to British business people (White & Ganley,1982). Additionally, they withdrew the British Airways-operated *Concorde*'s licence to use Saudi Arabian airspace.

Arguably, the tough Saudi diplomatic approach in handling the controversy was related to the fact that the way the story of the princess was portrayed had offended Saudi Arabia's integrity and reputation, given the kingdom's role as a promoter of Islamic ideals, which condemns relationships outside marriage and even gives the state the right to kill adulterers, which is a complicated issue that is rooted in the history of the Arab society and tradition. It was the view of the Saudi royal family that the contents of the film, which focused on the private lives of some of their most prominent members, would tarnish that reputation. (Jones 2001, p. 2423). This was especially because footage of the princess showed her to be socially repressed (Jones 2001, p. 2423).

However, another (potentially more fundamental) factor in accounting for the Saudi reaction was geopolitical. The researcher of this study argues that by the time the film was aired in the UK and other Western countries in 1980, Saudi Arabia had strengthened its international relations, in particular its position as an ally to Western governments, which it relied on as a source of regional strength and leadership. Being exposed as a 'brutal' state during that time was threatening to the Saudi government's political security.

Linking this back to the theoretical section, we can refer to public diplomacy discourse that outlines the importance for a government to address not only foreign governments but also their publics when facing an unexpected image crisis. Saudi Arabia resorted to attacking the filmmakers' credibility by claiming that the film had presented an 'untrue' picture of the kingdom, perhaps to divert attention away from the princess's execution and the repressive situation for women in Saudi Arabia more generally. Moreover, Saudi Arabia at the time did not engage in other public communication activities, nor did its diplomats or officials explain just how the film presented an unfaithful picture of the kingdom, given that the country's judicial system did indeed follow a strict interpretation of Islamic law concerning adultery. Rather, they attempted to prevent the film from being shown through political and economic

means (i.e. by attempting to limit the freedom of the press), thus conforming to the repressive image portrayed in the film.

This discussion is important in terms of accounting for the historic evolution of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy. We see that such a strategy was never likely to be viewed sympathetically in a relatively liberal society such as the UK, where the role of the media and the freedom of expression are seen as essential to its democracy. One reason for Saudi Arabia's failure in dealing with this public opinion crisis was its shortage of resources and experience. Arguably, Saudi Arabia was less than 50 years old when this crisis took place and did not have sufficient mechanisms or many trained advisors to advise the government on how to deal with such sudden events or how to predict the event's long-term consequences on the country's interests. Nevertheless, even though Saudi politicians and diplomats today have better knowledge and understanding of Western states' values and the role of the media in these societies, they remain reluctant to react publicly during public opinion incidents.

This is a problem that continues to exist today, as the image of the kingdom is being damaged by its domestic affairs and practices (e.g. beheading prisoners or flogging journalists). In many of these cases, international criticism is met with silence on the part of the Saudi government, not as an attempt to deny the facts but because this is simply an aspect of the culture of governance. Politicians and diplomats in Saudi Arabia are inconspicuous. From the short review of the literature in Chapter Two, the key pillars of successful public diplomacy should include informing foreign mindsets by being credible and consistent in communications (Ross, 2003); however, most Saudi diplomats prefer not to interact with the media, unlike many of their counterparts in other countries. They prefer to remain silent and not react to real-time media coverage and comment. Possibly, this is due to the Saudi government's non-interference and 'no comment' policy, which is instilled in them during their diplomat training courses. This is why Saudi Arabia usually leaves international outrage and criticism unanswered. Even in the rare cases in which officials do publicly address criticism, they tend to defend their policies, rather than explaining them and identifying how they developed within a specific historical and religious background.

In our preliminary examination of the literature, we drew attention to the fact that many countries suffer from an image deficit due to political decisions or actions. The negative perception of the US in the Arab world is often associated with its foreign policy in the region, one consequence of which is the constant appearance of anti-

American trade boycott campaigns aimed at inflicting economic damage on the US. In contrast, Saudi Arabia's image crisis is often associated with aspects of its domestic policies. This is a historical and ongoing problem troubling the country's image. The negative impact of Saudi Arabia's domestic governance on how the country is perceived abroad is not limited to the West. Its domestic policies have been the target of criticism by many states, some of which have political agendas against Saudi Arabia. Take, for example, in the 1960s, the Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser – well known for his lukewarm attitude towards Saudi Arabia's politics – repeatedly raising the issue of the treatment of women in Saudi Arabia to mock the country's system and to attempt to damage its credibility in the neighbouring Arab region. On many occasions, he used this issue to describe the Saudi ruling system as "backwards" and a "source of repression" (Khalid, 2013). Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia has not often felt the need to react, as it feels secure in its relationships with the world, thanks largely to its oil reserves. Saudi Arabia is aware that the world is dependent on its oil, a 'hard power' asset, which gives it the strength, influence and ability to achieve its political goals, especially during moments of crisis. For example, the OPEC embargo on oil trade, imposed after the Arab–Israeli crisis of 1973 by Saudi Arabia and Arab countries, aimed to inflict economic damage on the US and some other countries due to their support for Israel (Vesethe, 2002). This 'hard power' approach to force its political agenda has gradually become a more common policy that Saudi Arabia uses to protect itself when it feels threatened. This is even demonstrated at present by its oil price policies, which are designed to serve its national goals but not those of its rivals.

It is unfair to say that Saudi Arabia's 'hard power' diplomacy was wholly, or largely, unsuccessful in terms of managing the image crisis regarding 'Death of a Princess'. In one way, it showed a deficiency in the way that the country managed its international relations when faced with damage to its image, as its angry reaction triggered a diplomatic spat with the UK that was too complex to be solved immediately. On the other hand, the Saudis' tough reaction drove many governments, such as those of Sweden and some US states, to accede to the demand not to show the film out of fear of trade sanctions. Arguably, Saudi Arabia's 'hard power' threat influenced the way in which Western governments have dealt with political issues, especially those that have a public dimension. This is demonstrated by a number of other cases; for example, the UK authorities' decision not to give any comments about

granting political asylum to a Saudi princess who had a child with her English boyfriend in 2009, claiming that they did not comment on individual cases (BBC, 2009). It seems likely that in reality their decision was aimed at keeping the case low profile to avoid further press coverage of women's rights in Saudi Arabia, which might have disrupted bilateral relations.

It can be said that after the 'Death of a Princess' incident, Saudi Arabia's way of addressing public opinion in the UK matured in the sense that it now tends to separate the personal issues of the royal family from the country's international relations. This shift can be witnessed by looking at the reaction of the government when handling scandals involving members of the royal family. For example, when the former Saudi Interior Minister Prince Naif was accused by *The Independent* newspaper of ordering police in the country to use weapons "with no mercy" to put down a demonstration that was triggered in the eastern province following the eruption of the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011 (BBC, 2011), the Saudi government chose to resort quietly to a British court to sue the newspaper, rather than escalating the issue and involving diplomats to object to the story (BBC, 2011). This shows greater understanding in Saudi political circles that it is possible to manage public relations and reputational issues without burning bridges with other countries, which is particularly the case post-9/11.

3.6   The 9/11 Attacks

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 were another crisis for Saudi Arabia's international image, considering that 15 of the 19 who committed the attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center were Saudis (Nelles 2003, p. 20). Studying Saudi Arabia's diplomatic approach to dealing with this particular crisis is important for this study to give a historical overview on the various public diplomacy tactics that have been used by the kingdom to restore its image. These tactics are, arguably, significant in understanding how Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy approach vacillates between using 'hard power' and soft power approaches in diplomacy. While the country's diplomatic approach in dealing with the film reflected a hard approach, the next section will demonstrate how the country moved to embracing its soft power appeal instead of 'hard power' and employed persuasive means in order to limit and repair the damage done to its image after 9/11.

It is important to note that although the 9/11 attacks occurred in the US, the negative impact on Saudi Arabia's image was not limited to the US but was also manifest in most Western countries, including the UK. This is unsurprising, considering that 67 Britons were killed in the attack (Cacciottolo, 2011). This was more than in any other single terrorist atrocity, including during The Troubles when the state battled insurgency in Northern Ireland. This drew criticism of Saudi Arabia, which was accused of harbouring terrorists and breeding terrorism (Nelles 2003, p. 20). This section argues that following the 9/11 attacks, Saudi Arabia recognised the importance of public opinion in democratic societies and the role it plays in political decision-making, particularly as non-government entities, such as the media, policy institutions and NGOs, played a role in driving the criticism against Saudi Arabia. These influences began to pressure the UK government into reconsidering the country's relationship with Saudi Arabia, stressing that the relationship with the country should be based on other considerations, such as human rights, and less on oil and trade (Nelles 2003, p. 20).

The researcher argues in this thesis that amid this tension, Saudi Arabia felt the need to employ strategic public diplomacy for the first time to inform and influence public opinion. This part of the thesis will present a critical analysis of these efforts as a way of enhancing our understanding of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy more broadly. Reviewing the available literature on this case, it is possible to say that the use of promotional strategies by using public relations firms characterised Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy during that period, with the express purpose of demonstrating that the kingdom was a partner for the West in its global counterterrorism mission, not part of terrorism (Al-Arfaj, 2013). Saudi Arabia's image in the US and the rest of the Western world, including the UK, was negatively influenced by the revelation of the Saudi involvement in the attack, and questions were raised about whether the West should consider the kingdom to be a friend or a liability, or perhaps even an enemy (Al-Arfaj, 2013). This was reflected by a number of public opinion surveys (as discussed in Chapter 1). In the UK, the home of 67 of the victims of the attacks, the media discussions invariably linked terrorism to Saudi Arabia. According to Al-Qarni (2007, p. 8) the image crisis that faced the country in the UK was media led:

Saudi Arabia's image had faced ... hostile propagandas before, but the one following 9/11 events was the largest in its history. Western media contributed largely to it, with institutional efforts to influence the political, economic and social decisions in the entire region. The distorting campaigns were mainly centred in the United States, but other Western media were part of it, such as Britain.

The UK's political position in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks was very clear. It emphasised how mass terrorism was financed and how the terrorists had managed to move across the different countries (CNN, 2001). The Bush and Blair speeches about the new 'war on terror' and the importance of democracy promotion in the Arab world had a tone that indicated that the US and UK were serious about fighting terrorism, even if that meant they would lose friends – a disconcerting threat to the Saudis, who had hitherto enjoyed tremendous support from its allies. Bush was quoted as saying (BBC, 2004):

As long as the Middle East remains a place of tyranny and despair and anger, it will continue to produce men and movements that threaten the safety of America and our friends. So, America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East. We will challenge the enemies of reform, confront the allies of terror, and expect a higher standard from our friends.

Speculation became rife in media reports and among researchers in the UK as to the causes of the 9/11 attacks, and this centred on the idea of jihad as a primary pillar of sharia law that Saudi Arabia supposedly adhered to, funded and promoted across the world.

Major UK newspapers carried stories with extreme headlines criticising Saudi Arabia, according to Al-Qarni (2007), who claims that the UK press was influenced by the US media. His analysis of Saudi Arabia's image in the UK press between 2001 and 2004 concludes that the major sources from which the UK press drew its information regarding Saudi Arabia were American. Research and policy institutions offered to the British government a number of analyses on a host of issues in Saudi Arabia, including freedom of religion, poverty and women's rights. These worked to bring the UK's relationship with Saudi Arabia into question, leading to the emergence of voices within the UK Parliament who called for 'reframing' the relationship with

Saudi Arabia (Hefer, 2016). Under such pressure, the UK government in turn began to demand accountability from Saudi diplomats, namely the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the UK, Ghazi Al-Ghusaibi, who faced outrage from the UK government after writing a poem one year after 9/11 praising a Palestinian teenage suicide bomber who blew herself up in Jerusalem to kill Israelis (BBC, 2002). At the urging of the Jewish Council of Great Britain, the UK government made its position clear on inflammatory racial pedagogy by sending a letter of objection in the strongest possible terms from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to the ambassador (BBC, 2002). The ambassador was relieved of his duty by the Saudi government, which was unwilling to stoke public opinion against it and confirm accusations of the promotion of racial pedagogy with the 9/11 attacks on the US still fresh in memory.

Aspects of Saudi society that were criticised included the idea that disaffected Saudi youth were easy prey for extremists (English 2011, p.223) As they were often unemployed, socially repressed, youth were becoming full of resentment for the ruling classes and religion, which seemed to dominate their social lives. With no true freedom of political expression, frustration was building in Saudi society. The Saudi school curriculum was considered a platform that taught intolerance at early ages, which had caused the spread of radicalisation across the community (Weinberge, 2017). The influence of the *Wahhabi* creed in all aspects of life and politics in Saudi Arabia extended to Sunni communities in Asian countries, especially through 24,000 schools (*madrasas*) in Pakistan (Culbertson, 2016) and 150 mosques in Indonesia (Varagur, 2017), all created and supported by Saudi Arabia as well as the alleged financing of Islamic jihadi groups as part of Saudi Arabia's duty to support Islamic principles around the world. Private donors and charities had also been given carte blanche by the Saudi government in support of their operation to fight the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, which arguably turned them from a radical movement into organised militants who then embraced Al-Qaida (Hegghammer 2010, p. 26).

From the short review above, it is evident that Saudi Arabia post-9/11 was facing quite different circumstances in public perceptions to those it had with the 'Death of a Princess' crisis. The weak position of Saudi Arabia after the attacks made it almost impossible for the country to confront its accusers, which was a driver that shifted the Saudi government's public diplomacy strategy to focus more on persuasive tactics, relying on soft power. This was quite different from the confrontational and tough attitude that had prevailed beforehand, typified by the way in which the Saudis

expressed their displeasure at the film 'Death of a Princess' and their defiance of any judgement of the Saudi Arabian social system. Possibly, the difference in approach could be due to the fact that Saudi Arabia had been in a stronger position in 1980, sufficient to make it believe that it was entitled to reject any discussion of its internal affairs, while in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, it found it difficult to challenge the revelation of their involvement. However, the shift could also be attributed to the fact that the Saudi government had witnessed the impact of its negative image on national and international interests.

3.7   The Impact of 9/11 on Saudi Arabia's Policy Interests

The negative consequences on Saudi Arabia emerged quickly from various quarters after the 9/11 attacks, specifically in terms of its own public's safety, financial losses and the loss of its global reputation. Many Saudis experienced victimisation and alienation from Western societies as a result of Islamophobia. In the UK, for example, by 2013, half of the UK's mosques and Islamic centres had suffered at least one attack since 9/11; Saudis were also subjected to attacks and mistreatment abroad (Rawlinson & Gander, 2013). Former Saudi Ambassador Turki Al-Faisal commented the following on the UK public's limited knowledge of Saudi Arabia (Butler, 2004):

> *I think there is a view here, that the kingdom and its people are so alien, it's almost as if we come from another planet, with our customs and traditions and religion and our practices. So part of this exercise is to make people here aware that we are as human as they are. The [UK] public is still pretty much unaware of what the true conditions are in Saudi Arabia.*

Saudi travellers were subjected to special security measures that were not applied to others in many Western airports; these procedures involved intensive physical inspections, with dogs at customs and border control. Complaints by students were raised over verbal and physical Islamophobic abuse, especially at US universities, forcing many of them to leave the US to protect themselves (Al-Ahaideb, 2013). The increasing mistreatment drove the Saudi government to warn that they would order all Saudis to return home if the harassment continued (Al-Ahaideb, 2013). Concurrently, many Western businesses began to lose faith in investment in Saudi

Arabia.[15] Small business deals were halted as foreign investors started to view the kingdom as a risky environment and feared that their businesses would be targeted, especially after their personnel became victims of terrorist attacks inside Saudi Arabia, driving many of them to leave the kingdom (Harris, Pelham & Bright, 2002). Talking at his *majlis* (council) to an audience of officials, *ulama* (religious clerics) and businesspeople, Prince Abdullah condemned a perceived foreign media campaign against the kingdom. He said:

> *By now you are aware of the situation and the deliberate and malicious*
> *campaign against our country. You have a duty to explain to those you*
> *know the (real) situation in your country (Al-Awad, 2008).*

However, despite Saudi Arabia's awareness of its image deficit, it failed to address whether it took any responsibility for what had happened, particularly as it insisted on describing the negative public opinion as part of an 'anti-Saudi' campaign by the West.

3.8   World Trade Organization Accession

Besides the accusation of harbouring terrorism, 9/11 made Saudi Arabia vulnerable to accusations on a host of other issues, too such as human rights. Saudi Arabia's accession by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 was a case in point, as negotiations were hampered following the attacks (Ghulam 2012, p. 235) Opposition to the conduct of Saudi Arabia's domestic affairs found cohesion in lobbies from a number of Western governments, who maintained that the kingdom's policies violated WTO principles (Ghulam 2012, p. 235). Two of the reservations came to the fore: the rights of women and the boycott of Israeli products and services. Ghulam (2012) argues:

A number of issues of the Saudi Arabian WTO accession were at the intersection of economy, politics and religion. The Israeli issue can be thought of as purely political. As the WTO accession was distinctly composed of numerous issues and sub-issues, however, it could also be thought of as an issue presented not only for

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[15] This information was discussed during a seminar about the repercussions of 9/11 on the US–Saudi economic relationship (2005). A brief was published in the *Al-Riyadh* newspaper. *http://www.alriyadh.com/70470* [Accessed 20 June 2019].

its own sake, but also to be used as an additional pressure card, or to be traded off against other issues.

The objection to the kingdom's accession to the WTO was organised and official. For example, members of the US Congress opposed Saudi Arabia's accession, demanding that the department of state reject the Saudi proposal unless the country ceased the boycott of Israeli products and cut off financial support for terrorism (Blanchard 2010, p. 36). Further, congressional representatives sought real change regarding human rights violations and religious freedom (Al-Jazeera, 2004). There were demands that Saudi Arabia needed to instigate real change to support women's participation in the economy and freedom and the elimination of cultural barriers (Al-Jazeera, 2004) such as the concept of 'honour', which to them required women to have an existence that was purely domestic.

3.9 Saudi Arabia's Public Diplomacy Post-9/11: A Public Relations Exercise

Saudi Arabia came to understand that neglecting public opinion, or offering 'no comment' on accusations, would result in further harm to its interests. With this in mind, public relations played a critical role in Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy in the aftermath of 9/11. To this end, the kingdom allocated substantial funds following the attacks and hired foreign public relation firms through its embassies to handle its publicity and improve its image. It was understood that between 2001 and 2010, Saudi Arabia paid approximately $100 million to firms in the US to lobby the US government (Stern, 2011). In London, the Saudi Arabian Embassy hired special advisors to undertake campaigns dedicated to the improvement of the kingdom's image, including arranging interviews for officials with different media outlets.

3.9.1 Public Relations Firms

As previously reported in the literature, the use of public relations firms is common for wealthy Arab Gulf states in order to improve their images. As cited in the literature review, Kuwait implemented image and reputation management strategy after its invasion by Iraq in 1990, using the public relations firm Hill and Knowlton to persuade the US public to take a favourable view on US military action in the Gulf War (Doorley & Garcia 2011, p.28).

Ten years after the Gulf war, the Saudis hired two public relations firms, Burson-Marsteller and Qorvis, to lobby in the US for the Saudi cause (Burnham 2013, p. 2). A few days after the 9/11 attacks, Burson-Marsteller bought 20 national newspaper advertisements to promote the historical relationships between the US and Saudi Arabia and to express condolences from Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Qorvis was hired for an estimated $200,000 per month to help Saudi Arabia to improve its image (Burnham 2013, p. 2). There were numerous obstacles facing the Qorvis team: not only had they been tasked with repairing the political damage that had been done to Saudi Arabia's image in the US but they also had to respond to the criticisms levied by the US public. The Qorvis's television advertisements were pulled by cable networks such as the Weather Channel, A&E, Bravo and the USA Network, which said they were inappropriate (Ayed, 2002).

Relating this to the literature review in Chapter two, the Saudi case provides evidence of the similarities in goals between public diplomacy and public relations: they can both manage the flow of information to ensure a positive image. However, it can be argued that in the Saudi case, the country turned to public relations firms to achieve short-term outcomes, possibly because it lacked the sophisticated agencies within its central government to conduct strategic public diplomacy. Strategic public diplomacy was not part of Saudi Arabia's overall diplomacy strategy in this period; it was rather a public relations strategy. However, the matter was given urgency after 9/11, as Saudi Arabia was thrust into debates about terrorism and thus feared that its interests would be affected. Saudi Arabia attempted to overcome the obstacles by hiring public relations companies.

3.9.2   Mass Media Communication

Attempting to overcome the obstacles facing their country, Saudi officials and diplomats were dispatched to give interviews on television shows and in the press to defend the kingdom's position, as well as to engage in public discussion panels at academic institutions and universities (Nelles 2003, p. 20). Saudi Arabia's former ambassador to London, Prince Turki Al-Faisal, stated that he was involved in 1980, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and tempted Saudi youths, including Osama bin Laden, to go and fight alongside with the Afghanis against the Soviet (Bright & Harris, 2003). Nevertheless, Saudis wanted to be heard by the public, not just by the elite, to inform them about the nature of Saudi Arabia's relations with Osama bin

Laden. When the Saudi ambassador to Washington, Bandar bin Sultan, appeared on a US-wide television tour following the 9/11 attacks, he was careful to stress that Saudi Arabia had cut its ties with the Taliban and that bin Laden's Saudi nationality had been revoked ten years before 9/11 (Burnham 2013, p. 1). Further, in 2006 and during an interview with PBS, Prince Turki Al-Faisal rejected in claims that Saudi Arabia funds terrorism and that the majority of its youth are radicalised.

However, Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy went beyond the media and public relations and involved it trying to play a greater role in resolving international conflicts to reduce tension and promote international security. One of the famous initiatives it undertook as part of this strategy was the Arab–Israeli peace initiative (PBS, 2006).

3.9.3   The Arab–Israeli Peace Initiative (2002)

The intellectual and ideological dimensions of the 9/11 attacks had been touched upon by a number of Saudi officials, especially by the foreign policy advisor of the Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal. During interviews, he referred to the link between such acts of terrorism and the lack of a resolution in the Arab–Israeli conflict (Nelles 2003, p. 20). Six months after the attack, Saudi Prince Abdullah proposed a peace plan to solve the conflict between Arabs and Israel (Teitelbaum, 2011). He suggested a complete withdrawal from all occupied territories in Palestine by Israel since 1967, including Jerusalem, in exchange for full normalisation of Arab ties with Israel (Teitelbaum, 2011). The Saudis claimed that that the plan aimed to offer security to Israel and relieve it from regional isolation in the Middle East, which would also guarantee an independent state for Palestine. It is relevant to consider the effect that this initiative had, or was intended to have, on diverting public attention away from any Saudi responsibility for 9/11.

Clearly, a consequence of Prince Abdullah's peace initiative would have been reinforcement of the idea that the kingdom was a peacemaker and partner in international counterterrorism, not part of it. Arguably, this position on the Arab–Israeli conflict was a soft power moves by Saudi Arabia – a particular case that reflected a public diplomacy approach by a non-Western state that aimed at being an international player. It used the soft power of its mediating position in the international stage, especially when it was time to calm the inflamed situation and trouble following the 9/11 attacks and the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising or 'Intifada'. It is possible to say that initiating the peace plan was a creative way to improve Saudi

Arabia's image after the predicament of its perceived 9/11 involvement. The wave of hostility and media responses the attack had generated against the kingdom had been too great to be absorbed by its traditional diplomacy. Significant in the announcement of the plan was the role of US Journalist Thomas Freedman who is believed to have broken the news of the initiative in his New York Times's column.[16] The belief was that by using a Jewish journalist, Saudi Arabia hoped to influence the tide of anti-Saudi arguments and change the sentiments of the media, which was formulated to improve Saudi Arabia's image through a call for global peace.

However, this investment offered little, if anything, to improve its image, according to Burnham (2013), who argues that this was due to the weakness of the Saudi message, which was at best not convincing enough to manipulate Western opinion. It is true that Saudi Arabia tried to react domestically by encouraging its senior religious clergy to condemn Al-Qaida and refute its relevance to Islam. However, such exhortations carried little weight when the voices calling for jihad, with their hostility towards the West, continued at Riyadh mosques.

Relating to the theoretical literature and discussion of Marrow, Brown (2003), Melissen (2005) and Ross (2003) that in order to establish a favourable reputation through public diplomacy, elements need to be developed such as credibility and honesty. A great deal more credibility than just ineffective public relations exercises was indeed needed from Saudi Arabia in order for the country to defend itself against accusations after 9/11.

3.10   Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has argued that Saudi Arabia's diplomacy has vacillated between using diplomatic approaches based on hard power and soft power tactics. It has sought to develop a conscious strategy of 'smart power' by combining the two. Through this combination, Saudi Arabia manages to achieve its goals internationally and domestically. While its use of soft power has been successful in the Arab and Sunni Muslim countries, it is questionable whether the same strategy could gain Saudi Arabia a positive image in the Western world, including the UK.

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[16]   Thomas Freeman's article titled: An Intriguing Signal From the Saudi Crown Prince (2002). New York Times. *https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/17/opinion/an-intriguing-signal-from-the-saudi-crown-prince.html* [Accessed 20 June 2019].

This is because the UK government might be positively inclined towards Saudi Arabia, but its citizens do not entirely see the value of such positive relations in light of the many diplomatic crises.

This chapter has discussed this paradox in light of Saudi Arabia's relations with the UK, suggesting that Saudi Arabia's tough reaction of ensuing diplomatic furore over the film 'Death of a Princess' revealed a deficiency in its international relations toolkit: the lack of mechanisms to handle its international relations during situations where its image and reputation were being damaged. The strategy appeared to develop in the wake of 9/11, as Saudi Arabia's diplomacy became more mature and rational. The country moved towards embracing its soft power appeal ahead of hard power and employed persuasive means to limit and repair the damage done to its image. This approach had its challenges. This chapter has argued that neither of these approaches wholly succeeded in assisting the kingdom in repairing its damaged image, yet these incidents drove Saudi Arabia to develop more-strategic and sophisticated public diplomacy-, which will be discussed in the next Chapter.

Chapter 4

Section 1   Saudi Arabia's New Public Diplomacy

4.1   Overview

This chapter argues that after the 9/11 attacks, it became more imperative for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to introduce internal reform, so as to escape the backlash it received for its alleged extremism that has created misconceptions of the country at different levels. It argues that Saudi Arabia took conscious and dedicated domestic reform measures to gain the faith of both the USA and the UK in terms of working to improve its internal policies. This gradual move towards modernization, in return, has aided sophisticated public diplomacy based on soft power tools to secure a positive image. Focusing on the UK specifically, the chapter puts forth the argument that Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy programs in the UK after 9/11 have been driven and shaped by its domestic reform. Evidence of this can be found in the way that Saudi Arabia has undertaken strategic public diplomacy rooted in soft power such as the use of 'Islam' to advocate interfaith and intercultural coexistence, and 'women' to reflect its move towards modernisation which ultimately reflect a change at the domestic level. But the question remains; whether they managed to change how Saudi Arabia is perceived abroad. This is why studying various forms of public diplomacy is important to answer this question.

The following section will review those internal changes to help gain an understanding of the motives behind the new Saudi public diplomacy practice. This outline will be followed by an analysis of Saudi Arabia's use of soft power in its public diplomacy initiatives and outline limitations and obstacles facing its approach.

4.2   Domestic Reform

The 9/11 attacks and the subsequent criticism of Saudi Arabia's domestic policies played a decisive role in the Saudi willingness to enact reform. As early as 1990, Saudi Arabia moved towards introducing some political reforms (Cordesman & Obaid 2005, p. 361)

While the establishment of the advisory council provided an overture at reform, it did not result in any considerable shift in political power (Freedom House 2011, p. 576).

It was not until the events of 2001 that Saudi Arabia reinvigorated its efforts to pursue changes to its internal policies, economy and society. With King Abdullah's ascendency to power in 2005, Saudi Arabia was under extreme pressure to reform. Trying to achieve an acceptable balance between traditionalism and modernism, the new Saudi policy attempted to adapt traditional values to become more in line with modern requirements (Telegraph, 2015). In spite of resistance from conservative religious establishments that desired to maintain the status quo, the King managed to press forward and enact sizable political change (Burke, 2011). Several key elements advanced a shift towards a more open policy. Key amongst these elements were the personality of the King, the liberal environment he operated in and the fact that his advisors supported a plan to modernize the Kingdom. Abdullah's progressive attitude, compared to his formers, was encapsulated in his saying, "The Kingdom cannot be frozen, while the world is changing around us" (Ramady 2010, p.17). Furthermore, King Abdullah was also renowned for his active support of global coexistence and tolerance (Nkurunziza 2014, p. 93). He was the only Saudi King to publicly condemn religious establishments with hard-line attitudes in the country (Moftars, 2009). In 2001, King Abdullah made his position very clear during a meeting with the senior Ulama, High ranking Islamic scholars, when he warned not to indulge in extremism (Moftars, 2009).

Equally important is the notion that policy reform was necessary for Saudi Arabia in the light of foreign policy conflicts and domestic challenges that faced the Kingdom in the post-9/11 era. The increasing threat of terrorism from Al-Qaida intensified from 2003 to 2007, when the terrorist group repeatedly targeted government sites, oil establishments and civilians (White 2013, p.127). Following a series of terrorist attacks, primarily against Western expatriates and security forces—including car and truck bombings as well as raids by gunmen against civilians (USA International Business Publication 2005, p. 29)—the Kingdom intensified its anti-terrorism efforts. Moreover, the heightened recruitment of young Saudis by terrorist organisations became a source of international embarrassment for Saudi Arabia. Following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, thousands of Saudis embarked on a journey to participate in what they believed to be an anti-American jihad (Wilcke

2009, p. 4). Meanwhile, other recruits centred their efforts on targeting Saudi Arabia for its pro-Western stance and abundance of expatriates residing within the Kingdom (Chandler & Gunaratna 2007, p. 146).

Publicly, the combination of these two factors resulted in growing frustration amongst citizens, and the regime's policies were viewed as a primary culprit of driving the youth to terrorism. The decreasing trust in the government prompted the regime to take immediate measures aimed at absorbing societal upheaval and alleviating any sympathy or support for terrorists. Therefore, a shift towards reform was driven by the need to restore trust between state and society. Amidst policies seeking to re-establish domestic confidence and deter terrorism, the government moved further towards modernisation as it realised it was no longer immune to scrutiny and criticism from its allies. Chairman of a Jeddah-based research centre, told the researcher in an interview during the Gulf Research Meeting in Cambridge in 2015 that Saudi Arabia sought to move away from a policy of isolation and 'exceptional privacy' that permitted certain regulations to distinguish the Kingdom from the international community. The emerging belief towards such a policy was that it not only failed to safeguard the country's interests but also decreased sympathy while consolidating misconceptions about the country's policies across the world. In fact, such an 'isolation' policy made it increasingly difficult for the country to counter deliberate defamation campaigns and in turn influence the internal sphere by undermining trust between the government and its people. As a result, there was a sense of urgency to review public policy, which signalled a shift towards opening up the country's economy and society and re-assessing the ways in which the Kingdom operated and dealt with the outside world.[17]

Another enduring task Saudi Arabia was faced with was re-establishing its relations with its strategic ally, the United States. The impact of 9/11 on the US-Saudi relations resulted in a reform strategy aimed at convincing the world that the Kingdom was an active and cooperative ally of the US-led war on terror. In particular, this meant the enforcement of moderate policy and a heightened response to increasing pressure by Western allies to undertake domestic reform (Nonneman 2007, p.131) This study argues that the implementation of reform in the Kingdom was further accelerated by the fact that the social climate in the country was ripe and ready to absorb change. As the researcher was working as a journalist in Riyadh between the years 2005 and 2009,

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[17]   Interview conducted face to face. August 2015. Cambridge University.

she witnessed that pressure for reform from political activists and intellectuals substantially increased after 9/11. Yet, the advancement of technology aided such demands as it increased awareness and shed light on governmental policies. This resulted in a widespread debate on the performance of governmental institutions, corruption within the judiciary and inadequate civil rights. The people, however, were not alone in wanting reform. The Saudi government itself was a proponent of change. In 2003, the late Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Minister of Foreign Affairs, echoed support for political reform while discussing the need for increased political participation by the public, more openness to criticise the government and the need to better identify weaknesses in order to tackle the challenges of the modern world (Coresman 2009, p.139).

In spite of such calls, political reform naturally took on a slow and gradual path as the regime sought to maintain the power of the monarchy and protect the Kingdom from the perils of hasty reform as far as they could without potentially risking backfire that produced a more extreme and radical Saudi populace. Over the last decade, these steps aimed at reform have focused on human development, restructuring of government agencies, increasing civic engagement, economic reform and the scrutiny of extremist discourse (Buckley & Fawn 2004, p.151) In essence, policymakers in the Kingdom emphasised the need to improve the Saudi standard of living, quality of life and technical capabilities as means of restoring trust in the government. The belief was that this would raise appreciation for the regime and in turn maintain societal cohesion and security (Buckley & Fawn 2004, p.151).

The government was able to introduce these measures by taking advantage of rising oil prices between 2000 to 2007 when the average price skyrocketing from 27 dollars a barrel to 100 dollars, and thus providing a boost to the budget that spurred economic growth and increased public spending (Westelius, 2013, p. 3). As a result, many areas have benefited from such economic and political developments, as the next section will highlight.

4.2.1.1 *Judicial System*

To confront allegations spread in Western media that Saudi Arabia's policies breach human rights at home, the country decided to restructure government agencies so that laws can be passed to direct Saudi Arabia away from isolation and bring it more in line with the international system in terms of economic, social and political

developments. Accordingly, in 2007, King Abdullah overhauled the judicial system and allocated two billion dollars towards building courthouses and providing training for judges (Nawankwo, 2011, p. 72).

Sharia (Islamic law) exists in a legal system without a formal code to adhere to (International Business Publication 2015, p.111). It is such that when a judge decides on matters, including criminal offenses, he simply passes on his own interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence (International Business Publication 2015, p.111). This means that for the same offence, different judges could decree varying punishments. Because of these vagaries and lack of precedence, the government introduced regulations and created specialised courts for the first time (Middle East Institute, 2009).

To rectify these issues, the Kingdom has acknowledged the importance of a modernized judiciary as witnessed by King Abdullah's 'Project for the Development of the Judiciary' in 2007. The project established appeals courts as well as specialized courts that deal with a wide range of issues such as commercial, labour and civil issues (Middle East Institute, 2009). The former were created particularly to address labour issues to fulfil the Kingdom's World Trade Organisation (WTO) obligations and reassure foreign investors of the rule of law (Lippman 2012, p. 27). The project also marks the first instance in which the judicial system has been extended beyond the borders of religious courts. More importantly, restructuring of the judicial system and the introduction of high courts and appeals courts have freed up the Supreme Judicial Council from having to engage in less pertinent legal proceedings (Middle East Institute, 2009). Though reforms introduced to the judicial system represented early signs of increasing human rights, there remains much to be done to achieve a system that champions human rights.

4.2.1.2 *Religious Tolerance*

The violent activity of terrorist groups, such as Al Qaida, inside the Kingdom has again thrust the government into the limelight and actively engaged it in an ideological battle against radicalization (Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington DC, 2019). Such a move was vital for the Kingdom in creating a tolerant image to escape the backlash it received post 9/11 for being a source of exporting radical ideologies. Extremist groups remain steadfast against the government's reformist vision and aim to aggravate and deter policy by recruiting supporters in Saudi Arabia. As a result, the

Kingdom has taken steps that concentrate on eliminating extremism at a grassroots level by targeting conservative members of society who are engaged in the dissemination of extremist ideas over the Internet, in mosques and even in classrooms (Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington DC, 2019). One of these measures to counter extremist influence was a cabinet reshuffle (Nee 2013, p. 4). Conservative religious figures were replaced with a more moderate religious authority (Nee 2013, p. 4). In 2009, the King appointed Abdulatif Al-Sheik as the head of the religious police, known as the 'Commission of Promotion of Virtue and Prevision of Vice,' due to his moderate views (BBC, 2012/a), while dismissing other senior clergy members who opposed co-education in the newly established King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (Burke, 2011).

Nevertheless, at the grassroots level, religious education initiatives were undertaken with the aim of educating imams and monitoring mosques in order to purge extremism and intolerance. To aid this initiative, public awareness campaigns were launched to reinforce the values of the Islamic faith and to educate Saudi citizens about the dangers of extremism and terrorism. Educational curricula have also undergone changes to textbooks to eliminate intolerant contents (Baran & Al Suwaij, 2006). Despite such changes, teachers are still reportedly espousing discriminatory and intolerant views towards non-Muslims and minority sects. The US Commission on religious freedom, established by the Congress in 2010 to assess religious freedom around the world, found that religious curricula in Saudi school continued to include intolerant discourses (United States Department of States, 2010, p. 136). Authors such as Lippman, (2012) argues that it is therefore tricky to gauge whether a nationwide project in 2007, which included 83 school districts in 27 different regions and provinces, succeeded in revising curricula and teaching methods to remove intolerant material and views (Lippman 2012, p. 139).

On the other hand, the Saudi regime has also actively targeted the influence that religious establishments have over the public sphere by attempting to limit the influence of the religious police (Al-ansari, 2012). In fact, in the direct aftermath of 9/11, future King Abdullah and Crown Prince then, addressed the senior religious committee of Ulama saying they haven't been doing enough to condemn extremism (Moftar, 2009). Abdullah's statement was accompanied by a policy that sought to regulate and define more clearly the authority of religious police over members of society. For example, volunteering for the religious police was abolished as a measure

to combat the illegal detainment of people by those not legally employed by the religious police (Al-ansari, 2012). Despite tighter restrictions and leadership changes, many of the above-mentioned problems persisted. That is to say that the measures taken were not sufficient in rooting out the abuses of the religious police and conservative religious factions. Arguably, members within the religious agencies remained steadfast in opposition to the implementation of the proposed reforms (McDowall, 2012).

The efforts of King Abdullah to contain the influence of the religious police stemmed from the significant political capital that he expended in promoting his interfaith dialogue initiative at home and abroad. (*See Section Interfaith and Intercultural dialogue*) However, the results have yet to be fully actualized through the facilitation of domestic change. In short, the Department of State has designated Saudi Arabia as a country of particular concern since 2004 due to the severe restriction on religious freedom in the country (Blanchard, 2010, p. 41). However, Saudi Arabia continued to address religious extremism through other sectors such as education.

4.2.1.3   *Education*

The International criticism of Saudi Arabia's educational system following the events of 9/11 resulted in an internal review of the country's national curricula (Nonneman 2007, p. 435). In particular, the review honed in on the adverse effects of religious components. In essence, education was critically viewed as a fundamental building block through which religious discourse could undergo modernization. In terms of reform, a number of changes to the national education plan were enacted to support the government's desire in fostering a more moderate society and dissuade international critics who may perceive the country as a source of radical Islam (Carnegie 2018, p. 202).

Nevertheless, the challenge of restructuring the educational system was also driven by demographic and economic pressure (Aarts & Nonneman, 2007, p. 78). That is to suggest that the government viewed the educational curriculum as lacking the tools necessary to perform in a competitive environment and provide the technical skills required to contribute to social and economic development (Aarts & Nonneman, 2007, p. 78). Thus, the government funded new universities and colleges and opened vocational training centres (Aarts & Nonneman 2007, p. 78). This positive shift towards educational reform also enabled more schools, for both boys and girls, to be

built. Reform was accompanied by heightened scrutiny against religious curricula as suggested earlier. The curriculum of Saudi schools, which had been developed under the supervision and approval of the Ulama was criticized by the United States post 9/11 for placing emphasis on the extreme ideas of the Salafi scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab[18] (Carnegie 2018, 202). Though it was purported that intolerant and extreme language was removed from textbooks, prejudice remained. An example of extreme language from a 2007-8 high school text said, "Jewish lives ruled by materialism" still exist (Lippman, 2012, p.141). The belief among Saudi policy officials is that as long as the *ulama* remain a political force that must be appeased, the existing paradigm within religious studies curriculum is unlikely to change in an effective way (Wynrandt, 2010, p.296).

Aiming to overcome the issue, in 2007, the Ministry of Education signed a five-year agreement with the King Abdul-Aziz centre for National Dialogue with the aim of promoting religious and cultural tolerance in the classroom through training and seminars (Al-Riyadh, 2007).

Overall, there was an increase in public spending between 2005 and 2015 through which the government targeted middle-class citizens with comprehensive education plans to root out the extremist ideology that had spread amongst them. However, this did not account for the fact that unemployment played a sizeable role in the spread of such ideology and frustration towards the government, in the first place (MacDowell, 2012). Irrespective of this fact, the agenda to reform education topped politics following 9/11 (Carnegie 2018, 202). Two phases of educational reform plans were undertaken. The first one was '*Tatweer,*' program, initiated by King Abdullah in 2009 to develop public education by making changes to the learning environment and address curriculum, content and teaching methods (Alyami, 2014, p. 1515). Despite the project efforts, it failed to remove the lion's share of extreme religious content, though it did manage to lessen the extremist undertones that promote hate speech. Among the reasons was the social resistance by the conservatives who opposed seeing the education system dedicating more time to science and math and introducing sport to girls education on the expense of Islamic teachings (allam, 2011).

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[18] Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab is a Sunni scholar and founder of the wahabism movement, which believes in a strict application of Islam.

Moreover, in 2005, the King created a scholarship program in order to educate middle-class Saudis abroad. (Taylor & Albasri, 2014 p. 110). The independent project directly involved the King through ministerial committees The program has resulted in hundreds of thousands of Saudi students studying abroad, among these a 100,000 in the USA alone. (Taylor & Albasri 2014, p.109). The aim of the program is that upon returning home, these students shall possess the skills necessary to help transform and modernize Saudi Arabia (See *Chapter Four*). On the home front, even bolder steps were envisioned with the opening of the first co-education institution in the history of the country (Kadhim, 2013, p. 247). King Abdullah University for Science and Technology was established in 2009 and allowed mixed-gender education, abolished enforcement of dress code for women, and use of English as the primary language of instruction (Kadhim, 2013, p. 247). It is also the first university to extensively employ staff from the United States and Europe. One instance in which the success of the initiative was highlighted was when David Cameron was invited to meet with female students in Jeddah—marking the first time a male, let alone a foreign politician, was allowed to enter a women-only establishment (Jeffry, 2013). During his visit, the British Prime Minister met with the first women allowed to practice criminal law in Saudi Arabia and conversed with young women at Dar Al-Hekma private college in Jeddah following the King striking down a law that banned female lawyers from practicing law (Jeffry, 2013). By introducing these reforms in favour of women, Saudi Arabia sent a message to its critics that the nation is taking serious steps towards equal rights for women.

4.2.1.4   *Migrant Workers*

Among the conscious measures Saudi Arabia adopted to gain the faith of the international community as a progressive country was the introduction of a set of reforms to its human rights policies. On the top of these measures was amending laws regulating migrant workers in order to provide them with more rights in an attempt to address the Kingdom's negative reputation of the conditions of its 10 million[19] expat workers—an issue that received a major spotlight post 9/11.

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[19]   This figure is from 2015. Marsh, D. (2015). Doing Business in the Middle East: A cultural and Practical guide for all Business Professionals, p. 58).

Commencing in 2008 a local study by the National Assembly of Human Rights Organization advised the regime to abolish the *kafalah* (sponsorship) system as it deemed to be contrary to meeting the international conventions to which Saudi Arabia had acceded (Al-Riyadh, 2008). The '*Kafalah*' is a system applied in all Arab Gulf states and dates back to the auspicious discovery of oil and the inflow of foreign employment working in projects of infrastructure (Azhari 2017, p. 63). Under the system, an employer bears responsibility for a hired migrant worker and must grant explicit permission to the worker to enter the country, transfer employment, or leave the country (Human Rights Watch 2008). Saudi Arabia issued a set of labour reform laws aimed at addressing the issue of improving living and working conditions of over 10 million expatriate workers—an issue that drew the scrutiny and criticism from several human rights organizations including Amnesty International (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

In an unprecedented move, Saudi Arabia addressed the '*Kafalah*' system to minimize its negative reputation resulting from the mistreatment of workers by employers. The kingdom decided to grant a number of major recruitment agencies the responsibility of sponsoring the expats workers instead of individual employers who might violate their rights (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The reform also accorded migrant workers the right to keep possession of their passports, and get their salaries on time while also applying a fine on employers who don't commit to these regulations (Human Rights Watch, 2015). In addition, a wage protection law that electronically monitors and documents workers' wages has been implemented in order to ensure that foreign workers rights are not violated (Human rights Watch, 2015). Efforts extended considerably beyond just ensuring adequate migrant living conditions. The government eliminated all forms of human trafficking and created 'expat workers care department' under the umbrella of its labour Ministry (Human Rights Watch 2008, p. 31). In another decision, the kingdom has established centres to serve especially the 1 million domestic workers who have left their employment, these centres provide assistance and to mediate disputes with employers (Human Rights Watch 2008, p. 93).

While comprehensive judicial restructuring may not have wholly improved the judicial process considering the unfair deportation of thousands of Ethiopian workers in 2013 (Horne, 2017), it can still be maintained that signs of real change are beginning to emerge. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has begun to address shortcomings to its immigration and labour laws as well as its judicial system.

4.2.1.5   *Freedom of Speech*

After the September 11 attack, Saudi Arabia took conscious and dedicated measures to gain the faith of both the USA and the UK through improving its domestic policies. To do so, the government had to adopt a relatively tolerant approach towards freedom of speech. For instance, the local press underwent increased activity in debating taboo topics and social issues (Menoret 2005, p. 202) Leading to relaxation on the previous taboo topics of autography, corruption in government agencies, human rights and the criticism of religious misbehaviours.

In light of these developments, the government increased its support for radio and television in the country (Salhi 2013, p. 105). The increased emphasis on culture resulted in the creation of specialized television channels presenting culture, economy and sport while addressing more nuanced audiences such as youth and women, thereby marking a shift away from solely religiously driven content. In addition, women presenters began to appear on national television dressed in colourful garbs and attire in a stark abandonment of the traditional black *abaya* (BBC, 2015). Thus, while the Kingdom remained amongst the world's most restrictive countries in terms of free speech, this freedom was gradually becoming more of a reality in the country (Menoret 2005, p. 202). All this was until the outbreak of the Arab Spring 2011 when one could notice the government's retreat to a more restrictive policy that cited safeguarding in the interests of national security.

4.2.1.6   *Cultural and Artistic expression*

One of the areas that benefited from the relative space of freedom was the cultural scene. Arguably the government's support to cultural activity and allow more freedom of expression was partly due to its desire to escape the backlash it received for its alleged extremism. This became evident in a number of initiatives that aimed at spreading a culture of knowledge acquisition, international literature and arts, as well as supporting intercultural dialogue (Tashkandi, 2019). The Kingdom also engaged in efforts to present itself as a cultural hub by organising annual book fairs, inviting thinkers to debate sensitive topics, and foreign politicians to partake in cultural activities (Arab news, 2019). Part of this has been high-profile visits by international figures, including the Prince of Wales, Charles, who famously joined members of the Royal family in performing a traditional sword dance at the Janadriyah Festival in

2014 boosting the UK-Saudi ties (BBC, 2014). This demonstrated Saudi Arabia's efforts to promote its cultural soft power and opening itself up to the outside world.

Nevertheless, the most evident example of the government's desire to jumpstart a cultural scene was the launching of an international award for translation, to promote cross-cultural interest in the literary productions of foreign countries through translation into multiple languages (Al-Sarrani 2016, 137). A readily apparent development as a result of such initiatives has been the proliferation of book fairs, which have become a new cultural phenomenon across Saudi Arabia with the most prominent being the Riyadh Book Fair. While at face value these book fairs appear to serve as a market where buyers and sellers partake in business transactions, there is a deeper cultural phenomenon that has developed. In particular, book fairs have surfaced as an arena where public debates and discussions are held through organized side events (Al-Sharif, 2019). In many ways, these served to challenge cultural policies aimed at restricting free speech throughout the country as many international authors have been invited to participate (Al-Sharif, 2019).

On the other side, the government allowed greater freedom to market and sell religious and political books. (Weston 2008, p. 449). Several books dealing with taboo subjects such as religious diversity and philosophy were displayed and sold. In 2007, the book fair even displayed a Bible. (Weston 2008, p. 449). Since then, a number of previously banned books have since resurfaced and become exhibited such as the controversial novelist Turkey Al-Hamid (Weston 2008, p. 449). Book Fairs have also served as an avenue to host controversial international writers, including the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, known for questioning religious authority and the Quran, who angered the Saudi grand mufti Abdul Aziz Al Sheikh, later calling him an ignorant on a TV show (Mahdi, 2009).

As a result, Prince Khalid Al-Faisal, a poet and Emir of Assir city, stated that the book fairs were a monumental step towards promoting a cultural soft power in the Kingdom and helped to promote an intellectual awakening to combat radicals (alyoum, 2015). However, as a sign of opposing the reform in the cultural scene, religious police continued harassing visitors at book fairs where it became commonplace for them to exercise their authority (Bergner 2008, 2145). Here they tried to impose segregation, specific dress codes for female visitors (Mahdi, 2009) as means of express their rejection towards the reform and supportive policies of cultural openness in the country (Mahdi, 2009).

A further source of opposition against reform between fundamentalists and intellectuals is on the government's liberal reform, has been the debate of how women ought to be represented in society. For instance, in 2009, two novelists were detained after attempting to get a female novelist's autograph (CNN, 2009), and nothing seems to have changed in 2015 as two men opposed the participation of a female poet in a public literary event before they had to be removed by security officers (Al-Harbi, 2015). Such encounters hint at the difficulties the government faces in trying to promote the reform in the cultural scene.

By contrast, cultural development has also been linked to the advancement and availability of technology. The proliferation of technology has nurtured the emergence of new genres of art–genres that often address controversial topics impacting large segments of Saudi society. The most prominent medium can be linked to art forms such as stand-up comedy shows that sometimes address political and social issues sarcastically (Ahmed, 2015). The presence of these artistic forms has solidified their artistic presence over the course of the last decade. The spread of these genres has gained popularity, due in part to the expansion of education overseas and tourists that relay and transfer their experiences in Saudi Arabia and sometimes even establish special commissions such as 'Club Jeddah Comedian' to discover talent and perform private live shows (Dennaoui, 2015).

The world's transition to a socially connected, digital society in the age of the Internet has stimulated the creation and production of art forms in Saudi Arabia too, such that Saudi Arabia began to rely on these as tools of 'soft power' when addressing other nations. YouTube, for example, has allowed many Saudi artists, filmmakers and designers to get noticed and develop their own talents and to develop their art (Ayad, 2013). More importantly, it granted artists an avenue through which they can express their views without fear of being censored. For example, a channel called 'We have been are fooled' in 2011 showed a controversial report discussing poverty in Saudi Arabia (Maloblena, 2011). Clearly, the power of youth and technology placed additional pressure on the government to open up.

In order to diversify and promote cultural activities among the youth population, a theatre awakening has also surfaced in Saudi Arabia as a result of the reform enacted after 9/11. Universities and cultural centres, such as the King Fahd Cultural Centre, are staging theatre plays especially during holidays and summer seasons (English, Skelly & O'Brien 2000, p. 306). Arguably, the advancement in the

field of cultural and artistic expressions has facilitated a modest yet gradual breakthrough in relation to increased openness in the field of freedom of expression over the last decade in the Kingdom.

4.2.1.7   *Civic Engagement*

Another step to tame the international criticism on its civil policies to buttress its image of a modern state, the country decided to allow citizens to engage in a dialogue of public policy to help address the challenges that face the country. To increase civic representation in government, the King appointed women to the Shoura Council, a consultative council advisory body linked directly to the King (BBC, 2013). The government also heeded the pleas and petitions of both religious and liberal factions by launching national dialogue in support of diverse opinions. The platform for national dialogue emerged in the form of the 'King Abdul-Aziz Centre for National Dialogue',[20] a project created in 2003 to encourage dialogue pertaining to public policy among people with varying ideological views, factions and sects. In the last decade, the Centre has addressed controversial issues including religious extremism, women's rights and youth unemployment (US accountability office 2005, p. 20) The popularity of the dialogue has increased, and some sessions are now even televised (Kraidy 2010, p.94)

The move has been met with consent from Saudi political activists as it has established a much-needed channel for communication between the public and the government. In turn, by allowing people to freely debate on a number of controversial topics, the Centre has provided the possibility for the incorporation of the content of the debates into official government decisions. This has served as a turning point for more inclusionary policies and freedom of expression. The embrace of open debate has propelled the National Dialogue into an annual event that takes place in various cities across Saudi Arabia. Each year a topic is selected for discussion, whether it is national unity or the expectations of the youth, and the recommendations from the proceedings are forwarded in the form of a letter addressed to the King, albeit it has no binding force (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, National Meetings 2019).

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[20] King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue. *https://kacnd.org* [Accessed 11 June 2019].

The National Dialogue has also encouraged civil society organisations and NGOs operating at a grassroots level to strive towards playing a greater role in society. For instance, the King Khalid Charity Foundation, a quasi-governmental foundation, launched a controversial campaign to raise awareness of abused women by encouraging them to speak out and not accept abuse from their spouses and men (Carrington, 2013). Four months later, a draft law was passed by the government criminalizing domestic abuse (Usher, 2013). Other examples include heightened civic engagement in the form of individual volunteerism to support women's rights (BBC, 2009). The rise of volunteerism and public criticism of officials coincided with advances in the field of technology and social media that created a new space through which people were able to exercise free speech and share their opinions publicly. Although monitored, social media in Saudi Arabia has also empowered the population to express their opinion to the extent that it has influenced regime decisions pertaining to princely allocations and the dismissal of top officials who provoked public ire via social media campaigns (Al-Arabiya, 2015).

4.2.1.8   *Women Empowerment*

International criticism has been feeding on issues of women's rights in Saudi Arabia since 9/11 that the government had to act upon rights accorded to Saudi women. While it remains a hot topic of discussion in the West, more recently has become the subject of intense debate within Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, whereas some Saudi activists advocate greater employment, marital and political rights for Saudi women, others support a more patriarchal outlook that seeks to maintain the status quo based on religious and cultural preferences (Blanchard, 2010, p. 41). Outside of Saudi Arabia, the perception of Saudi women is widely construed as them suffering restrictive lives and living under a gender bias (Al-Rasheed 2013, p. 140). But to improve this image, steps have been taken. Saudi women began to benefit from greater political, social and economic reform and were granted greater engagement in a concerted effort to alleviate inequality and poverty to reflect an image of a progressive country striving to ensure equal rights for women. One initial step taken by the government was promoting women as equal partners in society by appointing Noura Al-Fayz, the first female deputy minister for women's education (Olimat, 2013, p. 140). This historic move marked the first appointment of a Saudi woman in a prestigious position. As a result, Al-Fayz brushed aside fundamentalist criticism and

enacted a policy to make the first three primary school grades co-educational (Al-Sulami, 2011). More reforming steps Saudi Arabia has taken to reflect that it is addressing the international criticism of biased policies against women included granting Saudi women the right to possess independent national identification cards (Jabarti, 2005). Although this step was pursued mainly to prevent counterfeiting, it has benefited Saudi women as they have gained independent status by no longer having to be registered under a male guardian's identification card. (Human rights watch 2008, perpetual minors). In addition, a deeper reform was undertaken in supporting women's education. Saudi Arabia established the largest university in 2011 for women across the world, Princess Nora University for Women.[21] The multi-billion-dollar project named after the favourite sister of King Abdul Aziz Al Saud, the kingdom's founder, was one of the steps reflecting Saudi policies to improve conditions of women that other nations can relate to and respect (Wang 2014, p. 235).

Additionally, these steps were accompanied by providing increased work opportunities and the elimination of regulations that confined women strictly to jobs in sectors other than education and medicine. As of 2007, women were given the right to work in retail—a position that had previously been restricted to males and foreign workers (Burton, 2016, p.134). Not only has this increased the employment rate of women, but it has also abolished social conventions that imposed segregation between males and females in the workplace. Such a change was manifested in fields including banking and health.

Politically, women have been invited to participate in the decision-making process as witnessed by the appointment of women to the Shoura Council in 2007, granting women the right the occupy 20 per cent of political seats (BBC, 2013/a). Moreover, the King motioned to allow men and women to meet together to address the taboo issue of gender segregation. The liberal attitude of the King challenged traditional norms as women appeared shaking his hand with their faces unveiled (France 24, 2010). While many of these measures have signalled an overall increase of women's rights, other issues such as male guardianship remain unresolved. Nevertheless, these initial steps demonstrate that Saudi Arabia has moved towards creating a more inclusive and right-based environment for women to ameliorate the

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[21] Princess Noura Bint Abdurrahman University. *http://www.pnu.edu.sa/en/Pages/default.aspx*. [Accessed June 2019].

situation by encouraging gender parity in order to buttress the country's image as a modern State.

In fact, the introduction of these rights has empowered women to continue contesting and defying state-imposed limitations. Women fought for equal rights and even took to the streets as they did in 2011 to voice their individual right to drive in a campaign known as 'women2drive'[22]. The law was changed allowing women to drive and the first license was granted in 2018 (BBC, 2018).

It can be said that these reforms towards promoting religious tolerance, civic dialogue and free speech as well as encouraging gender parity were aimed at serving multiple domestic objectives. They were also meant to bolster the political motives of the Kingdom by revamping its global image and showing its commitment to addressing issues of international criticism and showcasing its stance towards reform. These developments have influenced the Saudi approach to public diplomacy post 9/11 as the country used aspects of changes in the domestic scene as tools of soft power to project a positive image of itself. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Section 2   Saudi Arabia's New Public Diplomacy

Developing an understanding of the Saudi domestic reform is critical if we are to put into perspective how Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy y has evolved post 9/11. The gradual transition towards modernization, religious tolerance and human rights at home aided a new, sophisticated public diplomacy, based on soft power with the aim to improve Saudi Arabia's global image. The following section will examine these initiatives in greater depth to highlight the shift in the Saudi public diplomacy approach towards appreciating and instrumentalising soft power to serve multiple and foreign policy objectives, including developing a positive image that is in accordance with its domestic reform which has been undertaken after September 11.

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[22] Women to drive campaign *https://oct26driving.com* [Accessed 20 June 2019].

4.2.2 Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue

As previous chapter demonstrated, Saudi Arabia sought to present its position against religious extremism through introducing domestic reforms relating to issues of global criticism such as addressing education, state of human rights, extremism and encourage higher level of freedom of press and arts. These reforms in its domestic scene have been somehow mirrored through its public diplomacy. It was not until very recently that Saudi Arabia for the first time sought to invest in its global Islamic position in order to promote tolerance and peace on an international level. The launching of a major interfaith dialogue initiative in 2012 known as the "King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue" (KAICIID) marked Saudi Arabia's largest public diplomacy initiative, to "foster dialogue among people of different faiths and cultures"[23]. This intergovernmental organisation consists of a board of directors made up of a variety of representatives from different regions of the world (KAICIID, 2012). Presented by the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs publication as part of the war of ideas initiative to promote moderation and tolerance, the centre was only established after seven-years of negotiations. It began with a highly publicised visit by the Saudi King, Abdullah to Pope Benedict XVI in November 2007 (Rosenthal, 2007). It was hoped that this first ever collaboration between the Head of the Roman Catholic Church and a Saudi monarch could foster a more moderate Islam, focused on promoting co-existence (Rosenthal, 2007).

An estimated 1.5 million Christians live in Saudi Arabia but are not allowed to worship publicly (Elias & Kasowsky, 2010). Saudi Arabia and the Vatican have no diplomatic ties, but when King Abdullah was crown Prince, he visited the late Pope John Paul II, in the Vatican. (Rosenthal, 2007). The promotion of interfaith dialogue served as a beneficial soft power strategy by Saudi Arabia to promote positive reform. In fact, Saudi Arabia's keenness towards religious modernisation inside its borders largely stemmed from asserting itself at the international level. In this regard, King Abdullah organized a dialogue between the world religions as well as urging religious intellectuals Ulama (senior Muslim scholars) to meet in Mecca in 2008 to discuss ways of improving dialogue with the followers of other religions and cultures (USA

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[23] KAICIID. (2012). King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz international Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue Website. [Accessed 19 June 2019].

International Business Publications 2005, p. 28). One of the primary recommendations that came out of the conference was the establishment of interfaith dialogue. The participants agreed on the importance of increasing communication between civilisations (USA International Business Publications 2005, p. 28).

Following the conference, the Saudi government initiated a global dialogue in the Spanish capital, Madrid, where both collaborated to host an international dialogue conference (The United Nations, 2005). Bringing together Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist leaders, the conference issued a declaration that urged faith communities to collaborate in the fight against extremism and instead to focus on advancing human rights (The United Nations, 2008). The declaration used the languages of the religions and cultures present, including from the non-Abrahamic ones. The third step towards promoting interfaith dialogue took place in the United Nation's General Assembly meeting for dialogue between religions, cultures and civilizations in New York in 2009. During the meeting, King Abdullah reiterated "terrorism and criminality are enemies of God, enemies of every religion and civilisation" (The United Nations, 2008). He announced the cooperation of Spain and Austria with the Kingdom to set up a centre based in Vienna that serves the objectives of dialogue (The United Nations, 2008).

The author of this report argues that there are a number of political motivations behind Saudi public diplomacy's interfaith activism; first is the country's interest in presenting its position as clearly against religious extremism to its Western partners, especially with increasing accusations by its Middle East rivals, such as Iran and Turkey, to weaken the credibility of the Saudi role in the region. The Kingdom perceived its effort in interfaith to educate international audiences about Islamic principles as part of its responsibility as the home of the two holy mosques. In fact, one of the Islamic principles requires the recognition and respect for other faiths. This approach differs greatly from placing an emphasis on Islam as the one and only religion. A shift away from this approach was important for Saudi Arabia, as its previous approach proved ineffective amongst Western societies that are characterised by a plurality of religions. Irrespective of whether Saudi Arabia has been successful or not in convincing the West of its commitment to initiate a dialogue, it is important to note that such a soft power policy that promotes religious diversity denotes a marked shift away from Saudi Arabia's previous public diplomacy conduct. As discussed earlier, Saudi Arabia has relied on its Islamic status to gain support in the Muslim

world by providing financial support and build Islamic mosques and centres as means of soft power to influence those countries and get them to support its policies. But as we can see, the Saudi public diplomacy has an ambition to go beyond the Islamic world, yet still depend on its Islamic role to promote co-assistance and peace to influence the wider international community not just the Islamic world.

Viewing interfaith as an important tool is necessary for Saudi Arabia in dissuading international critics who may perceive Islam as a radical religion. Moreover, it propels the country by giving it the opportunity to speak out on behalf of the Muslim world and thereby derail their radical and political rivals. It is equally important to note that the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent criticism of Saudi Arabia's religious policies played a decisive factor in Saudi willingness to engage in interfaith dialogue. As such, it was Saudi Arabia who declared it was a co-operating partner in the war on terror by openly promoting tolerance and endorsing dialogue. It tried show to its partners in the West that the image it portrayed in terms of human rights and religious freedom was closer to their own.

However, it is with little surprise that Saudi Arabia made a concerted effort to convince its allies of its tolerant approach. For instance, during a state visit to London in 2007, protesters accused King Abdullah of being a murderer and torturer (Brown, 2007). Concerns were also raised during the visit in the British press regarding the treatment of women in the Kingdom as well as bribery accusations involving an arm deal between the two countries (*USA International Business Publications*, 2005, p. 30). The predominant view amongst Western politicians and thinkers – that Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi interpretation of Islam operates as a breeding ground for terrorism – only served to solidify such views. It was these ingrained beliefs that led Saudi officials to request that the Saudi interfaith initiative could be included in the State Department's annual international religious freedom report, in the hope that the country would win more favourable perceptions from the West. Dramatically, it worked. As in 2009, Hilary Clinton praised Saudi Arabia's attempts to advance tolerance (WikiLeaks cable, 2008). But the step also was met with global reservation. The criticism was rooted in the fact while Saudi Arabia may be assisting in countering terrorism and religious intolerance but still criminalised the public practice of non-Islamic religions domestically (Valentine 2015, p. 162). To compound matters further, leaving the Muslim faith for another religion is punishable by death in the country, which calls into question the extent of dialogue between religions (Valentine 2015, p.

162). In light of this, Saudi policy towards other faiths can be viewed as undermining the country's efforts at promoting interfaith dialogue and making it the source of criticism rather than of tolerance.

Similarly, interfaith diplomacy did not achieve its goals because the government failed to follow its own steps by promoting tolerance in its own society. Shia minority's civil rights have been denied by Sunni-dominated Saudi government that includes being excluded from holding senior post in the government or the military (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Shiite religious leaders are also targeted for expressing their opinion and are denied teaching their own religious curriculum at special schools (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Additionally, while the country has taken progressive steps towards promoting religious tolerance and human rights through interfaith dialogue, its aims to be perceived as a tolerant moderate Islam was are far too ambitious. Perhaps a larger problem loomed at home that needed to be addressed first – the religious establishment known as (Ulema). The Ulama represent a public diplomacy paradox for Saudi Arabia, as they tend to be not supportive of the country's initiatives seeking to create religious moderation, which makes these initiatives looks like lacking credibility. For example, the influential religious establishment issued fatwas against interfaith dialogue and ultimately characterized such activity as un-Islamic and dangerous (Al- Atawneh 2011, p. 257). The Ulama even went as far as to suggest that the meetings were un-Islamic and that the only acceptable purpose of meeting with Jews and Christians should be to invite them to convert to Islam (Al- Atawneh 2011, p. 257).

Coupled with mounting human rights violations, the Kingdom came under attack from European politicians for not being a committed practitioner of interfaith dialogue. The Austrian Chancellor Werner Farman criticised the Saudi initiative, questioning in 2015 whether the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs really would like to give Saudi Arabia the opportunity to build an international 'propaganda centre' in Austria (Karen, 2015). He further added "An inter-religious dialogue centre that remains silent when it is time to speak out clearly for human rights is not worthy of being called a dialogue centre" (Karen, 2015).

But Saudi Arabia went beyond the soft power of religion to use its young population to spread and inform the outside world about its ongoing efforts at domestic change. The next section highlights such policy moves by examining how Saudi Arabia began to benefits from women as a tool of soft power to enhance its image and

reputation. A closer look at the literature on the role of women as a soft power however reveals a gap in studying such a potential and its impact on political agenda. Offering an examination regarding this through the Saudi case can stimulate researchers to furthered study this aspect and role on public diplomacy.

4.2.3   Saudi Women in the London Olympics 2012

It is quite evident that Saudi Arabia has focused on improving its reputation and image in the decade following the 9/11 attacks, given its numerous attempts to open up in the international arena. In addition to its interfaith dialogue plan, the role of women has been evident in its public diplomacy efforts, especially in the UK. Saudi Arabia has capitalised on the domestic progress for women's rights, and has turned the issue of women into a soft power tool to promote is image among the UK public opinion. The global connotations attached to Saudi women presented the London Olympic games in 2012 as a suitable forum for reflecting on the advancement of women's rights and Saudi Arabia's commitment to the issue.

In 2012, Riyadh decided for the first time to allow two young female athletes to compete in the London Olympic Games. While the Kingdom had 122 participants in five previous Olympic games until 2012 it had never sent a female athlete (Saudi Olympic Committee, 2018). The government of Saudi Arabia had come under pressure from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to lift the ban on female participants. Prior to the games, Anita DeFrantz, the Chair of the IOC's Women and Sports Commission claimed that Saudi Arabia should be barred from taking part in the Games until they change their policy regarding female athletes (Quinn 2012). Tessa Jowell, the Former Culture Secretary and Olympics Minister backed DeFrantz's view, and claimed that Saudi Arabia is breaking the spirit of the Olympics Charter's pledge towards equality (Quinn 2012). The decision by the IOC to bar countries with no female participants did not faze the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee chief in his ruling to prevent women from participating due to cultural and traditional reasons. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs overruled the decision and issued a statement endorsing female participation in the London games and expressing its great expectations of full participation from its team and assurance to look after all its competitors (Quinn 2012).

The efforts of the Saudi Embassy in London in lobbying the King to lift the ban on female participants was successful as two females were approved to officially

join the Saudi delegation at the games; Sarah Attar, a 800 meters runner, and Wijan Sharhakani, a martial artist, judo (BBC, 2012/b). However, the procedures undertaken were slightly unusual since several Saudi female athletes such as Dalma Malhas, an equestrian jumper and bronze medal winner at the Singapore Youth Olympics in 2010, had previously competed in sport competitions, albeit outside of formal Saudi representation (Nauright & Parrish 2012, p. 291).

The IOC pressure to include female athletes has also impacted the Saudi government's decision to allow women participants in the Olympics. In fact, with Qatar's and Brunei decision to allow female athletes to London's Olympics, Saudi Arabia would have risked isolation as the only country that prevent its women from taking a role in sport. Hence, Saudi public diplomacy moved quickly and overlooked the voices of religious conservatives that strongly opposed the move. For instance, preacher Mohammed Rafi, a member of the Muslim Scholars Association, posted a number of Twitter messages that urged the government to use the law to stop women from joining the 'un-Islamic' competition (Laha, 2012). In essence, it can be argued that Saudi Arabia included women in order to achieve certain political goals that revolved around improving its global image and swaying UK public's opinion towards viewing the country's gender policy in a more favourable light and one that reaffirmed Saudi Arabia's commitment towards meeting the international convention of the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Equally important was Saudi Arabia use of the Olympics to address the international community on its domestic social transformation by showing that it had broken away from biased policies against women. This proved to be a soft power tactic by Saudi Arabia that used the participation of female athletes to reflect its political changes to the foreign audience.

Addressing the Saudi athletes in summer 2012, UK ambassador Mohammed bin Nawaf said, "I am very proud of our 19 athletes, men and women, who came to participate this year" (Saudi Arabia Foreign Ministry, 2012). His full support was evident in the way he was pictured warmly applauding as the women walked during the opening ceremony. It is also evident that Saudi diplomats in London were well aware that the failure to allow women to participate would bring with it intense criticism by British media against Saudi Arabia. It can also be said that the political and social climate was ripe (due to King Abdullah's relatively supportive policies of

women's rights) for the Foreign Ministry to challenge to social taboos and lift the ban on women from participating in sport.

However, despite these efforts, the author of this research wrote in her article at the USC Centre of Public Diplomacy, that even though Saudi women had participated in the Games, there are still a number of challenges facing Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy to influence public opinion. First, Saudi Arabia's decision to allow sportswomen to compete in London seemed to go further that what the country had managed to achieve for women's rights domestically. Although the Saudi government decision to allow women participation in the Olympics was a step towards equal rights, this was not necessarily how it was perceived on the global scale, given the fact that women have no role in sport *inside* the Kingdom, and sport education is banned at girls schools This contradiction undermined Saudi Arabia's ability to convince the world of its commitment to women's rights. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia announced the lifting of its ban against women only two weeks prior to the Olympics, which created confusion and drew attention to existing conditions in the Kingdom such as the ban against driving, that they were effectively under a guardianship system and generally lacked rights. Coupled with laws banning women from sport in Saudi Arabia, this led to the critical belief that Saudi Arabia was engaging in propaganda rather than demonstrating that it was promoting women's rights. Human Rights Watch even raised this issue one year after the Games, stating "the world cheered when Saudi Arabia shared Olympic spotlight, but millions of girls and women are still stuck on the side-lines" (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Indeed, Saudi Arabia decided against sending female athletes to the 2015 Asian Games in South Korea. The daily Saudi Gazette quoted the author of this present thesis at the time arguing that in spite of allowing women athletes to compete in London Olympics – a feat that increased optimism for further female engagement in sport, there have not been any ensuing initiatives by the sports committee to address the gap in women's sport nor has the committee hinted at engaging in any future initiatives to support the role of women in sport. The author of this research raised this issue in her article at the Saudi Gazette news paper, criticising Saudi Arabia's decision not to send female athletes to Asian Games in South Korea while have allowed them to the Olympics. Saying that the level of competence of Saudi female athletes should be the main reason for not sending them to the Asian Games. Rather, it shows a reluctance address the issue of women in sport (Al-Osaimi, 2014).

Additionally, Saudi public diplomacy faces obstacles from conflicts of opinion arising from different visions decision-making institutions. A lack of policy coordination between various government agencies impacts the country's ability to respond crisis that often require quick and firm response . One particular reason for intra-governmental conflict is that inconsistent vision produces a lack of clear direction. Moreover, each official body is represented by unique cultures of governance, vision, institutional features and interests. That being said, bureaucratic division and overlap is a broad problem that affects many governments that cannot afford to engage in long term restructuring. In the case of Saudi Arabia, agencies predominantly undergo conflict due to a clash in vision. The researcher of this thesis has tackled this issue in her article at the Centre of Public Diplomacy blog:

Some officials preserve the need to retain traditional values and preserve national identity based on the interpretation of the Islamic principles. In contrast, other factions seek to reform the system and address the society through modern tools such as cultural and media platforms (Al-Osaimi, 2016).

The conflict of opinion can be demonstrated by looking at the official position in Riyadh which was not in favour of sending women based on Islamic perspective. This viewpoint was supported by interior minister Naif, who is known for his strong ties and support for the religious establishment and frequently reiterated that women shall not partake in the Olympics in an active effort to avoid discontent from the more conservative factions of society. In contrast, the Foreign Ministry adopted a stance that favoured sending women to participate in the London Olympics and saw it as an opportunity to increase global awareness of the Kingdom's commitment towards improving women's rights (Saudi Embassy in London, UK, 2012). Even following the official statement released from London, a sense of disagreement was evident as the Chief of the Saudi Olympic Committee claimed during a press conference that "women who want take part in their own will, are free to do, but the Kingdom Olympic authority in the country would only help in ensuring that their participation doesn't violate Islamic Sharia" (Sasson, 2015, p. 21).

Attempts to reform against the desire of a largely conservative society have naturally failed to present a well-defined form of how the country ought to present itself abroad to international audiences. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the Saudi government does not employ, nor has it crafted, a definition of the image it would like to project for itself. Likewise, the values and culture that it seeks to export

is vague, even amongst its politicians. Hence, Saudi society is lost between two intellectual patterns. In fact, the national identity of the state itself is still in its formative stage owing to relative infancy of the state. This confounds diplomats and undermines their ability to deliver its public diplomacy while also limiting the success of wider policy objectives of the Kingdom.

Arguably, allowing Saudi female athletes in the London's Olympic games was an unprecedented move by the kingdom insofar as that it used a non-governmental mouthpiece to reflect its ongoing domestic reform towards gender equality. The modest success of Saudi Arabia in showcasing its stance towards women right has allowed it to avoid isolation. However, there remains a credibility deficit in the international arena (Al-Osaimi, 2016).

However, besides using the developments on women's rights as a soft power asset public diplomacy the youth have come to the fore in the soft power strategy that the Saudi government has used. The next section will elaborate on this with greater details.

4.2.4   Foreign Education as a Form of Public Diplomacy

International education has been at the heart of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy to help to diminish stereotypes and facilitate a better bilateral relation with the world. Using its youth as a soft power, the Kingdom has invested in the external education to better position its population in the world whilst also achieving political objectives of improving its image.[24] This is through massive diplomacy-oriented scholarships for nationals to study at foreign universities that lead to degrees, Bachelors, Masters and doctorates. Since its creation in 2005, the state-funded program has sent 200,000 citizens and dependents to more than 30 universities around the globe, namely in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Japan (Arab news, 2015). The Saudi move is aimed at serving multiple domestic and foreign policy objectives. From the domestic sphere, the government recognises after 9/11 it has a youthful population that is lagging in education standards and professionalism, which resulted to huge rates of unemployment and drove the youths to engage in

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[24]   King Abdullah Scholarships Program. Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in the UK. *http://www.uksacb.org/uk-en1313/page/king-abdullah-scholarships-program* [Accessed 20 June 2019].

terrorism (MacDowell, 2012). According to the Ministry of Higher Education website, the program aims to create a sustainable development of human resources and qualify citizens for professional skills to serve both public and private sectors (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014). The increase in oil revenues has aided the government in sponsoring such a plan – oil price jumped to $100 per barrel between 2005 and 2007 (Westelius, 2013, p.3).

The Saudi government thought it would be wise to bring their citizens into the fold, particularly through international education. Indeed, education has been a soft power asset of many countries' public diplomacy. Many nations invested in education to achieving political goals. From a foreign policy perspective, Nye's (2004) work on soft power strongly emphasises the relationship between education exchange and its influence on the beliefs, and perception of foreign populations. Similarly, the Former Secretary of States Robert Gates argues, that exchange programs create a political influence. He said "No policy has proven more successful in making friends for the United States than educating international students at our colleagues and universities' exchange" (Katrina & Matthew 2013). Further, Former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who also explained the benefits of academic exchange for America: "International students and scholars benefit from engagement with our society and academic institutions and we benefit enormously from their interaction with our society" (Katrina & Matthew 2013). But the question remains whether or not they managed to change how Saudi Arabia is perceived abroad, this is why studying various form of public diplomacy is important to understand the impact.

Looking at how the education program started, it can be understood how the program represents a form of soft power on behalf of the Saudi government in response to the need to help repair the economic and diplomatic damage done to their relationship with the West post 9/11 (Taylor & Albasri 2014)

King Abdullah made an agreement with the American President George W. Bush to increase the number of Saudi students in the United States as a means of strengthening relations, and in turn Saudi Arabia would bring money into US higher education, as well as benefit other sectors of the economy such as health, recreation, and transportation and from their point of view that this may have been more significant than any other programs to further the relations (Thomas, 2013). After a few years, about 9, 252 male and female students were sent by Saudi Arabia's government to study at US universities (Rodolfo & Estimo, 2016). The pilot program

proved to be successful, and it was expanded to include a greater number of academic specialisations and other countries like the United Kingdom. Over the last decade more than 100,000 Saudi students have studied at United Kingdom universities and colleges (British Embassy in Riyadh, 2013). In 2015, more than 15,000 Saudi Arabian citizens have been conferred degrees in 30 British Universities (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in London, 2019). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has established a Cultural Bureau, a diplomatic office operating as a branch of the Saudi Arabian embassy in London that would administer the scholarship program and provide support services for Saudi students.

The program has yielded positive outcomes for Saudi Arabia in terms of cross-cultural exchange, especially the advantage of enabling Saudis to share their culture with people in Britain that facilitates cultural understanding, said a former Cultural Consul in the Saudi embassy in London, whom has been interviewed for this research in 2015. He added other foreign objectives associated with the program is Saudi Arabia's aims to strengthen its international relations with the UK, particularly in a political sense and this is exhibited indirectly through a Saudi student role in establishing a common dialogue with foreign citizens.

Moreover, the Saudi public diplomacy drive to send its citizens abroad was made with a desire of improving knowledge among Saudi's of global cultures. It would set the stage for Saudi Arabia to overcome isolation that has created misconceptions of the country at different levels. Thus, person-to-person contact through education will help improve British public opinion and understanding of Saudi Arabia. For his part, King Abdullah has expressed his hope that the Saudi students will also serve as 'ambassadors' for the Kingdom abroad (Al-Awad, 2008). A publication by the Ministry of Higher Education endorsed the idea of an ambassadorial role for the students stating that "the (KASP) aims to stimulate a cultural, social and scientific interchange between Saudi Arabia and foreign countries through the medium of the Kingdom's cultural ambassadors – the students it sends abroad." (Scala, 2016). Therefore, it could be argued that Saudi Arabia has tried to expose a whole generation of Saudis to different cultures and societies and enabled them to learn about other communities' values, to see how other people live and experience life, something which they can take back to Saudi Arabia and which could lead to moderation in the country.

To that end, students are encouraged by the Saudi government to become involved on campus and within the communities where they are living in to promote cultural outreach (Saudi Arabia Cultural bureau, our mission, 2018). At present, there are more than 34 registered Saudi clubs across UK universities and they are responsible for arranging regular events, such as national and religious occasions, as well as hosting fundraising events (Al-awsat, 2017). In a telephone interview in 2016 with the former Director of the Saudi Student Media Club in the UK,[25] he said that his team conduct events in order to showcase positive things about Saudi Arabia's culture and such activity gives those students a significant ambassadorial role as public diplomats. He went on to argue that the interact with students in various British universities is a golden opportunity for his Club to remove a number of myths surrounding Saudi Arabia especially role of women in Kingdom and how is it developing forward.

However, Saudi Arabia's diplomatic engagement with foreign countries through education is not wholly new; it has always been a pillar of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy to strengthen its bilateral relations. In 1928, a handful of Saudi citizens were sent to study outside the country on scholarship programs, especially in Egypt and Lebanon (Taylor & Albasri, 2014, p.110) With the unification of the country in 1932 and the subsequent discovery of oil, the Saudi human development strategy was similarly centred on education. It was not until 1960 that Europe would host Saudi students. Over subsequent years, the numbers of Saudis studying in Europe continues to climb, and the United Kingdom becomes the second destinations of choice (Taylor & Albasri 2014, p.110).

There is a diplomatic scope for creating the KASP scholarship program for Saudi Arabia, that's face to face interaction which will help to diminish stereotypes and facilitate a better bilateral relation, yet it does not appear that there is a clear mechanism for how the program could achieve its intended public diplomacy objectives. This is illustrated by a number of interviews conducted during the data collection of this thesis with representatives from Cultural Attaché and Ministry of Higher Education in the Kingdom, who seem to lack methods that could achieve all these objectives. Particularly when they have been asked about budgeting, or

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[25] Interview was conducted by telephone in September 2016, London, UK.

monitoring and assessing the ability to promote cultural outreach across the UK, their responses have been especially ambiguous.

Over the last four years, the Saudi embassy in London has engaged in a number of cultural activities, such as hosting art galleries, conducting seminars, and promoting dialogue though its cultural societies and students' clubs. Although these initiatives provide important opportunities to reach out to the British public by helping them recognize various features of Saudi culture, they could be more effective if they perform strategically to achieve a long-term result.

4.3   Public Diplomacy Through Culture

As discussed earlier, the advances removing restrictions on Art and culture in the domestic environment have an influence on how Saudi Arabia conducted its public diplomacy to dispel many misconceptions among foreign public. This is clearly evident in a statement by the former ambassador to Saudi Arabia Turki Al-Faisal during a cultural event in London called "Saudi Cultural Days" in 2004. Al-Faisal said: "This is not a political event. It's a people-to-people event" (Butler, 2004).

Cultural activities were never overlooked in the Saudi-British diplomacy although until recently it was offered only to the British elites. These activities were mainly historical and targeted elites by emphasizing the Royal family, and in particular the personality of the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, King Abdul-Aziz through festivals such as *Saudi Arabia Days in UK* in 1985 (Al-awsat 2015). The noticeable shift in demographics with the recent exhibition is therefore not worthy. Unlike most of the previous exhibitions, the Hajj exhibition, which will be discussed in details in the next section, has allowed large public groups to discover aspects of Saudi Arabia that millions of people do not have access to. The Saudi attempt to place culture within the sphere of foreign policy has achieved modest success in the form of public exhibitions. In 2011, the King Abdul Aziz Library and the Royal Geographical Society, presented rare photographs taken by Princess Alice, granddaughter of Queen Victoria, during her trip to Saudi Arabia in 1938 (Buali, 2011).

The photography exhibition titled *A journey of a Life Time* showed over 50 photographs that shed light and offered a wider view in regards to Saudi Arabia's different regions, traditions and culture as they displayed photos of Princess Alice drinking traditional Arab coffee at her palace *Al-Kanda*. (Buali, 2011). The exhibition

was an important step towards the long-term goal of eliminating the misconception that Saudi rulers are unfriendly towards women in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, other exhibitions include, the *Two Kingdoms* in London in 2005, and *Saudi Arabia Between Today and Yesterday* in 2007, which were organized by the Ministry of Culture and Media, sought to highlight historical relations between Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom (Al-awsat, 2015). It can be argued that Saudi Arabian public diplomacy post 9/11 has undertaken significant diplomatic measures to address the British general public through activities centred on the power of national culture, and citizens or what is referred to as 'people to people engagement.' This approach surfaced as a result of the cultural awakening and social development that has engulfed the Kingdom over the last decade that have been referred to in the study. But the UK has been privy to a number of other Saudi cultural exhibitions aimed at showcasing key aspects of the Kingdom's identity. The next section presents an overview of these initiatives to highlight Saudi soft power tools in public diplomacy.

4.3.1.1   *The Hajj, a Journey to the Heart of Islam*

Examining the nature of Saudi Arabia's exhibitions and cultural initiatives in the UK is of great importance for this study to support the argument that Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy has shifted and moved away to appreciating soft power tools. That shift is what makes the case of Saudi Arabia worth examining. One strategic soft power effort to present the national heritage of Saudi Arabia in the UK was the launch of an exhibition in London: 'The Hajj A Journey to the Heart of Islam (The British Museum, 2012/a). The exhibition presenting more than 209 manuscripts, paintings, archaeological finds, ancient pieces of brick and photographs, certificates, as well as some of the items that pilgrims carried with them on their journey. In addition, the exhibition shed light on the logistical challenges that face pilgrims each year, given that roughly three million people are in the same place to perform the same rites at the same time. (The British Museum, 2012/a). The Hajj exhibition had a significant role in the development of what scholar Joseph Nye (2004) refers to as soft power which arises from a country's identity.

Discussing the Saudi experience of projecting its soft power through this London exhibition , Professor of Journalism Seib suggested in his article titled: that Saudi Arabia used an aspect of its unique identity culture to capture the heart and mind of over 80,000 visitors in the UK. Previously, Saudi Arabia rarely appreciated the

Islamic dimension as a project worth promoting outside the Islamic world. That shows Saudi Arabia's own understanding of its unique soft power potential to strategically address the outside world has been better appreciated. It is important to note that this was the first exhibition of its kind to focus on the annual ritual of the pilgrimage. By focusing on a journey of pilgrimage, the experience serves as a soft power approach to highlight the ways in which Islam is not related to terrorism, bombs, or political conflicts in the Middle East (Seib, 2012).

Moreover, in loaning such precious items from Mecca to the British museum, Saudi Arabia offered a taste of its Saudi culture to the general public in UK. In addition to historical exhibits, the exhibition shed light on aspects of Saudi contemporary art, such as that by artist Ahmed Matter, titled *Magnetic*, which depicts a magnetic black cube-shaped object representing the *Kaba* (The British museum, 2012/b) it is surrounded by a black mass of sawdust iron to represent pilgrims who roam out. Philip Seib, the Vice Dean of the University of Southern California addressed such an experience in his article, arguing that the exhibition addressed an important pillar of Islam, as many people in the non-Muslim world relate Islam with terrorism and look at it with suspicion, but the exhibition managed to show the sense of its equality and common values to other religions (Seib, 2012). These are exceptional efforts as countries such as Saudi Arabia are often reluctant to reach out, a reluctance which allows for the 'othering' of Islam to proceed uncontested. (Seib, 2012).

It is also noteworthy that while many Saudi exhibitions promote the story and personality of the Royal family, the Hajj exhibition promotes neither politics nor involves the Royal family. Instead, the exhibition serves as an affirmation of religious belief.

It can therefore be argued that cultural awakening and social development within Saudi Arabia has promoted wider support for activities aimed at developing social, cultural and intellectual spheres through diplomatic outreach programs on an international scale. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia is also overseeing cultural infrastructure in the form of a number of iconic new museums and cultural centres due to concerted government efforts to develop tourism and heritage. For instance, the High Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH), was established in 2000, as the first ever government agency responsible for

developing and promoting Saudi Arabia through tourism and heritage.[26] Nonetheless, it is important to note that Saudi Arabia's tourism sector remains under-developed, but SCTH has made efforts to develop museums, cultural institutions and heritage sites in the country, and were significant enough in successfully registering four national historical sites on the UNISCO World Heritage List (SCTH, 2019). In late 2016 in Dhahran, the city where oil was first discovered and known as the Kingdom's hub of knowledge, creativity and cross-cultural engagement, the King Abdul Aziz Centre for World Culture was opened. Its objectives will be to support Saudi Arabia's social, cultural and intellectual policy progress as it operates as a major venue for live, cultural and artistic events focusing on world creative development (Arab news, 2018).

4.3.1.2   *Horse Exhibition from Arabia to Ascot*

Saudi attempts to expose its culture through public diplomacy to reflect on the different aspects of Saudi Arabia's history can further be seen through the 2012 exhibition in London The Horse: from Arabia to Royal Ascot (The British Museum, 2012/c). This exhibition underlines the efforts by the foreign ministry to move beyond diplomatic events for elites and further into the public domain the exhibition explored the history of horses in the Middle East, which date back 300AD, including various breeds, and how Arabian horses were imported to Britain as far back as 900 years ago (The British Museum, 2012/c). The exhibition was significant soft power for the fact that it highlights Saudi Arabia's willingness to emphasize similarities between its own culture and that of Britain's in the form of a deep-rooted equestrian tradition since riding has been an important part of both Saudi and British society.

Indeed, the exhibition offered an opportunity to reflect on the different aspects of Saudi Arabia's culture with horses, whilst also challenged the visitors from the UK and the rest of the world who some of them believe that desert societies may lack a civilization. The intensive cultural exhibitions by Saudi Arabia in the UK serve as an as example of how the Kingdom has stepped up its cultural activity in an aggressive effort to improve its image among the foreign public (Exell & Rico 2016, p.147).

While Saudi Arabia has made efforts to stimulate its cultural presence in the UK through exhibitions activities, it has engaged in considerably fewer efforts to

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[26] High Commission for Tourism and National Heritage. (2019),
     https://scth.gov.sa/en/Pages/default.aspx#2 [Accessed 20 June 2019].

promote other forms of theatrical, cinematic and musical activities to address the British public, which can be influential in forming audience perceptions about the country. In fact, such activities remain limited, if not completely absent. This is unusual given the fact that the Kingdom enjoys artistic diversity in its local culture – as has been evidenced by major artistic events in the Kingdom. Therefore, diplomatic agencies appear reluctant in incorporating other forms of artistic expression with foreign publics.

Understanding the cultural aspects of Islamic identity and its influence on politics is important in trying to understand such reluctance. Saudi Arabia's religious system, which forms its political system, has adopted an extreme attitude that exclude all form of arts (Jabrane, 2017). This is supported by religious fatwa (religious opinion) against some forms of art that are enforced by senior Ulama Religious fatwas have for a very long time shaped the overall societal and political attitude towards some arts by viewing them as haram (forbidden), and therefore ensuring that they are prevented in both the educational and public sphere (Jabrane, 2017). This unfavourable attitude towards art as luxury and non-essential is an attitude that still persists among government agencies such as the Foreign Ministry, and as a result disinclines diplomats from using art and music as a means of national self-definition through their foreign missions.

However, there is a visible sign that Saudi embassy in London has recently begun incorporating art in its diplomacy; efforts can be found in the exhibition of famous Saudi artist and photographer, Ahmed Mater, that was hosted in the in the British Museum in 2012 (The British museum, 2012/b). However, this special event was conducted inside the embassy and thus could not reach a wider public audience in the UK. It can be argued that there could be greater inclusion of Saudi artists so as to advance the Kingdom's foreign policy objective of increasing its reputation among the wider British public. The fact that there is not more emphasis placed on art is unusual given that several genres of art have developed over the course of the last decade. Public galleries exhibiting modern art in Saudi Arabia have increased ten-fold. The city of Jeddah alone has tens of art galleries, where contemporary art is shown for exhibition and or for sale.[27] The influx of commercial galleries and a growing grass-

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[27] Jeeran. (2019). *https://m.jeeran.com/jeddah/search/?categories=1412&page=1* [Accessed June 2019].

roots movement of artists who have gained an international reputation further support this. One such example is Abdulanasir Gharim, whose paintings sold for more than a million dollars in an exhibition held outside of the Kingdom (Al-Hurrah, 2014).

A number of art exhibitions have taken place in the UK, ranging from fine to contemporary arts, photographs and sculpture. However, the artists themselves individually set these up – though the embassy did take the time to attend some of these. While Saudi art in the UK has been shown by individual artists and through invitations to international exhibitions, others have received support from British agencies, as is the case with the Edge of Arabia[28], a British non-profit social enterprise that focuses on improving the understanding of Saudi Art through free exhibitions. While the Saudi government has stimulated the art sector internally, it has not done so through a comprehensive strategy that actively showcases the creativity of local artists to foreign audiences. In a similar vein to art, Saudi Arabia has not moved towards wholeheartedly embracing music or films as part of its public diplomacy abroad the section will discuss this in details.

4.3.1.3   *Music and Films*

Previous public diplomacy encounters between the Kingdom and the UK have not been successful to bring Saudi films or music to the UK in spite of the fact that there remains great potential for both to be utilized as a form of soft power – insofar as it can serve to provide clarity on how Saudi culture has evolved over the past decade.

One reason for this is that the cinematic and music industry is not fully endorsed domestically and they are banned in the Kingdom. While there are no general bans on the musical profession and production itself, the government does in fact censor public musical events – barring music deemed to be folkloric. This is partly related to the interpretation of Islamic discourse that deems musical material to be unrighteous and a distraction from observing God (Jabrane, 2017). To some extent, teachers and mosque leaders also often propagate similar views (Jabrane, 2017). In spite of this, the music industry in Saudi Arabia is flourishing and a sizeable faction of the population is proud of it (Fadel, 2015). The Arabian Peninsula has always been, and still is, full of music, contrary to popular belief. In fact, musicians can turn into

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[28]   Edge of Arabia. (2019). *http://edgeofarabia.com* [Accessed June 2019].

national icons, such as Mohammed Abduh who is widely anointed in the Arab world as the 'artist of the Arab' (Dorian, Duane & McConnachie 1999, p. 353). At an official capacity however, music is not something that the country espouses as an international achievement.

Over the last ten years production of cinematic films has dramatically increased, a fact demonstrated by the creation of many film festivals in Saudi Arabia. From 1975 until 2012, there were 255 Saudi films (Rida, 2017). 'Wadja', a Saudi film produced by female director Haifa Al-Mansour in 2013, was filmed inside the Kingdom and was the first-ever Saudi candidate on the Oscar as well as British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA) shortlist for foreign language film. (Tartaglione, 2013). Despite the fact that it won seven international prizes, it severely lacked promotion stemming from the government's foreign policy. In fact, Saudi diplomatic missions do not engage in the promotion of creative works by filmmakers, or encourage such artists to present their work abroad as cultural sensitivity remains a barrier for diplomats when it comes to promoting cinema. While the presence of cinemas dates back to the 1960s in Saudi Arabia, they were banned following the occupation of the Grand Mosque in November 1979 in an attempt to contain the anger of the Saudi Islamic movement following the crisis (Hammond 2017, p. 116). Prior to this, they were a regular feature of Western residential compounds 'Aramco' and of sports clubs in the cities of Jeddah, Abha and Tiaf (Kamalipour 1994, p. 253).

Thus, unlike the way in which the United States film industry serves as a diplomatic asset for attaining political goals, the film industry in Saudi Arabia is not recognized domestically as something that the government ought to employ in order to project certain images of the Kingdom. Moreover, there is a fear that the promoting films could result in negative aspects of the film being blown out of proportion, that certain films could leak embarrassing facts that harm the reputation of the country. To complicate matters further, Saudi film directors tend to push existing boundaries that highlight the socially conservative history of the country. Recent works have been largely feminist and against the dominance of religious influence. For example, 'Ana wa Alakhar' (me and the other) explores the restrictions placed on women in the conservative Islamic kingdom (Al-Osaimi, 2005/ a). In spite of this, the Saudi government could benefit from encouraging the production of movies that aim to promote positive representations of Saudi Arabia's national struggle against terrorism. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia has yet to embrace the idea that it can employ the film

industry as a diplomatic asset. Certainly the soft power that flows from movies can be a tricky medium for an outsider to manipulate. However, in controlling its own image, states can challenge the credibility of media created representations of a country.

4.4   Conclusion

This Chapter outlined and critiqued Saudi Arabia's efforts to overhaul its public diplomacy strategy in order to develop an image that is in accordance with its domestic reform; an obvious divorce from its traditional public diplomacy, which has been a total reliant on its officials and public relations firms. The Kingdom has done this using aspects of its soft power arising from elements of a country's character, such as religion, youth population - with the aim to leverage its position of dominance in the world. An interfaith dialogue initiative was flagged as the only intergovernmental organization with a board of directors from a large world religious community. This step came as part of the 'war of ideas' initiative, the fruit of seven years of diplomatic negotiations. The aim of this public diplomacy program, however, is not unilateral. As much as it is for promoting tolerance and harmony between religions in Saudi Arabia, it is also to bolster the political motives of the Kingdom by revamping its global image. However, this move faced global criticism as Saudi Arabia was accused of hypocrisy in terms of its domestic religious policies where followers of other faiths are still persecuted, and conversion to another faith from Islam is still punishable by death. Saudi Arabia has also sought to ameliorate the situation by encouraging gender parity in order to buttress its image of a modern State. It did so by allowing two female athletes to represent Saudi Arabia at the 2012 London Summer Olympics, an unprecedented move in the history of the Kingdom.

Even though Saudi Arabia sought to portray itself as a nation that allows women to progress towards equality, this measure was not entirely carried out of free will. However, Saudi Arabia's promise of an inclusive gender policy turned out to be rather hollow, as it did not remain consistent in the domestic scene. Furthermore, the continuation of conservative restrictions on basic freedom of women such as the ban on driving at that time fuelled the criticism towards Saudi's gender policy as propaganda, rather than genuine concern towards inclusivism and equality. To compensate for the confidence deficit that Saudi Arabia has incurred because of the abovementioned shortcomings of its diplomatic policies, it has sought to more creative

methods. Education, culture and art were promoted systematically in order to familiarize the West with the rich heritage of the Kingdom in a wider bid to seek acceptance from their societies. These initiatives, though sometimes drawing controversy, have raised an important issue on whether they have, not managed to create a positive outcome on Saudi Arabia's image.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis

5.1   Overview

After examining various forms of Saudi Arabia public diplomacy initiatives of the past and how it has interacted with the UK to promote its image, it is important to assess whether this effort has been effective in addressing its image deficit, and which factors are involved in supporting or obstructing the success of this objective. This Chapter will present a detailed explanation of the methodology adopted to answer this question. The literature review will examine the type of designs, which were consulted before selecting the sequential explanatory design for this study, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of mixed method research. Secondly, it will identify the methods for data collection and the reasons for choosing these particular methods over others. Additionally, it will explain the population studies and describe the sampling for each method and the reasons for such a choice. The Chapter will go on to explain the research limitations, particularly in measuring the effectiveness of public diplomacy more generally, and interviewing elites.

5.2   Multimethodology: Literature Review

Multimethodology refers to the usage of more than one method in collecting data for research (Brewer & Hunter 2006, pp. xiii). Mixed method research, specifically, deals with mixing the two distinct methodologies or paradigms – quantitative and qualitative. Mixed methods design also means analysing both the quantitative and qualitative findings separately and then 'mixing' the result to answer the reach questions and hypotheses.

Mixed methods can be defined as when researchers collect information, analyses the information and then draw in inferences only after mixing both quantitative and qualitative data thoroughly (Molina-Azorin & Fetters, 2016). Alternatively, and perhaps more comprehensively, Clark, Creswell, & Green (2008) defined mixed methods as pertaining to a research design, which has both philosophy

and methodology in it. There are both qualitative and quantitative approaches involved, and these work together to offer better understanding of research (Management Association & Information Resources, 2015, pp. 32).

Guest (2013), argues that one of the many reasons why researchers may prefer using multi method strategy in social science research is that it provides certain distinct advantages not provided by singular methods. Using simply quantitative or qualitative data may not be sufficient in isolation yet both can provide important data in their own respects. Additionally, and in the context of evaluating Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy, having both quantitative and qualitative approaches afford the researcher multiple angles to understand the country's public diplomacy and a more complete picture of its impact in the UK for the benefit of a better conclusion. Essentially, it becomes a case of the more evidence, the better. The aggregated qualitative and quantitative processes make it possible to examine possibilities that one of them cannot provide. There are four primary types of mixed method research designs, which were reviewed by the researcher before selecting the sequential explanatory design.

5.2.1   Sequential Explanatory

Here, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used but the collection and analysis of one is given more priority over the other. Quantitative data is more heavily focused on in this kind of design, with qualitative data deemed important but given less priority. However, the findings of both the methods are not derived and presented separately, but are integrated to give a fuller picture of the solution or answer to the research problem. This is generally done in the interpretation phase of the research study (Wisdom & Cresswell, 2013, p. 2).

Sequential 'exploratory' design does the exact opposite of sequential 'explanatory' design – it offers more priority to the collection and analysis of qualitative data over the collection and analysis of quantitative data. Again, he findings achieved through both methods are then combined into an integrated whole during the interpretation stage of the study (Bazeley 2003).

Both sequential methods have the benefit of being easy to design and implement because there are clearly demarcated steps and stages to be followed. The design is easily built and the results therefore end up becoming easy to report. This makes for a very focused and streamlined research (*Clark, Creswell, & Green* 2008, p.268). Some of the weaknesses of both these methods are that it can be a very lengthy

process because data collection has to be completed in both forms, in different stages – both quantitative and qualitative.

5.2.2   Concurrent Triangulations

Here, instead of collecting one kind of data first and then the other, both are collected simultaneously. Although the collection and analysis of both kinds of data is done simultaneously, the processes are kept separate from each other. Again, as per the sequential methods, the findings are not reported separately as received from the two methods, but are integrated to form conclusions at the interpretation stage of the study. No special priority is given to any one kind of method, however, and both are deemed equally essential (*Clark, Creswell, & Green* 2008, pp. 183-188).

This kind of design helps achieve a complete understanding of a specific phenomenon and tends to do very well especially when corroboration or cross verification of findings is required. However, it should be kept in mind that this method typically requires a certain level of expertise because two methods are being carried out at the same time (Wisdom & Cresswell, 2013, p. 4). It also has the advantage of saving time compared to the sequential methods because simultaneously carrying out of both of the processes saves the time it would take to separately carry out the finding in two phases, in other words sequentially.

5.2.3   Concurrent Nested

This method stands apart from the other three methods (Concurrent triangulations, sequential explanatory and exploratory). Here, the level of priority (qualitative v quantitative) given to one method over the other is apparent. The predominant method is used for data collection, and this method nests the other (less important) method within itself (*Clark, Creswell, & Green*, 2008, p.184). Integration in this approach can prove difficult, though, and it is best chosen by a researcher with a certain level of expertise. A common criticism offered up to this process is that because less comparative priority is given to one method (whether qualitative or quantitative), there is a certain disadvantage of not having a balanced interpretation at the end of the study (Wisdom & Cresswell, 2013, p .4).

After reviewing the above, the design of this study followed a sequential 'explanatory' technique; it is also dependent, with one qualitative data adding

additional depth and understanding of the quantitative. The use of this approach was chosen to ensure a stronger validity for the quantitative results which seek to examine how favourable is Saudi Arabia's image in the UK public opinion, in light of its public diplomacy measures, and provides more details about the quantitative results which seek to examine the factors shaping the UK public' opinion regarding Saudi Arabia. Although some social scientists, such as Creswell (2007), recommend that it is important for sequential designs to use the same sample of participants in both qualitative and quantities, this study used a different sample of population to get specific information from experts and government representatives which cannot be obtained by the type of participant in the quantitative phase; the public, who may not have had sufficient information about Saudi-UK relations.

5.3   Data Collection

The Data collection for this study has depended on both primary and secondary resources. Primary data was collected directly due to the lack of scholarly research available on Saudi public diplomacy; the primary collected data has included qualitative and quantitative types. The quantitative methods, which were in the form of a questionnaire, have helped the researcher to better understand UK public opinion regarding Saudi Arabia as a means of assessing the effectiveness of its public diplomacy. However, to gain a deeper understanding of the factors shaping the Saudi image issue, a qualitative phase followed. It was based on interviewing British and Saudi elites, diplomats, researchers and journalists (details will follow in the Qualitative Method section). Such a mix of methods has provided a deeper insight into whether Saudi government-sponsored initiatives have been successful in reaching their targets, whilst also offering balance in the analysis given by the researcher.

Secondary resources were also consulted during the early stages of this research process. Articles, online publications and prior studies were reviewed to develop an understanding of the conceptual and practical aspects of conducting diplomacy public diplomacy. This stage was essential to identifying the gaps in the literature illustrated earlier in the research, and therefore to propose the hypothesis and the questions the study needed to examine. Another useful way to discover more about the topic was by attending seminars, discussion panels and conferences both in the UK and abroad. Two of the most significant conferences relating to public diplomacy were

the Dubrovnik Diplomatic Forum in 2015 and the ISA International Studies Conventions in USA, where the researcher presented a paper Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy. These have allowed the researcher to gather information from diplomacy and international relations experts and practitioners, in addition to the aforementioned sources.

5.4   Quantitative Method

The aim of the first quantitative phase was to gather data on the current perceptions of Saudi Arabia amongst people in UK. This was in order to give an indication as to whether Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy activities in the UK have been successful in informing and influencing British public opinion to view its image positively. A public opinion questionnaire was used as opposed to other methods such as focus groups since the nature of the research requires the participation of a larger number of people- which is very difficult to achieve in focus groups- and also because a small number of people may not adequately generalise opinion of the population in the UK.

It is important to note that quantitative research generally tends to have a larger sample size, for the simple reason that the very motive of quantitative research is to find a result that can then be generalised for the rest of the population (Baran, 2016, pp.108-119). Additionally, there is a need for in-depth information regarding how Saudi Arabia is perceived in the UK, as this has been rarely examined in recent academic research; this information would be too difficult to gain via a single focus group. Of course, it is to be remembered that the researcher may bend such rules if the need of the study so demands it. The purpose and intent of the study is the destination, and such rules are merely tools used to reach that destination (Stage & Manning 2015, pp.182-186).

However, because surveying a larger pool of participants will not give the researcher an opportunity to discuss their opinion towards the object of the questionnaire, the researcher decided to incorporate the qualitative phase (See the Qualitative Methods section). Determining the questions was an important phase for the quantitative process. The questions used in the questionnaire focused on specific areas, which, after consulting the literature on Saudi Arabia's image, have been identified as issues that are negatively impacting Saudi Arabia's image (see Table 1).

Several statements were formulated to reflect these issues, such as Saudi Arabia foreign and domestic policy, people and culture. The logic behind the choice for this was not only to measure whether the participants view Saudi Arabia negatively or positively, but to identify which aspects are most likely to shape the overall public image as the survey included 15 statements, distributed to a sample size of 320 people.

5.4.1   Sampling of Participation for the Quantitative Method

In this research, the planned questionnaire was spread over a large demographic region in England, UK. The participants were selected to represent a non-governmental audience to serve the notion of public diplomacy as follows: from each university the researcher took 20 academics, 20 non-academic (professionals), 20 undergraduate students, and 20 postgraduate students. This means that the number of participants from four universities reached 320. This number may be considered too small to reflect the whole population in the UK, but it must be remembered that the researcher has accessed data that can supplement her hypothesis for the research (see *Chapter One: Insight into Saudi Arabia's Image in the 21 Century*).

The logic behind using academic institutions is because these include participants from different walks of life; people from different disciplines, but also social background. Although the participants belong to academic institutions, not all of them were involved in academia; there were also professionals involved in providing services within the university's maintenance such as transportation, among other things. The logic behind this choice is to minimise any bias or prejudice that may arise from the choice of a particular section of society. Additionally, academic institutions are accessible for academic research and people who study or work there are more likely to be willing to participate in academic research.

The questionnaire was available to 320 British persons at four universities including: The University of Oxford, University College London, the University of Hull and the University of East Anglia. These universities were selected for this study for several reasons. Most prominently, it was important to examine a mixed set of universities, which represent different demographic distributions; they are spread throughout different areas in the UK, which in turn, allows for capturing a variety of views from different levels of public opinion; this was important to enhance the validity of the research findings. However, the sample of participants was not selected randomly.

5.4.2   Limitations of Collecting the Quantitative Data

It is important to note that there have been some limitations to this study, as data on Saudi Arabia was not easily available and often sparse. In the post-Arab spring era, the age-old culture of secrecy amongst officials in Saudi Arabia has begun to change somewhat, as news and information became more easily circulated through different mediums. This has put officials under pressure to be more transparent and this has resulted in making enough information available to the public domain and that has helped the researcher to get a better picture of the problems that face this research. However, some Saudi officials who had been approached were reluctant to give information, and sometimes the information that they did give was inconsistent and was contradicted by other sources reviewed by the researcher. However, it helped that the researcher comes from a well-known family in Saudi Arabia that dominates in the military, something that gained her a privilege of trust to access materials to support her research and reach out to officials. Although there were some Saudi officials who provided useful and relevant qualitative information on this topic, it was useful to conduct interviews that went beyond them and to include those with considerable knowledge on the workings in the field of international relations such as researchers and journalists – people who were freer to give critical opinion when compared to officials, something which helped to overcome research limitations.

A further limitation was that perceptions about a country are subject to change at a moment's notice or can remain stable for long periods of time. For example, the United States, which has benefited from a leading perception around the world for several decades due to its soft power prowess, has seen a noticeable dip in the Islamic world following its invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Melissen, 2005, p. 5). Similarly, countries that have been negatively perceived such as Brazil have been able to slightly improve their image within an extremely short period of time due to geopolitical circumstances and economic power (Ristovic, 2012)

American broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow contended that measuring the impact of public diplomacy has always been a challenge. Indeed, as Tim Banfield, Director of Value for Money Studies at the National Audit Office, has also noted, the impact of public diplomacy is difficult to quantify 'year on year' (Foreign Commonwealth office, 2008). Certainly, since the impact of public diplomacy programmes can take a long time to manifest, employing public diplomacy has rarely

resulted in change in a short period of time. The next section will further discuss this limitation and others.

5.4.3   Measuring Public Diplomacy Impact

It is appreciated that assessing the impact of public diplomacy that relies on soft power is not easy task. In addition, there is far less scholarly attention given to which practical evaluation measurements can be applied. The researcher attempted to minimise this limitation by examining tools which have been used by governments to assess their public diplomacy activities overseas. It was evident that public diplomacy outcomes cannot be measured in one single thematic way, because every country expects a different outcome from practising public diplomacy and this makes it impossible to follow one method of measurement. On this, Brown (2017) contends:

> *There should not be a one-size-fits-all method to understanding the impact of public diplomacy, as it will require a mix of them and there must be a long-term commitment to collecting the various data points that reflect the complexity of public diplomacy work and the relationships they try to create and maintain.*

But, even with the absence of a formal evaluation mechanism for public diplomacy, some literature has offered insights for accomplishing such a purpose. For instance, the 'Lord Carter's Review' of UK public diplomacy, in 2006, recommended that the British government must develop means to evaluate its public diplomacy activities in order to create accountability and achieve effective performance and results (Public Diplomacy Review, 2006). His approach focused on linking the activities with the objectives (Wilding, 2007). As a result of this, a questionnaire in this study had been chosen to give an indication about a country's image. One logical reason for this choice is linked to the motivation for Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy, which previous Chapters (three and four) outlined as attempting to secure a positive public image; therefore, it is 'public' opinion that must be measured. In addition, the definition of public diplomacy stresses on the relationship between the 'activity' of public diplomacy and the 'objective', so the evaluation of its effectiveness should always be based on why such activity is conducted.

Furthermore, and as a result of Secretary Clinton's calls on the State Department to institutionalise a process of monitoring and evaluating public

diplomacy work in 2010, USA public diplomacy has developed a number of qualitative and quantitative tools to assess how effective United States' public diplomacy is through education exchange programmes, such as the International Visitor Leadership Program, and the Citizen Exchange Programmes. An independent firm, which was hired to examine effectiveness, included surveying participant opinion to assess the programs' effectiveness (Department of States, 2012).

Indeed, measuring public opinion can also be obtained from attitudes polling, for example via Gallup[29] or Zogby Analytic [30] – all major organisations which measure and track the public's attitudes about *political*, economic and social issues. Although these give relatively accurate indications and they cover larger population, it was not possible to use them in this study because Saudi Arabia was either not covered by their services or their data on Saudi Arabia was not updated.

5.5   Results and Discussion: Analysis of Saudi Arabia's image in the UK

A mix between online-based and paper-based questionnaires was employed to collect qualitative data for this study (see Table 1). While online-based questionnaires and economic data collection methods can be easily delivered and administrated, such questionnaires are linked to low response rates. Therefore, in order to tackle these drawbacks, a paper-based questionnaire was also employed. The questionnaire comprised 15 questions, and it was divided into two parts (details illustrated in Tables 1 and 2). In the first part, participants were asked to give personal information, whereas in the second part the participants were asked to express their opinions and perceptions towards Saudi Arabia. For the purpose of confidentiality, participation was completely anonymous, as the participants were not required to provide any personal information that identified them.

The questionnaire measured the perception of Saudi Arabia in the UK to gauge evidence of whether its public diplomacy has been effective in influencing UK public opinion to positively view its image. The significance of this stage is to answer the main question, which seeks to discover, "How favourable is Saudi Arabia's image in the UK in light of its creative public diplomacy measures?"

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[29] Gallup, *https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx* [Accessed 20 June 2019].

[30] Zogby Analytic, *https://zogbyanalytics.com* [Accessed 20 June 2019].

It goes without saying that public diplomacy is an important instrument in terms of informing foreign populations about states, identity, ideals and policies. And Saudi Arabia has done so, in particular, by engaging in soft power initiatives seeking to informing the foreign public about developments taking place in its domestic scene in regards to issues of criticism; but how would that secure a positive image?

The questionnaire was made available to 320 British personnel (See Qualitative Method). Of the 320 personnel who received the questionnaire, 199 personnel responded, giving a response rate of 62%; 20% of the responses were via an online-based questionnaire, and 42% were via a paper-based questionnaire. A direct measurement technique was used on participants through the Likert Scale[31] where participants express their level of agreement or disagreement on specific statements. These statements were formulated based on the underlying motivation behind public diplomacy efforts; for example, one of the activities carried out by Saudi Arabia involved an interfaith dialogue and participants were therefore giving statements about the role of Saudi Arabia in countering religious extremism. The question asked: Does Saudi Arabia embrace moderate Islam? (see rest of questions in Table 1). It is important to note that this approach was chosen instead of indirect measurement technique (e.g., projective techniques) because the researcher wanted to capture the intensity of the respondents' feelings.

The participants, their demographics and their characteristics are presented in Table 1. The results indicate that among the 199 participants, 52% were males and 48% were females. It was found that 48% of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 years, and 5% the participants were over 50 years. 22% of the participants were academic staff, and 28% were undergraduate students. Half of the participants (50%) were white British, and only 14% of them were black British. For the vast majority of British respondents, their perceptions of Saudi Arabia come from the

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[31] Likert Scale is a method that places person's level of agreement or disagreement with a statement using five point scales (Law & Pascoe 2012, p.123). The original Likert Scale used a series of questions with five response alternatives: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. It can be combined the responses from the series of questions to create an attitudinal measurement scale (Boone & Boone, 2012 cited in Subedi 2016, p. 38). This approach has been commonly used to gather data specifically in survey research, which seek to measure human attitude (Weng & Cheng 2000- cited in Subedi 2016, p. 36). Therefore, this method is suitable for this study to gauge the intended participants' attitude of British public opinion towards Saudi Arabia.

media. More than half of the participants (51%) agreed that mass media (i.e., TV, newspapers, radio and cinema) was the primary source of information about Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the results show that social media (27%), communication with Saudi friend/business colleague (7%) and school education (11%) were also important sources of information about Saudi Arabia.

Table 5.1.   Characteristics of the Participants (N=94)

		Frequency	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	103	52
	Female	96	48
	Total	**N=199**	**100%**
Age	18-25	96	48
	26-35	57	29
	36-50	36	18
	>50	10	5
	Total	**N=199**	**100%**
Ethnic Origin	White British	100	50
	British with Asian Origin	50	25
	British with Black Origin	27	14
	British with Arab Origin	13	7
	Other	9	4
	Total	**N=199**	**100%**
Location	University of Oxford	14	7
	University College London	18	9
	University of Hull	91	46
	University of East Anglia	76	38
	Total	**N= 199**	**100%**
Relation to his/her Educational Establishment	Post-graduate Student	87	44
	Undergraduate Student	56	28
	Academic Staff	44	22
	Non-academic Staff	12	6
	Total	**N=199**	**100%**
Source of Information	Mass media (i.e. Television, newspaper, radio, cinema)	102	51

about Saudi Arabia	Social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	54	27
	School education	21	11
	I worked in or visited Saudi Arabia	9	4
	Saudi friend or business colleague	13	7
	Total	**N=199**	**100%**

The second part of the questionnaire focused on the image of Saudi Arabia in the UK. The participants were asked to answer 14 questions which were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from high to low (strongly agree to strongly disagree). In order to find out the overall score for each question, the mean is calculated for each question (see details in Table 2). It should be noted that all questions' responses with "no knowledge" were excluded from the mean's calculation.

In Table 2, questions' means are shown. The mean scores ranged from 1.9 to 4.3 on a 5-point Likert scale. The results show that the respondents slightly agreed (Mean=2.6) that Saudi contributes to the world's good such as offering financial aid and assistance to developing countries. However, the respondents are neutral "neither agree nor disagree" (Mean=3.1) in terms of supporting Saudi Arabia's global oil policy.

The respondents agree (Mean=2.32) that Saudi Arabia is an important and strategic partner for Britain in terms of countering terrorism. Furthermore, the respondents confirm (Mean=2.47) that the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Britain is an important aspect for British public interests. The respondents think (Mean=2.3) that Britain should extend its relationship with Saudi Arabia beyond the interests, which only relate to the oil industry. On the other hand, the respondents strongly agree that Saudi Arabia and Britain have different values (Mean=3.98).

The results point out that Saudi Arabia is a religious country (Mean=2.4), while the results reject the notion that Saudi Arabia should be considered as a country that embraces moderate Islam (Mean=3.4). It is obvious that the respondents have negative views about Saudi Arabia's human rights policy (Mean=4). Likewise, the results suggest that the respondents disagree with Saudi Arabia's practices in terms of women's rights (Mean=4.3) and human rights (Mean=3.9).

Importantly, it can be seen that the respondents have more knowledge about the Saudis' domestic policy than Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. For example, while

40% of the respondents have no knowledge about Saudi Arabian global oil policy, 92% of the respondents have knowledge about women's' rights.

Finally, the majority of the respondents state that they interact with Saudi students at their universities (Mean=1.8), and also most of them view Saudis as friendly.

Overall, the results reveal that the favourability of Saudis among the respondents is varied. As figure (3) illustrates, 38% of the respondents perceive Saudis as favourable, and 48% of them identify Saudis as unfavourable. 9% of the respondents consider Saudis as very unfavourable, and only 6% of the respondents view Saudis as very favourable.

Table 5.2. Descriptive Analysis

Question	F / %	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No knowledge the about question's subject	Mean	Mode
Saudi Arabia contributes to the world's good, in term of offering financial aid and assistance to the developing world	N	8	108	30	15	21	17	2.60	2
	%	4	54	15	8	11	9		
Saudi Arabia's relationship with Britain is important for British public interests	N	24	104	18	2	28	23	2.47	2
	%	12	52	9	1	14	12		
Saudi Arabia is a strategic partner for Britain, especially in countering terrorism	N	22	110	22	5	15	25	2.32	2
	%	11	55	11	3	8	13		
Saudi Arabia embraces moderate Islam	N	4	32	46	55	32	30	3.47	4
	%	2	16	23	28	16	15		
Saudi Arabia's policy fosters terrorism	N	18	44	46	6	56	29	3.22	3
	%	9	22	23	3	28	15		
Saudi Arabia respects human rights	N	6	6	26	96	48	17	3.96	4
	%	3	3	14	51	26	3		
Saudi Arabia and Britain share similar values	N	6	12	22	80	60	19	3.98	4
	%	3	13	23	85	64	20		
I approve Saudi Arabia's global oil policy	N	4	22	68	8	18	79	3.12	3
	%	2	11	34	4	9	40		
Britain should build its relationship with Saudi Arabia on other strategic interests other than oil	N	30	82	28	16	6	37	2.3	2
	%	32	87	30	17	6	39		
Saudi Arabia supports women's rights	N	2	2	14	82	84	15	4.33	4
	%	1	1	7	41	42	8		
I approve human rights policy of Saudi Arabia	N	2	2	28	84	50	33	4.07	4
	%	1	1	14	42	25	17		
I do interact with Saudi students at my University	N	24	164	0	0	0	11	1.87	2
	%	12	82	0	0	0	6		
I think Saudis are kind and friendly	N	38	126	12	2	2	19	1.91	2
	%	19	63	6	1	1	10		
I think Saudis are religious	N	16	105	4	41	0	33	2.42	2
	%	8	53	2	21	0	17		

1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree , 4 = strongly disagree, F=Frequencies

Saudis' Overall Favourability Among the Respondents

■ Very favourable ■ favourable ■ unfavourable ■ very unfavourable
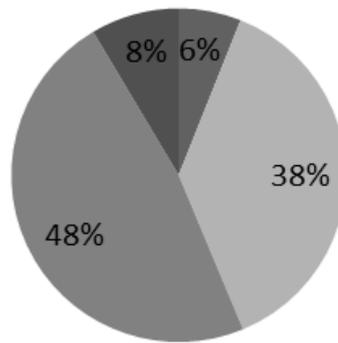
Figure 5.1.   Saudis' Overall Favourability Among the Respondents

The data gathered suggest that Saudi Arabia continues its struggle in addressing UK public opinion. Up until writing this study, one can say that there has been little discernible positive recovery for Saudi Arabia's image in the UK. Yet, the broadly negative perception of the Kingdom among the British public comes despite the widespread awareness of the importance of Saudi-Britain political relations. Many British people agree that Saudi Arabia has positive aspects too, however, especially with its generosity in humanitarian contributions to the world's poorer nations. Nevertheless, Saudi public diplomacy and its soft power fail to emerge as a primary agent in influencing a positive perception among British citizens.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia's attempt to practice its religious soft power through interfaith dialogue was meant to project an image of a moderate Kingdom, but it did not yield the expected outcome and the UK's perception of Riyadh remains as a staunch conservative and extremist state, as shown in the above survey. Likewise, the data results suggest that respondents still disagree with Saudi Arabia's practices in terms of human rights despite the Saudi's public diplomacy attempts to portray itself as a nation that allows women to progress towards equality by supporting female participation in sporting events such as the London Olympics. This could suggest that the appalling treatment of women and religious minorities has become part of the

simplified picture of Saudi Arabia, but it also shows the significant limitations of public diplomacy preventing Saudi Arabia from securing a positive image in the UK—a nation where civil liberties and freedoms are not only considered paramount but are critical to shaping perceptions of other nations.

Moreover, the study results show that the respondents have more knowledge of the Saudi domestic policy than its foreign policy. For example, while some respondents had no knowledge of Saudi Arabia's global oil policy, most of them had knowledge of women's rights in the Kingdom. Additionally, it is noticeable that respondents have perceived Saudi Arabia's domestic policy negatively and, consequently, their lack of knowledge of Saudi foreign policy may contribute to an increasingly negative perception of Saudi Arabia. In other words, the overall image of Saudi Arabia, mostly negative, is shaped based on knowledge of its domestic policy.

As a result, it can be argued that Saudi public diplomacy that is now slowly moving beyond state-based, diplomatic, elite conceptions towards soft power has partially succeeded in influencing public opinion in the UK positively. The overall negative image of Saudi Arabia stems primarily from the Kingdom's domestic policies. However, there are some promising aspects of Saudi public diplomacy in the UK that could bear fruit according to the data shown. For example, student clubs and educational programs that are being promoted through public diplomacy in the UK has a positive influence on British citizens. The majority of respondents viewed Saudis with whom they've interacted at universities as friendly and kind. This could be linked to the fact that educational exchange programs facilitate personal interactions that tend to be free of overt ulterior political motives. Therefore, such tools, if continued strategically, could be an encouraging soft power for Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy to challenge the Western misconception of the country and its people. Nonetheless, the results shown are still alarming as this paradox in public diplomacy rarely occurs between two ostensibly close governments—'friendly' government relations should ordinarily result in a positive, not negative, 'public' image.

Substantial evidence shows that 'domestic' policies contribute significantly to shaping perception of Saudi Arabia. Yet, this argument needs to be justified through interviews with the target audience in order to understand why Saudi public diplomacy falls short of actualising the desired image. The present study addressed this concern by assessing its findings both quantitively and qualitatively. As such, it was able to identify factors affecting the formation of a Saudi image overseas. Examination of

such factors is essential to drawing a link between Saudi Arabia's domestic policies and its loss of soft power in public diplomacy. This conclusion contributes to the existing body of literature that lacks an argument demonstrating how domestic policy decisions may affect public diplomacy goals. This particular area has received little academic attention, as pointed out earlier in this thesis.

5.6 Qualitative Method

5.6.1 Sampling of Participants for the Qualitative Methods

Using qualitative data in this study was necessary to enhance the exploration of factors, which have contributed to shaping Saudi Arabia's image, and to identify issues around Saudi Arabian image formation which was not primarily part of the quantitative phase. Insights from interviewees have been featured in this research based on semi-structured interviews, which were theorised as a method for the qualitative phase. This type was chosen over others, such as focus groups, because the research needs a more detailed picture to be built up from the perspective of experts, government and officials, but cannot be gathered all together in a focus group. Semi structured interviews were beneficial with those particular participants because it allowed more knowledge to be extended from the questions, while at the same time kept the questions focused to obtain specific information.

Semi-structured interview has enriched the investigation with additional information from experts and giving qualitative depth to the quantitative findings (see questions in Table 3). However, the aim of extracting some quotes from various interviewees was to examine why the respondents have responded in the way that they did to the statements which were given in the quantitative phase. Questions for the qualitative phase had been formulated based on the issues that emerged from the quantitative data.

This phase started with interviews of 12 participants, including six diplomats and officials in in the Foreign Commonwealth Office and the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They are divided as follows: three Saudi diplomats in UK, and three British diplomats who have previously served in the Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. This number is sufficient considering that they are experts and that there is a questionnaire to complement the purpose of this research.

The logic behind choosing to interview diplomats is that they are knowledgeable and have a broader understanding of international relations; therefore, they can enhance quantitative results. Moreover, existing studies have rarely conducted interviews with elites, due to difficulties in reaching them. However, the researcher decided also to include input from six researchers and journalists, because this would add credibility to her research. Researchers were selected due to their experience in research ethics; therefore they are less likely to respond with the answer they feel the researcher expects to hear from them. These came from both British and Saudi think tanks, including the Gulf Studies Centre, Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House), the Council of Arab British Understanding and the Dubai-based Al-Mesbar Research Centre. The researchers also provided useful insights to this study and were selected according to their expert knowledge of Saudi-British relations. Participants were contacted via email, telephone and face to face.

5.6.2 Limitation of Collecting the Qualitative Data: Interviewing Elites

The researcher faced several challenges in her initial years of researching. One of these was choosing the right people to interview. The last few years have seen an increase in the literature regarding interviewing elites. This can be attributed to exponential expansion in areas such as case studies, focus groups, observant participation, and interviewing. Also, a keen interest of scholars has developed in recent years around understanding not only the behaviour and perspectives of leaders but also business, politics and society as a whole. The word 'elite' has wider connotations in scholarly literature. No such clear-cut definitions are given for the word and hence it is interpreted differently in its own way by many scholars. The term 'elite' in this research refers to diplomats, top government officials and people from ruling families. These categories were very important aspects of this study, as their perspectives of their experience will give an insight into issues with which this study is concerned.

The researcher is known for her work in journalism in Saudi Arabia and her profession gave her ample experience in conducting interviews; she also has a network of elites with whom she can connect. But, for her, the real challenge was to interview men in Saudi Arabia. The country does not allow interaction between people of opposite sex without any relations. Hence, meetings were arranged in London. Also, it was easy for the researcher to connect with British ambassadors because her

profession had allowed her to build many high-profile contacts, some of whom she had met during her research. The interview with former British ambassadors took place in the UK, while only one was carried out at the British Embassy in the United Arab Emirates. One of the interviews was also conducted at 10 Downing Street.

There were several techniques, which were adopted by the interviewer to get the best output. She conducted a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions as this enabled her elite interviewees to give flexible replies and this meant she was able to extract more information from them. Initiating a conversation was also beneficial for the researcher because it gave more scope for interaction than a simple question-answer format. Such techniques were useful in bringing the interviewee back to the conversation when it had lost its track. Generally, diplomats are well trained to give out only the information they want to. Hence, some tried to control their interview and remained keener to answer questions selectively.

Another disadvantage involved was recording the interviews. The interviews with diplomats were transcribed rather than recorded. Security measures in many diplomatic buildings do not allow electronic devices. Many of the interviewees were hesitant to have their interviews recorded because they worked for organisations that do not encourage them to give personal opinions. The researcher's interview questions were well structured and organised, which has allowed her to cover the most important information relevant to the study. Therefore, having a verbatim script did lead to loss of some minor information. The aim of the interview was to speak to diplomats with expertise rather than influence. The research involves dealing with foreign relations among countries, which requires information to be drawn from participants in fields of diplomacy and foreign policy. It is for this reason that the interviewer chose to include diplomatic and official representatives as interviewees.

5.7   Result and Discussion: Conceptual Analysis of Influences and Factors Shaping Image of Saudi Arabia in the UK

The data gathered from the quantitative phase has shown that Saudi Arabia's sophisticated public diplomacy is not wholly successful in diminishing the causes of its image deficit, therefore, it is important to understand the underlying factors of the low percentage of favourability among respondents identified earlier. It is also important to provide balance in the analysis by conducting interviews with experts with a view to validating the hypothesis, which suggested that Saudi Arabia's

sophisticated public diplomacy cannot diminish the causes of its image deficit and identify factors as to why not. The researcher further explored this by asking her interviewees the following questions.

1. Saudi Arabia has initiated a number of public diplomacy initiatives, why haven't these steps been effective in improving Saudi Arabia's image?
2. Why does Saudi Arabia suffer from an image deficit in the UK?
3. What factors are shaping Saudi Arabia's image in the UK?

Through an analysis of the interplay of factors obtained from the interviews, it was clear that Saudi Arabia's negative image is conditioned by specific political, historical and cultural variations in its domestic scene compared to the UK's. The following aspects have been identified during interviews as key to furthering the understanding of formation of Saudi Arabia's image deficit, which its public diplomacy initiatives have not been wholly able to mitigate: the development of the historical relationship between British and Saudi states; the domestic policies of the latter; related experiences of British expats in Saudi Arabia; the rise of Islamophobia in Britain; the British state's attendant identification of Islam as an object of political concern and intervention, and the British media's articulation and popularisation of such discourses.

One important explanation for the incongruence between the close political ties of the British and Saudi states and their respective publics was that relations between the two have principally been mediated through their ruling elites which has proved insufficient in stimulating significant forms of inter-cultural relations and mutual understanding between the peoples of the two societies, because, interaction between the two publics has historically been indirect and mediated by elites.

Indeed, migration has historically provided greater opportunities for securing a form of public interaction. Since the formation of the Kingdom in 1932, hundreds of thousands of British workers have migrated to Saudi Arabia. Whilst migration has allowed many British citizens to enrich their understanding of Saudi Arabia's culture and values, the 'feedback' effect of such experiences in British society has been uneven. The researcher has addressed this issue in an interview with a former British

ambassador to Riyadh which took place in London, in 2015.[32] Answering her question regarding why Saudi Arabia has an image deficit he stated that aspects of the domestic policies of Saudi Arabia have often been experienced as 'at odds' with the values and expectations of British culture and society. He added that aspects of Saudi law that are incongruent with those of Western states have proved challenging too for British expatriates, and often negatively affecting its perception.

This perception of differences with British society is longstanding; knowledge about Saudi society and culture was initially informed by the orientalist narratives of travellers and political envoys at the turn of the 20th century (Potts 1988, p.117). This more established set of signifiers has been supplemented by the prominence of Islamophobic discourses in British politics and the media in the past decade that have attended the 'war on terror'. The national image of Saudi Arabia – the symbolic homeland of Islam – has been shaped by these discourses through its association with Sharia Law, the 9/11 Saudi hijackers, and lack of gender equality. Kundnani (2014) identifies two currents within such discourses – a 'culturalist' approach which views Islam as fundamentally incompatible with Western modernity and its values, and a liberal 'reformist' approach that stresses the compatibility of a particular 'undistorted', political and 'modern' version of Islam with the culture and political institutions of Western states (Kundnani, 2014, pp5-6). The Saudi state can be signified through either of these approaches, encompassing a large swathe of political opinion. Moreover, the national image of the Kingdom is located within a chain of signifiers concerning Islam more generally. Recurrent moral panics concerning Islam circulated by the media draw on the categories and oppositions integral to the discourses identified by Kundnani e.g., clashes between value systems, notions of an irrational religious fanaticism, the threat of Sharia law undermining the institutions of the British state and the oppression of women in Islam. Refined notions of 'Islam' and 'Islamic culture' create a situation in which historical and socio-political particularities, nuances and distinctions become occluded. Through conflation and association with this signifier concerning Islam, this discursive context works to enhance perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a place of difference, intolerance, and oppression.

Other issues that were raised in the interviews, which contributed to the negative image of Saudi Arabia, included the war on terror, the rise of Islamophobia,

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[32] Interview was conducted face to face at Four Milbank, October, 2015.London, UK.

and political and economic relations between Saudi Arabia and the UK. It was evident that the close political ties between the two countries, which have been principally mediated by the ruling elites and have been widely considered to aid the perception of the relationship, were still insufficient to increase positive perceptions of Saudi Arabia more generally. This could further be explained by the differences in the culture, and consequently the perception of women and human rights among people in the two countries. The experiences of travellers and British expatriates in Saudi Arabia proved to be negative especially in their perceptions concerning how human and specifically women rights are handled domestically in Saudi Arabia.

In United Arab Emirates' capital, Abu Dhabi, the researcher interviewed the former British ambassador,[33] asking him about factors which have shaped the negative Saudi image amongst British public to which he said:

Some of the negative reports on the restrictions on rights and civil liberties of women "put the country in an unpleasant light compared to the British recognition of women rights". Adding that denying for example women the right to drive cars is perceived to be demeaning to women in society.

Clearly here, the issue of women's rights has undoubtedly caused and continues to cause major negative publicity for Saudi Arabia in the UK, both amongst their public (as shown in the previous data) and diplomats.

5.7.1 The Role of the Mass Media

Despite changing patterns of media consumption, established television broadcasters and newspapers, in both online and offline versions, remains a predominant source of information for the British public. As the results from the quantitative phase suggested, the vast majority of British respondents' perceptions of Saudi Arabia come from the media. More than half of the participants (51%) agreed that mass media (i.e., TV, newspapers, radio and cinema) was the primary source of information about Saudi Arabia. A number of researchers draw a connection between the media and the fashioning of a state's national image. For Lippmann, people get their information about the world outside their community through the mass media. McNelly (1986) and Izcaray maintain that the media can contribute to our

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[33] Interview was conducted face to face with his Excellency the former UK ambassador to United Arab Emirates at the British Embassy in Abu Dhabi, UAE. November 2015.

understanding, and indeed misunderstandings of other countries and societies. The implications suggested by the media are particularly significant in this case, as, perhaps unlike other nations, most visitors from Britain to Saudi Arabia are not tourists but workers or those performing religious duties (for example, Hajj). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the media hold an especially privileged position in its capacity to influence the British public's perceptions of Saudi Arabia.

One explanation for this disparity is the way unconscious prejudices influence journalists, particularly when reporting on foreign affairs. Mann (2010) argues that this is a common problem in newsrooms, because editorial decisions are conditioned by stereotypes about foreign countries, which can result in misleading or one-sided reports. In addition to the influence of stereotypes, another factor is the way in which news producers attempt to address their content to presumed audiences. They must ascertain what sort of content will appeal to their audiences and command their attention over time. Thus, on the one hand, media organisations must gauge their expected audiences, and on the other, they must generate particular interlinked narratives and themes which can be drawn on repeatedly to sustain interest. These forms of manufacturing content phenomena are illustrated by reports in some British media outlets regarding the Saudi government's digitisation of female travel authorisation documents. This was presented as a means of tracking women's movements and a further diminution of their rights in Saudi Arabia. What the articles failed to report was that the tracking of such movements was not a new development – the same policy was applied, as women already require permission from their male guardians to cross borders.

A former Cultural Consul at the Saudi Embassy in London, highlighted this issue during an interview with him at the Embassy in London in 2015, especially when he was asked about what factors are shaping Saudi Arabia image in the UK.

He argued that the incomplete and sensationalist style of reports attests to the way that prevalent stereotypes and signifiers associated with a nation generate pressures to fit reports into particular narratives. He also said that as the audience for such stories tend to be unfamiliar with Saudi Arabia, and therefore unable to verify reports, they wield significant influence over public perceptions and possess a remarkable staying power. He added that there are a number of British bloggers and journalists who offer more positive and nuanced portrayals of Saudi Arabia based on their own experiences. However, these alternative perspectives are generally shared

through social media, and possess limited influence and reach compared with established media platforms.[34]

Some of the interviewees also attributed the unfavourable perception of Saudi Arabia in Britain, which typically resulted in undermining the effort of its public diplomacy, to a longer-term deficit of information made available to the general public. Prior to the proliferation of personal computers and the Internet, the most detailed British media reportage from Saudi Arabia was as part of its Gulf War coverage in the 1990s. Before that, even less was reported concerning Saudi politics and the everyday life of its citizens. What did exist was limited to a few documentaries about travel or political events. One exception to this trend was the 1981 documentary 'Death of a Princess', which sparked controversy whilst its critics argued it was offensive to the Saudi way of life, religious rules and customs in its presentation of Saudi society (This has been discussed in Chapter Three). This long-term imbalance in subject matter concerning Saudi Arabia has certainly worked to frame its public perception, as well as the kind of narratives with which journalists operate. As Kunczik (2016, p. 46) argues, "Prejudices about nations are carried forward through the generations, so that historical events of long ago remain decisive in a nation's image." It is likely that if the British media had historically offered a more even-handed set of reports from Saudi Arabia, the British public would hold a more nuanced perception of the country and its culture.

However, it is important to note that information deficits are not caused only by editorial biases but also arise from the political context of the geopolitical relationship between Britain and Saudi Arabia. The states' institutions are equally as important as that of journalists in shaping media content. For example, BBC Trust Review of the reportage of the Arab world in 2012, reveals inconsistencies in the BBC's coverage across Middle East and North Africa MENA region. The coverage of Saudi Arabia was deemed to be thin, despite its active involvement in the Yemeni and Bahraini uprisings and its role as a close ally of the West (Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2013). One possible explanation for this relative silence is, in fact, the nature of the media's relationship with the British state, rather than a journalistic bias against Saudi Arabia. Whereas in Britain, the media possesses genuine

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[34] Interview took place at the Saudi Embassy in London, UK.
 September 2015.

institutional and critical distance from the state, it is also structured into a relation of dependence.

The Saudi state is implicated in influencing media content domestically as well as internationally, as noted by former Guardian journalist and researcher in a phone interview in 2016.[35] He argued because of wide-ranging restrictions applied to foreign journalists by Saudi Arabia "it makes it difficult for media organisations to provide accurate and in-depth coverage."

For example, in 2011, Riyadh-based Reuters' correspondent Ulf Laessing was deported for his controversial coverage of the political protest in 2011, which erupted at Al-Qatif, in the Eastern province by Shiite protesters calling for political rights and protesting (Committee of Protecting Journalists, 2012). The restrictions on journalists combines with a disinterest on the part of the Saudi government in providing competing reports that could offer alternative perspectives to international audiences. Unlike Iran, for example, Saudi Arabia does not have an International English-language satellite TV or radio channel, which could provide counter-veiling information and demonstrate different aspects of Saudi policy, culture and everyday life. This appears unusual, given the large budget allocated to the Saudi Media and Information Ministry by the central government, but rather reflects a conscious decision by the Saudi state. The government is not motivated to promote knowledge of its society and politics among Western audiences, as its feels secure in its relationship with Britain due to its deep economic and political ties.

Therefore, there is complex relationship between institutions, forms of social knowledge and signification, which together shape how the media influences the perceptions of the public. The agency of media organisations in selecting, presenting and producing content has a primary function in conditioning perceptions of a nation. However, accounting for Saudi Arabia's national image cannot be reduced to media bias or disadvantage. Analysis must also include the historically accumulated stereotypes and everyday narratives concerning a country held by the public; disparities in knowledge and information; and the role of states in directly and indirectly influencing the availability of such information and how it can be presented.

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[35] Interview was conducted by telephone with the Guardian journalist in November 2015.

5.7.2   The War on Terror

Another factor which has contributed to shaping perception of Saudi Arabia and typically undermined the effectiveness to develop a more favourable image in the UK is related to the global war on terror. Saudi Arabia is a destination for many Muslim Britons. More than 70,000 British Muslims visit Mecca each year to perform the religious duty of Hajj and Umrah (Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2013, p.31). On this, the Director of a Dubai-based Research Centre, highlights, in a special interview for this research, that a crucial factor in the negative national image of Saudi Arabia in the minds of many Western people, not just in the UK, derives from its association with 'Wahhabism' which is seen as a strict doctrinal approach of Islam and adhered to by Saudi Islamic clerics. He further argues that the fact that this version of Islam is followed by a number of Islamic extremist movements, including al-Qaida, the Taliban, and, more recently, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), means that these associations have tarnished Saudi Arabia's national image with the stigma of terrorism.[36]

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has implemented a robust anti-terrorism policy. Chapter four of this study already discussed efforts made to combat extremism within Saudi community, with crackdowns on imams preaching extremist views, and the detention of the sympathisers of terrorist groups such as al-Qaida. Additionally, the former Saudi King, Abdullah's announcement of long prison sentences for anyone who travelled abroad to fight or encourage others to do so has not prevented extremists from using mosques and other religious platforms to disseminate extremist views and incitement. But a number of Saudi clerics continued to encourage young men, from both Saudi Arabia and the UK, to engage in Jihad in Syria and Iraq, which has damaged the credibility of Saudi Arabia's efforts to counter Islamic extremism especially in the UK. For example, the British government denied entry to many Saudi preachers such as the popular Saudi cleric Mohammed Al-Arifi, who was accused of inciting young British Muslims to fight in Syria (Reuters, 2014/a). Saudis are also often over-represented among the members of jihadist campaigns outside Saudi Arabia. As at 2015, the number of Saudis fighting in Syria was as high as 3,000, some of whom are veterans of earlier campaigns in Afghanistan (Al-Arabiya, 2014). Saudi

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[36] Interview took place at Costa Coffee in Dubai, UAE, in February 2016.

Arabia's donations to Muslim countries across the world, as part of its aim to promote Islam, are also a source of controversy. Donations often take the form of charity or establishing religious schools (Madrassas) that promote religious values and education; these donations are considered by the House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Committee report as one of "the main source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide" (Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2013, p. 50). The report recommended that Saudi Arabia must ensure that its legitimate promotion of religious values does not inadvertently contribute to the furtherance of extremism, especially with regard to states in North Africa and the Middle East. The report further explains that:

> *...Saudi Arabia continues to be a vital but complicated counter-terrorism partner for the UK. However, Saudi Arabia is part of the problem as well as part of the solution. We recommend that the Government make it a priority to engage with its counter-terrorism partners in Saudi Arabia to improve the monitoring of the funding flowing from Saudi Arabia to organisations with an extremist message so that it can be more effectively disrupted.*

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's policy in Syria was also seen as amounting to funding groups considered by Washington to be terrorists, though Saudi Arabia has denied financing or supporting militant groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). After some UK media outlets carried such accusations, the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in London released a statement, which read, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia does not and has not supported, financially, morally or through any other means, the terrorist organisation known as… ISIS." (Black, 2016).

5.7.3   Islamophobia and Public Perceptions of Saudi Arabia

The status of Saudi Arabia's partnership with Britain in the War on Terror has not positively impacted its public image, according to the interviewees. In fact, the national image of Saudi Arabia has been impacted by the War on Terror, due to the rise of Islamophobia as a tributary ideology of that project. Islamophobia, as a discourse related to the War on Terror, can be understood as, in part, a two-fold attempt at the depoliticisation of radical Islam, and an essentialisation of Islam more generally. First, it seeks to deny socio-political explanations underlying violent

actions, refocusing investigation of such contexts onto notions of an irrational fanaticism either latent in the religion itself or a result of the 'radicalisation' of followers by extremist interpretations. Second, it deepens this initial depoliticisation by extending the lines of difference, establishing linkages with a diverse set of issues such a women's and LGBT rights in Muslim countries, Islamic forms of political organisation and law and forms of religious dress. Through this manoeuvre Islam and variants of radical Islam are increasingly conflated and their respective import occluded. The latter is no longer only a menace due to potential violent actions but stands more broadly as an ideology posing an existential threat to Western societies. Its targets are thus expanded to include culture, national identity, liberal democracy, civil liberties, non-Muslim faiths, tolerance, and gender equality among other things. This was encapsulated by Tony Blair's claim that 'they hate our way of life' after 9/11. In both the conservative and liberal versions identified by Kundnani (2014), Islam is associated with an actual or potential cultural confrontation - whether framed as the 'East vs. West', the 'premodern' vs. the 'modern', or alternatively as a struggle to defend the values of liberal democracy from its antagonists.

This framing of the issue in a language of values and 'ways of life' has been integral to the practice of the British state in its policing of Muslim communities under the banner of anti-extremism. These initiatives are accompanied by a discourse that stresses integration with British culture and values. Muslim parents and community leaders are expected to not only deter their youths from engaging with extremist political and religious perspectives, but must also stymie criticisms of British society and proactively proclaim allegiance to British values.

These practices similarly invite non-Muslim British citizens to align themselves along this value axis, through the perception of themselves and their way of life as under threat. An effect of this interpellation is to radically expand the set of associations attached to Islam and the differences signified by Muslims – the otherness of Islam becomes articulated as a potential affront to national, cultural and personal identities. This is evidenced by the treatment of Islam in contemporary public discourse and the emphasis is less on potential terrorist activity, and more on a deeper form of 'attack' on British culture, civil society and institutions. A poll by Corporate Reputation featured on BBC News registered this inflection, noting that whilst a significant minority of respondents held negative views about Muslims in general, a

far higher proportion viewed Islam as a specific threat to democratic values (Talwar, 2016).

This impacts Saudi Arabia, since it is the home of Islam's two holiest sites. This culturalisation of the War on Terror has also attached a series of new signifiers to what could previously be perceived as socio-cultural differences between the West and the Muslim world, impacting public perceptions. The meanings circulated by the discourse surrounding Muslims in Britain become transferable as part of an abstract notion of Islam onto the Muslim world more generally. Arguably, a state like Saudi Arabia, with its adherence to *Sharia* law, restriction of religious and women's freedoms, necessarily becomes signified through this conceptual frame. Consequently, perceptions of difference are supplemented with a more 'familiar' chain of meanings and associations- concerning *Sharia* law, religious intolerance and women's rights etc. With this cultural binary at work, global values difference between two cultures and societies become an almost violent form of difference, charged with emotional effect.

The specific historical and political circumstances that condition the nature of Saudi society are obscured. The latter can instead be perceived as not simply culturally different, but offensively different, fundamentally at odds with the West. Public perceptions of alterity are thus multiplied; cultural and geographic otherness is supplemented by a sense of a deep difference between 'their' and 'our' national, personal and cultural identities.

This reformulation of alterity is part of a more fundamental erasure of history, politics and institutions affected by these discourses. A key example of this would be the issue of women in Islam. In contemporary public discourse in Britain, for example, Muslim women are figured as either as victims – oppressed by their families and communities – or, alternatively, as antagonists who abide by religious dress as a form of provocation or refusal to integrate. In both cases the agency of Muslim women is denied and their situation simplified, something which excludes acknowledgement of the capacity of women to negotiate their freedoms and desires within their communities and their capacity for choice and self-expression. Through an emphasis on Muslim culture, rather than a multiplicity of sexist practices inside and outside religious communities, the socio-political factors, which propagate gender inequality, are elided.

As noted, Islamophobic discourses can provide a lens through which the public perceive a country like Saudi Arabia, applying the same categories and assumptions

that underlie the discourse in Britain. In the case of Saudi women's rights, public perceptions tend to be diverted from the precise historical and socio-political processes that determined their position in society relative to other states in the region. Equally, an additional effect is to reify such societies; what is in fact dynamic, subject to both tacit and overt socio-political negotiation and contestation, is made to appear static, an effect of 'culture'. In both cases, the position of Saudi women is one-sidedly assumed to be one of oppression and passivity, and somehow culturally fundamental.

This discussion of the impact of the War on Terror and Islamophobia on Saudi Arabia's national image has again stressed the analytical importance of the relationship between state and media practices, and their respective organisation of forms of social knowledge and signification.

5.7.4   British Migration to Saudi Arabia

An important factor influencing Saudi Arabia's image from the standpoint of the interviewees, which has hampered the Kingdom's public diplomacy objective of improving its image, is the experience of the British migrants in Saudi Arabia. Working in Saudi Arabia has been a means for British migrants to foster a national image of the country, through engagement with the Kingdom's culture and society.

Over the past 80 years, hundreds of thousands of British workers and their families have come to work in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the education, health, finance and defence sectors. Although the number of British migrants has gone down from 30,000 post 9/11, especially following Al-Qaida's attacks on Western expats inhabited compound 'Al-Hamraa' in 2003 (Bradley, 2003). However, whilst working in the Kingdom has provided an opportunity for many British migrants to understand the country's culture and develop relationships with Saudis, the effect of migration on expats' perceptions of Saudi Arabia has often been negative.

A principal factor raised by most of the interviewees was the issue of cultural difference between British migrants and native Saudis. As a state based on a religious tribal cultural heritage, Saudi Arabia is at odds with Western liberal values in many ways. This difference has become more palpable for many British employed in Saudi Arabia used to working in a globalised world, where liberal democratic political forms have proliferated. The culture shock experienced by British migrants is accentuated by a lack of integration with locals and Saudi society more generally.

This was highlighted in the researcher's report, which was published in the Saudi English-language newspaper 'Arab news' in 2005. She argued that those cultural differences created a lack of everyday communication between Saudis and Westerners. The reasons for this are complex. On the one hand, "many Saudis are reluctant to socialise with foreigners, particularly those of different religious and cultural backgrounds." On the other hand, "many Westerners choose to segregate themselves, due to the language barrier and a desire to live an approximation of a Western lifestyle in the Kingdom" (Al-Osaimi, 2005/b). The organisation of labour markets for Western workers implies such segregation – indeed, contracts offer workers gated housing in neighbourhoods populated by Westerners. Self-segregation also stems in part from the nature of Saudi society and in part from security concerns amongst Westerners. Social life in Saudi Arabia tends to discourage interaction amongst different members of society. In addition to strict gender segregation in public places, there are laws restricting spaces for public assembly - these apply to cinemas and theatres, too. This results in a lack of the requisite atmosphere to facilitate cross-cultural interaction and dialogue (Al-Osaimi, 2005/b).

In the past decade, security has become a key concern for British workers in Saudi Arabia after the 2003 al-Qaida attacks on Western journalists and housing compounds in Riyadh (Bradley, 2003). A response by many British migrants has been to move to gated developments, surrounded by large security walls and barbed wire. This has accentuated the lack of integration between migrant workers and locals, as the latter also feel Westerners do not wish to associate with them. Saudi laws also generate additional barriers for British workers. A particular grievance amongst expats is the difficulty in obtaining tourist visas for their families. The state sets strict conditions, such as requiring a Saudi company to initiate the visa application process, which is reported to be a time-consuming process and a deterrent for recreational visitors. Female visitors must be over forty or accompanied by a male relative. This has frustrated many Western workers who were unable to host their families during the holiday seasons. These factors denigrate Saudi Arabia's reputation amongst businesses and individuals internationally.

One senior member of the Department of International Trade, UK echoed this sentiment in 2016 to the author:

Restrictions on freedoms in Saudi Arabia foster negative perceptions of the country- not just among its hundreds of thousands of non-Muslim expatriates, but also for its public image across the world when these workers return home.[37]

Indeed, foreign workers make up 30 per cent of the population in Saudi Arabia, standing at 9 million people by 2015 (Marsh, 2015), two million of whom are non-Muslims (United States Department of State, 2017). Despite this large number of multi-faith residents, freedom of religious expression is severely constrained, ranging from the banning of non-Islamic place of worship to police raids of worshipers gathered in private homes. In 2012 over 50 Ethiopian Christians were arrested for gathering to practice non-Islamic rituals in rented home (BBC, 2012/c). From the perspective of non-Muslim Western workers, such events undermine the credibility of the Saudi state's proclaimed desire to institutionalise religious tolerance and promote the principles interfaith and intercultural dialogue which Saudi officials claim to promote. Saudi Arabia is one of the few states to organise a police force dedicated to upholding *Sharia* Law in society. The Mutaween, or the 'Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice' is made up of 4,000 members[38] who patrol the streets regulating dress codes, the strict separation of men and women, enforce daily prayer five times a day, and police other behaviours required by *Sharia*. The far-reaching powers and reputation of the Mutaween make everyday life in Saudi Arabia challenging for locals and foreign-born workers alike.

Both international human rights organisations and local activists have criticised the state for bestowing the religious police with large amounts of power and refusing to codify their responsibilities in law. The prevalent abuse of individual and religious liberties by the Saudi state intensifies the socio-cultural feelings of alienation reported by many expat workers and bolsters the perception of Saudi Arabia as an intolerant and oppressive country (Reuters, 2014/b). However, recently, increasing scrutiny has been directed at the role of religious police in Saudi society, following hundreds of incidents of beating, whipping and harassing of people. Some prominent figures in Saudi civil society have begun to openly criticise the Mutaween's aggressive

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[37] Interview took place at 10 Downing Street in 2016. London, UK.

[38] Al-Sharif, M. (2014). Rein In the Saudi Religious Police. New York Time,*https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.nytimes.com/2014/02/11/opinion/rein-in-the-saudi-religious-police.amp.html.* [Accessed 11 July 2019].

tactics. For example, Saudi columnist Abdullah bin Bakeet called for the elimination of the religious police, arguing that 'it contains hard-liners' (You Tube, 2013). The public character of these condemnations potentially indicates a shift in Saudi society against the Mutaween, which could begin to alter foreign-born workers' perceptions.

5.7.5   Human rights

The issue of human rights is another significant negative factor influencing Saudi Arabia's national image amongst British expats in the Kingdom in which the majority of the interviewees for this study admitted it is an important factor hindering the achievement of the Saudi public diplomacy goal of towards securing a positive image. The interviews highlighted the negative perception of the human rights in Saudi Arabia; specifically, the alleged abuse of human and women rights undermines opportunities of Saudi Arabia to improve its image.

Despite the fact that there has been progress in improving conditions for Saudi women, these have not been wholly sufficient to convince the world of its commitment to improving women's rights. The rights and civil liberties of women are severely restricted despite the state signing in 2000 the charter of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which promises commitment to ensuring gender equality (Haddad & Stowasser, 2004). Women's rights in Saudi Arabia are still one of the most limited in the world. They are not allowed to drive (during the period of the completion of this thesis), they are forbidden from socialising in public with non-related men except for their husbands; and, regardless of their faith, are required to wear an '*abaya*'[39] when out in public (World Report Saudi Arabia Event of 2017, 2018).

Whilst it is becoming more common to see women in public with uncovered hair, this still carries a risk of arrest by religious police. Women are regarded as minors under the state's legal guardianship law, meaning that, regardless of age, they are forbidden from travelling, studying, or working without permission from their male guardians (World Report Saudi Arabia Event of 2017, 2018).

An additional problem for women is the fact that Saudi law is uncodified (Peters 2005, p. 148), with no legally binding written constitution and rulings based

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[39]   Abaya is the name of the black garment worn by Muslim women in the Middle East.

on interpretation of some imams. For example, there is no law preventing women from driving, but it used to be considered forbidden in terms of socio-cultural norms and expectations. Due to the uncodified character of Saudi law, religious officials are able to make legal decisions that discriminate against women, which can subsequently be justified through cultural norms and expectations. An appeal to the unique character of Saudi culture is often used to entrench conservative religious practices and regulations in Saudi society.

Chapter four of this research has discussed advances which have been made in the position of women in Saudi society, such as generating labour market opportunities for women and giving them voting rights in the municipal elections. However, the pace of change has been criticised, as women are still confronted by persistent discriminatory policies and regulations. (World Report Saudi Arabia Event of 2017, 2018). Many foreign-born workers, both women and men with partners or families, feel intimidated by the rules and regulations they face, and as a result feel distant from Saudi society and culture. Their sharing of these experiences influences the Saudi national image amongst the publics of Western states. Furthermore, the criticism of gender inequality in Saudi Arabia by high-ranking politicians draws attention to the issue and further tarnishes public perceptions. For example, former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, during a speech hosted by the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in 2013, remarked that the Saudi's ban on women driving is an issue "that is hard to even rationalise in today's world" (Chatham House, 2013).

5.8   Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to measure the image of Saudi Arabia amongst the British public as means of assessing the effectiveness of its public diplomacy in mitigating its image deficit. An analysis of qualitative data collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews revealed that Saudi Arabia continues to struggle with addressing Western public opinion. Its richness in soft power financial wealth, cultural diversity, youth population, and religious dimensions, has not been fully effective soft power tools to produce the influence necessary to pursue successful public diplomacy in the Britain.

This chapter has also attempted to account for the negative perception of Saudi Arabia amongst the British public by drawing attention to how national image in the

UK is constituted through the interplay of the semiotic, political and historical factors. The close historical and geopolitical links between the Saudi Arabian and British states shown to be an obstacle to Saudi public diplomacy because the interaction between the two publics has historically been indirect and mediated by elites. Rather than receiving information about the diverse ranges of opinion and forms of contestation within civil society, the public tends to predominantly hear about Saudi Arabia either through discussions about, elite spectacles or negative stories about the rights of women and religious minorities which cohere with extant media narratives. The roles of the media - and the semiotic sphere of communication more generally - in establishing connotative linkages between issues in Saudi society and Islamophobic discourses works to further shape public perceptions.

A major conclusion of this study suggests Saudi Arabia public diplomacy efforts suffer from a credibility deficit, because what the country tries to project about itself abroad appears to be overshadowed by its local policies. The study found that it is therefore difficult for public diplomacy to be successful to support the larger foreign policy mission, if a country does not live by universal values. In other words, any positive changes in perception are highly dependent on domestic environment.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1   Overview

This Chapter summarises the key findings of the role Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy has played towards securing a positive image in the UK, and draws on the research from the previous five Chapters. It is followed by recommendations which should provide academics who are studying public diplomacy an alternative series of case studies to draw insights from. As for policy makers, especially in Saudi Arabia, this Chapter intends to help them improve public diplomacy more broadly, at a particularly important juncture, as the country moves towards implementing its 'Vision 2030', - the long-term plan that will direct the future of the country's policies and development in the next decade. Securing a more positive international image will enhance the political, and economic objectives of the vision.

6.2   Rethinking Saudi Public Diplomacy: The Way Forward

Saudi Arabia has struggled since the beginning of 21st Century, especially on its public diplomacy and relations with other countries, particularly the UK. Saudi's major undoing has been the failure to appreciate the role of diplomacy in continuation of domestic politics. Inasmuch as the country has strong economic and soft power asset to pursue any diplomatic issue or even strengthen its relation with the UK, Saudi Arabia has failed in creating a better public image. The country has experienced serious challenges in its diplomatic policy and relations in the past. Thus, it is only imperative that the internal policies of the country, which has been contradicting its foreign policies, are addressed.

Although the time period that this research covers falls outside recent developments such as the lifting of the ban on women driving and curbing the power of the aggressive religious establishments, this study has shown that up until 2015 there had been little discernible positive recovery for Saudi Arabia's image in the UK.

The broadly negative opinion of the Kingdom amongst the British public comes despite strong political relations with the government. Saudi public diplomacy thus far has not wholly succeeded in properly informing and influencing UK public's opinion (see *Chapter Five*). Therefore, Saudi Arabia must rethink its current approach to public diplomacy; however, the key is to address the main causes of its image deficit.

The overall negative image of Saudi Arabia stems largely from the Kingdom's domestic policies. Notably, the country has a bad image on internal policies concerning human rights and freedoms, which are significant public diplomacy limitation preventing Saudi Arabia from securing a positive image in the UK. Thus, Saudi Arabia should appreciate what UK has achieved through domestic policies where civil liberties and freedoms are not only considered paramount, but are critical to how the British perceive and judge the outside world (see *Chapter Five*). This finding reinforces what other scholars have established such as Joseph Nye (2004) and Philip Seib (2011); who all found the importance of a country's political values and their international appeal and for a country to succeed in its public diplomacy missions. Although what they have argued about focused mainly on the correlation between conduct of public diplomacy and (foreign) policy, this research has offered an evidence through the case of Saudi Arabia's image in the UK, that what those scholars argued about is valid also in relations to a country's (domestic) policies. For example, public diplomacy cannot progress along on its path and thus it must be linked to both domestic and foreign policies as a means of enhancing that policy (Nye, 2004; Seib, 2011). This study, therefore, shows that it is difficult for Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy to be successful in the UK and to support the larger foreign policy mission. This is because of one fact that the country does not live by its promoted ideals at home such as interfaith dialogue or freedom of women.

The relative failure of Saudi public diplomacy can also be linked- to the lack of co-ordination and absence of specific policies within the structure of Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry to strategically direct public diplomacy. This understandably has a deleterious effect on the opportunities the kingdom can enjoy to exercise effective public diplomacy and make use of its 'soft power' potential. The major drawback for Saudi Arabia's implementation of 'soft power' is its limited democratic political system. This is why the Kingdom's public diplomacy challenges are quite different from other major power states in the Western world in the sense that it is bogged down

with aspects of its domestic policies. This in turn stems from the nature of the autocratic political regime linked to its strict monarchical system, causing many aspects of its domestic policy to falter – as well as affecting its foreign policy goals.

Soft power theory, which is presented by Nye (2004), has emerged as an important element in the Western context. This theory was found to be valid and applicable in Saudi Arabia, especially with the application of Islamic status as the main form of its soft power. The only difference between Saudi Arabia and the UK is that Saudi use soft power to assist in responding to specific incidents, and therefore, not as a continuous process in all issues related to domestic public policy. This thesis initially focused on the period immediately after the September 11 attacks; catastrophic events that triggered the global debate on public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005, p.8). Chapter Three specifically discusses this in terms of a turning point in Saudi Arabia's diplomatic outlook. It showed that after these traumatic events, it shifted more from 'hard power' towards 'soft power' tactics. The shift occurred to make up for the confidence deficit that developed as a result of Saudi Arabia's shortcomings in its diplomatic approach when addressing criticism aimed towards it after 9/11. As a result, it began engaging in expensive marketing and public relations campaigns, which have failed to change the country's negative image. Even when Saudi Arabia departed a little from using the PR companies to brand its image, the Saudi effort was not convincing to change its image among UK public. Thus, we can confirm that Murrow's (2008) notion of credibility holds true for Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy. Overall, being perceived as honest and reliable is a necessary condition for obtaining and holding the attention of target audiences, as well as for effective persuasion, which is the objective of strategic political communication.

What would have been a better strategy for the Kingdom to have followed would have seen the development of a more tolerant image by introducing a credible policies sufficient to reflect its a truthful form of public diplomacy messages It took 10 years - after 9/11 - for an interfaith dialogue initiative by the King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz's International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) to show Saudi Arabia's desire to adopt a new image of a moderate Saudi Arabia using its Islamic status to promote co-assistance and tolerance among world religions and gain acceptance among Western societies that promote pluralism. And yet much of it was

little more than propaganda. Saudi Arabia tried to sell to the world that it encouraged gender parity by portraying itself as a nation that allowed women to progress towards equality (see my exploration of Saudi Arabia's decision to allow women to participate in the London Olympic in Chapter Four). However, a credibility deficit appeared to ruin the impact of such policies, something that arose from an essential contradiction between what the country was promoting abroad and what its existing policies were at home. This disconnect proved even more difficult to project when followers of other faiths continued to be persecuted in Saudi Arabia. Add to that the Saudi government's promise of an inclusive gender policy while continuing its conservative restrictions on basic freedom of women.

This fundamental contradiction over what Saudi Arabia tends to project as its image on an international platform compared to what it is in reality at home puts Saudi diplomats in a difficult situation, where they are unable to effectively present the Kingdom's policies and feel thwarted when they try to contribute to public diplomacy policies. This can be also linked to polarised opinions within government institutions inside the Kingdom. In every institution, there is conservative faction vehemently opposing any liberalising efforts of the government and labelling them as corrupting forces; then there is a progressive faction, which tries to pursue them at every turn. This push-me pull-you approach produces an inconsistency in vision leading to a lack of direction, something that undermines the practice of good public diplomacy. This internal conflict could be avoided if Saudi Arabia had its own Public Diplomacy department in its Foreign Ministry entrusted with the task of developing Saudi Arabia's image projection and reputation management. Currently, in the timeframe covered by this research - this does not exist and Saudi foreign missions handle public relations by recruiting foreign public relations companies at high cost to handle communication within host countries. However, as this thesis has shown, to be ineffective in explaining Saudi Arabia's positions on many fronts. Thus, this study demonstrates that internal conflict within the structure of foreign ministry of Saudi Arabia should be studied in the future with the aim of exploring the conduct of public diplomacy in a country associated with undemocratic systems. Besides, it will be important to explore how the internal conflicts in a country with poor domestic policies undermines a healthy and effective performance of the overall public policy.

There are though some promising aspects of Saudi public diplomacy in the UK that could bear fruit. Culture, art exhibitions, students' clubs and educational programs which are being promoted through public diplomacy in the UK are good tools to familiarise British citizens about the rich culture and heritage of the Kingdom. The uniqueness of such activities lies in the fact that they tend to be free of overt ulterior political motives, or affirmation of purely Islamic religious belief. The cultural exhibitions in particular emphasises similarities between Saudi Arabia's culture and that of Britain which, if continued strategically, could help to move prejudices about Saudi Arabia and challenge the Western notion that desert societies lack a sophisticated and civilised contribution to humanity. But the problem remains that these programs are not followed by an assessment to evaluate their overall impact. Evaluation should be an essential phase of any programme, since evaluation can identify successes and failures and make recommendations for future improvements.

Yet, Saudi Arabia even when projecting its image tends to ignore other potential sources of 'soft power' as I illustrated in this study. The Kingdom has much to offer which is vibrant and diverse. Consider, for example, the Arabic language; it is a unique 'soft power', which Nye described as resource rooted in Saudi Arabia's history. The holy Quran was spoken by the angel Jibril and written down in Meccas. This could be used as an economic investment as well as public diplomacy to create forums for interaction between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world. If Saudi Arabia invited British students to study Arabic in Saudi Arabia, or funded grants for foreigners to come to the Kingdom to take courses in Arabic, it would encourage long-lasting connections with other countries, and create robust language-graduate alumni groups who upon return home would influence how Saudi Arabia is perceived. Yet there remains in Saudi Arabia a reluctance to strategically promote other forms of 'soft power', such as cinema and the music industry. Again, such promotion remains limited due to domestic restrictions on some forms of entertainment. The political and religious system in Saudi Arabia is not mutually exclusive and in fact, to a very large extent, they end up influencing each other.

The conservative strain of religion popular in Saudi Arabia views all forms of art as '*haram*' or forbidden, owing to their 'corrupting effect.' Nevertheless, if Saudi Arabia challenged these ideas it could be the first step to significant public diplomacy.

In today's complex politics, no country should rely solely on military and economic power to secure foreign relations. Foreign public minds should be informed

accurately and properly through a strategy of public diplomacy so as to be able have a positive influence on the intended country. But the foreign policy of a state should go hand in hand with a proper accounting of its own policies and how this will fit into a strategically thought out public diplomacy plan. Public diplomacy can be an effective tool in improving a country's image but only when this is built on fair and legitimate domestic politics.

6.3   Recommendations

It is recommended that Saudi Arabia benefit from the following recommendation to enhance its public diplomacy and the UK as well as the world.

1. Saudi Arabia needs to establish public diplomacy within its Foreign Ministry that can define long-term strategies with measurable objectives for the country's external communication to support the country's overall policy objectives. Part of the responsibility would be to ensure that the general public in the host country have an accurate update not only on foreign policy developments but also on domestic economic and social policies that have bearings. Furthermore, it is recommended for Saudi Arabia to create inter-ministerial teams that can coordinate all those involved in the country's public diplomacy abroad. In addition, these inter-ministerial teams would create a special bureau of management which would be responsible for the measurement and the assessment of the programmes and activities delivered as part of Saudi Arabia's public diplomacy. In other words, they would be involved in evaluating the overall performance of the country's diplomacy efforts. Evaluation is an essential phase of the programme, since evaluation can identify successes and failures and make recommendations for future improvements.

2. It is recommended that Saudi Arabia adopt a branding strategy to support the development of features for a national identity and foreign policy by building a political and personal image that will help the country represent its self with a clearer vision. Saudi Arabia has a good basis to become a powerful brand globally, given its richness in soft power, historical and cultural diversity, religion and wealth. This means that Saudi Arabia needs to establish special institutions to support the process of creating a strong brand based on elements of its national

identity that is unique and modern enough to reflect the new development in Saudi Arabia, and be delivered overseas through a communication channel, such as public diplomacy. Such a plan has already been adopted by some of its neighbouring countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, which within a short time managed to become an international hub for tourism and investment via a creative public diplomacy campaign despite more limited resources than Saudi Arabia. It is interesting to see the difference in the status of the two countries in the ranking they achieved in the Good Countries Index, which includes 163 countries across the world. In the 2014-2015 lists, the United Arab Emirates is ranked 19 in the index, while Saudi Arabia's position is way behind this as it sits at number 39 (Good Country Index, 2015).[40]

3. It is recommended that Saudi Arabia allocate appropriate resources for further training of its diplomats, so that they have the skills to present the kingdom's policies in a positive manner. Saudi Arabia should focus on proper diplomatic training programme for all Saudi diplomats in mastering communication. Training is an important investment for diplomats because this will enable them to communicate the Saudi Arabia's policies and interests abroad through channels, such as appearing in foreign media and meeting with non-media entities including non-governmental bodies. Public diplomacy can become more effective in the long run by increasing the training for diplomats, but also by the following elements: A) Updated educational system which the objective of developing modern communication skills and encouraging a culture of dialogue and debate, in addition to sound training involving both listening to others and speaking. Introducing diplomatic training courses throughout Saudi universities and other higher education institutions would help to achieve this goal, and it would eliminate the need for foreign public relations companies. Such training should provide professionals with both theory and practical knowledge and skills, which help them to be persuasive and influential. B) Increase foreign language training to address deficiencies in language skills among a number of Saudi officers working in Embassies. Increased language skills (that is, in the language of the host country) would contribute greatly to understanding the political climate of

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[40] Branding Index 2014-2015. *https://www.futurebrand.com/uploads/Country-Brand-Index-2014-15.pdf* [Accessed 25 June 2019].

that state. Cultural understanding and the ability to influence are integral to the diplomatic skillset. It is vital for Saudi Arabia's interests abroad that diplomats are able to engage with people around the world by speaking their language and listening to them.

4. Establish special Arabic language schools and centres to welcome foreigners to visit Saudi Arabia to learn Arabic. This will benefit Saudi Arabia from Investing in Arabic language to promote Saudi Arabia's soft power, help foreigners to discover the country by spending sometimes there. Additionally, it will help Saudis to interact successfully with other nationalities and build their trust and partnership.

5. It is recommended that Saudi Arabia rethink to strategically take advantage of its youth living abroad to support the Saudi Arabia's foreign policy objectives. A major soft power asset of Saudi Arabia is its young demographic – most population are under 35 years (BBC, 2017). They have already proven to be a force of change inside Saudi Arabia, but they are also worth being considered to further foreign policy goals. There are already tens of thousands Saudi citizens studying abroad, Young students can be engaged in PD programmes to reflect the transformations undertaken in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with the Ministry of Education could benefit from launching public diplomacy training for its students travelling abroad and provide them with necessary knowledge to explain the country's policies that can help them to portray Saudi Arabia in a different and more positive way.

6. It is recommended that Saudi Arabia diversity the use of communication channels, to include not just press, but also multi-languages Satellite channels as well as the use of social media. The increase in sources of information, through the proliferation of global and regional broadcasters using satellite technologies, as well as the global reach of news and information websites on the internet, has diversified and complicated the shaping of attitudes of foreign societies towards Saudi Arabia. Mass and social media can fill an important role in Saudi Arabia's pubic diplomacy with their ability to release messages faster than governmental bodies. The Saudi Ministry of Foreign affairs can also benefit from encouraging diplomats to increase their online presence and engage with followers be it government representatives or other parts of foreign societies to explain policies of Saudi Arabia as it is.

7. Social media can bring a good publicity for Saudi Arabia when considering the high percentage of Twitter and YouTube users in the country. Saudi Arabia can utilise the high percentage users to get them to promote the country's achievements and contributions, and that would help move the country's image away from the context with which the country has been viewed since 9/11. Also, it is recommended that Saudi Arabia reconsider linking its international broadcasting with its foreign policy goals in terms of bringing about better international understanding of the kingdom. In simple terms, the task of public diplomacy involves engaging the media and the non-media channels to put the country's policies in the correct perspective dispelling any misrepresentation about the country's policies. At the moment, establishing an English satellite television station to educate other countries about Saudi Arabia's affairs is becoming more important than ever. Saudi Arabia is fighting on different fronts and its interventions, whether in Yemen or Syria has been constantly questioned. An English-language channel would be beneficial to cut through the prejudice that fills the airwaves in much of the global media and enhance understanding of Saudi Arabia via balanced news that better manages its reputation.

8. Saudi Arabia should accelerate domestic reform by 1- Remove restrictions on foreign journalists. Allowing more foreign journalists to visit and report from Saudi Arabia will the potentially create more balanced reporting based since these journalists could see the country for themselves rather than relying on second-hand sources or stereotypes. It is important for international audiences to have a positive and balanced picture of the country. Saudi Arabia is politically stable and enjoying economic development. The role of foreign journalists is essential to ensure such an image is truly presented to the international audience, which can be achieved by making immigration rules friendlier towards foreign journalists. 2- Enhancing the role of women can be achieved through adopting a long-term plan to empower women. The plan could include increasing female representation in the Foreign Ministry and in leadership positions in general, in order to make them more engaged with the outside world and correct misunderstandings that the rest of the world may have. Another act that would improve Saudi Arabia's international image would be to lift the ban on women driving. The issue of women's rights has undoubtedly caused and continues to cause major negative publicity whilst making international headlines. In one of her articles, which

appeared in Al-Arabiya, the researcher has written: Women are a crucial element in shaping the popular image of Saudi Arabia among the British. This issue is constantly raised during most academic and policy discussions, and undermines progressive efforts at Saudi development. This should not come as a surprise, as Saudi Arabia can be perceived as socially closed, and it is easy for stereotypes to become pervasive when it comes to preconceptions of Saudi women 3) adopting a moderate religious discourse. The image of Saudi Arabia can benefit from enhancing the religious discourse adopted by the country. To adopt a moderate tone that speaks of tolerance, diversity, and pluralism will have an impact across the Islamic world. Saudi Arabia also can dispel religious misconceptions by permitting non-Muslim tourists on special trips to visit and see Mecca.

9. Finally, Saudi Arabia might examine its role in the world by trying to engage more with the world's issues beyond its politics, or energy. It is recommended that Saudi decision-makers take part in contributing towards resolving global issues which affect the world. Important world affairs where Saudi Arabia could have a major impact include climate change, human-centred security and development, and solutions to the complex problems of globalisation.

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