INVESTMENT IN THE SPORTS INDUSTRY IN SAUDI ARABIA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF FOOTBALL FANS

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This research paper delves into the dynamic relationship between sports industry investments and the quality of life (QOL) of football fans in Saudi Arabia. As part of the ambitious Vision 2030 initiative, Saudi Arabia has recognized the immense potential of the sports industry to promote diversification, enhance the economy, and improve citizens’ well-being. Specifically, the study examines the impact of investments in various facets of the football industry on quality of life (QOL), including infrastructure, players, coaches, hosting international events, digital platforms and broadcasting, education, and training.

Methods: A quantitative methodology employed to explore the study relationship and included a large-scale survey of 1,200 football fans who attended events from June to September 2023 in Saudi Arabia. To assess the effects of investments on QOL, respondents were asked to provide ratings on overall satisfaction, expectations, and perceived comparisons to ideal investments.

Results: The findings of this research illuminate the significant role that sports industry investments, specifically investment in players and coaches plays significant role in enhancing the QOL of football fans in Saudi Arabia. The study demonstrates that investments in various aspects of the football industry positively influence fan satisfaction, surpass expectations, and closely align with ideal investments, thus reflecting the fruitful impact of such investments on the QOL.

Conclusion: This research has implications for policymakers, sports industry stakeholders, and the general public. It underscores the importance of strategic investments in the sports industry, as they not only contribute to economic growth but also significantly influence the quality of life of football enthusiasts in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: investment in players and coaches, quality of life, investment in football infrastructure, hosting international events, digital platforms and broadcasting.

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INVESTIMENTO NA INDÚSTRIA DO ESPORTE NA ARÁBIA SAUDITA E SEU IMPACTO NA QUALIDADE DE VIDA DOS FÃS DE FUTEBOL

RESUMO

Objetivos: Este artigo de pesquisa aprofunda a relação dinâmica entre os investimentos da indústria esportiva e a qualidade de vida (QV) dos fãs de futebol na Arábia Saudita. Como parte da ambiciosa iniciativa Visão 2030, a Arábia Saudita reconheceu o imenso potencial da indústria do esporte para promover a diversificação, melhorar a economia e melhorar o bem-estar dos cidadãos. Especificamente, o estudo examina o impacto dos investimentos em várias facetas da indústria do futebol na qualidade de vida (QV), incluindo infraestrutura, jogadores, treinadores, hospedagem de eventos internacionais, plataformas digitais e radiodifusão, educação e formação.

Métodos: Uma metodologia quantitativa empregada para explorar o relacionamento de estudo e incluiu uma pesquisa em larga escala de 1.200 fãs de futebol que participaram de eventos de junho a setembro de 2023 na Arábia Saudita. Para avaliar os efeitos dos investimentos na QOL, os entrevistados foram solicitados a fornecer classificações sobre satisfação geral, expectativas e comparações percebidas com investimentos ideais.

Resultados: Os resultados desta pesquisa iluminam o papel significativo que os investimentos da indústria esportiva, especificamente o investimento em jogadores e treinadores, desempenham um papel significativo no aumento da QV dos fãs de futebol na Arábia Saudita. O estudo demonstra que os investimentos em vários aspectos da indústria do futebol influenciam positivamente a satisfação dos fãs, superam as expectativas e se alinham estreitamente com os investimentos ideais, refletindo assim o impacto frutuoso de tais investimentos na QOL.

Conclusão: Esta pesquisa tem implicações para os formuladores de políticas, as partes interessadas da indústria esportiva e o público em geral. Sublinha a importância dos investimentos estratégicos na indústria do esporte, uma vez que não só contribuem para o crescimento econômico, mas também influenciam significativamente a qualidade de vida dos entusiastas do futebol na Arábia Saudita.

Palavras-chave: investimento em jogadores e treinadores, qualidade de vida, investimento em infraestrutura futebolística, hospedagem de eventos internacionais, plataformas digitais, radiodifusão.

1 INTRODUCTION

Football is a popular sport in Saudi Arabia, and the government has recognized its potential to enhance the quality of life in the country. The government has made significant investments in sports infrastructure, including football, to promote both local and global investments in sports. The Ministry of Investment's efforts to support the sports industry are expected to attract foreign investments and contribute to the growth of the sector (TBS Report, 2023). The impact of Vision 2030 in promoting investments in sports is undeniable, as it highlights the country's focus on sports as a vital contributor to its future growth and development. Across Europe, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) embarked on a thorough examination of the socio-economic...
benefits derived from football. The findings reveal that in the year 2020, the 8.6 million amateur players registered across 25 European nations made a significant economic impact, totaling over US$47 billion. This impact includes not only the direct economic advantages related to their participation in the sport but also the secondary benefits, such as cost savings in healthcare and improvements in overall societal well-being (E. Smith, 2023; TBS Report, 2023; Tlemsani et al., 2019).

In Saudi Arabia, the government has announced very substantial investment commitments, this includes plans for around US$2 billion in sports investments over the next five years, a commitment of US$670 million to assist sports clubs in their privatization efforts, and an additional US$320 million in private sector investments pledged by various clubs. Football, often affectionately called the beautiful game, occupies a unique and cherished spot in the hearts of millions worldwide(TBS Report, 2023). In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), this passion for football is no exception. Saudi Arabia has a rich football history, with a deeply rooted love for the sport evident in the enthusiastic support of local teams, international competitions, and the ever-growing number of football enthusiasts who call the nation home. Football is not just a sport in Saudi Arabia; it is a cultural phenomenon that resonates with people from all walks of life(Joyner, 2020).

While the significance of football in Saudi Arabia is undeniable, the sport's impact extends far beyond the confines of stadiums and television screens. Football is a powerful driver of social, economic, and cultural change. It serves as a source of unity, fosters community development, and contributes to individual well-being (Tamimi, 2023). The purpose of this research paper is to explore the multifaceted relationship between football investment and the quality of life in KSA. Football investment in KSA encompasses various aspects, including financial contributions, infrastructure development, talent cultivation, and the hosting of international events (MacInnes, 2023a). The country has consistently allocated substantial resources to strengthen its football infrastructure, aiming to improve the standards of the domestic leagues, empower national teams, and provide opportunities for young talents to thrive (Joyner, 2020). These investments have led to Saudi Arabia's recognition as a regional football powerhouse, and the nation has successfully hosted international tournaments that showcased its commitment to the sport. The impact of football investment, however, extends beyond trophies and victories. It is intrinsically tied to the quality of life for millions of Saudis. Football is more than a
game; it is a reflection of the nation's cultural values, a means of community engagement, and a source of pride and joy for individuals (Dixon, 2023a).

In KSA, football is deeply embedded in the nation's cultural fabric. It is a symbol of national identity and pride, with football events bringing Saudis together like no other activity. The Kingdom has embraced international football and used it as a platform for cultural exchange and diplomacy (Ahmed Reda, 2023). Hosting international tournaments and welcoming teams from around the world offers a unique opportunity for cultural dialogue and strengthening international relations (Kim et al., 2015). In recent years, Saudi Arabia has witnessed a surge in its football industry's growth, as it looks to establish itself as a major player in the international football scene. Central to this growth is the substantial investment made in developing players and coaches (Noah Berman, n.d.). The Kingdom has recognized the pivotal role that talented players and well-trained coaches play in the sport's success. By investing in players and coaches, Saudi Arabia is not only strengthening its own football industry but also making a significant impact on the global football landscape (Michaelson, 2021).

Saudi Arabia has seen a rise in the recruitment of international football players and coaches in recent years. Clubs in the Saudi Professional League, as well as the Saudi national team, have sought to bolster their squads with foreign talent to enhance their competitiveness on the domestic and international fronts (Tamimi, 2023). The introduction of international players has added a new dimension to Saudi football and contributed to its growth and development. The presence of well-known international players can attract more fans to the stadiums and boost viewership for televised matches. Their reputation and style of play can be a significant draw for football enthusiasts (Michaelson, 2023). Several international players have made their mark in Saudi Arabian football in recent years. These players come from diverse backgrounds, including South America, Europe, and Africa. They have contributed to the success of their respective clubs and brought a new level of excitement to the league (Michaelson, 2021).

The Quality-of-Life Program aims to host approximately 400 sporting events annually, through 100 sports federations backed by the Ministry of Sports (TBS Report, 2023). By doing so, Saudi Arabia is aligning with Vision 2030, which recognizes the economic and investment potential of the sports industry in enhancing the quality of life. The government has set national targets for getting the population moving, 20% of whom are classified as obese (TBS Report, 2023). In the money directed towards football, there
is a discernible link to public health. There has been an explosion in football academies and coaching programs. After the creation of a women’s football department in the Saudi Arabian Football Federation in 2019, as many as 50,000 girls are thought to play as part of a school’s league (Tamimi, 2023).

Understanding the influence of football investment on the quality of life in KSA is essential for stakeholders, policymakers, and sports enthusiasts. The findings of this research can inform strategic decisions regarding future investments, resource allocation, and development projects in the football sector, ultimately enhancing the well-being of the nation's citizens. As the passion for football continues to thrive in Saudi Arabia, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the holistic impact of football investment, reaffirming the sport's central role in the Kingdom's society and its potential for a brighter, healthier, and more prosperous future.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) originated in the late 1950s, drawing upon concepts from economics, sociology, and psychology to analyze human behavior. SET perceives human behavior as a form of social exchange, wherein the nature and sustainability of this exchange are influenced by the rewards received by both parties involved. Social exchange, in particular, signifies a mutual interaction in which one party offers help and assistance to another, with the anticipation that the other party holds an obligation to reciprocate (Homans, 1958). SET is a widely employed framework for assessing the impact of various factors, including social, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects, on the support provided by residents for events (Ng, 2023; Rida et al., 2023; Yoopetch, 2022). It is grounded in the fundamental premise that both residents and tourists tend to express supportive attitudes toward a sports event when they perceive that the benefits outweigh the associated costs (Harrill, 2004; Liu et al., 2017). For instance, Kaplanidou et al. (K. (Kiki) Kaplanidou et al., 2013) utilized SET to explore the influence of the 2010 FIFA World Cup on the quality of life and event support among South African residents. They discovered that the perceived changes were considered part of a social exchange process, motivating residents to endorse the event's hosting. In a similar vein, Lee, Cornwell, and Babiak (Lee et al., 2013) revealed that residents' perceived benefits had a positive impact on their support for tourism development, while perceived costs had a negative effect. Within the realm of sport tourism literature, it is
common for studies to adopt SET to examine whether residents’ perceptions of sport event impacts correlate with their attitudes toward these events or tourism (Chen, 2011). Inoue and Havard (Inoue & Havard, 2014) delved into the origins and repercussions of social impacts as perceived by local participants in sport events using SET, while Kim et al. (Kim et al., 2015) applied SET to assess the perceived social impacts of hosting large-scale sport tourism events. Overall, SET serves as a valuable tool to elucidate the various roles and characteristics of the reciprocal relationship between sport events and local residents and to comprehend the existence of this exchange relationship in diverse cultural contexts. Subsequently, a theoretical framework was developed for the current study based on SET to explain the impact of sports investment on quality of life in Saudi Arabia context.

Sports investment in KSA has been a significant focus of the government's Vision 2030 plan to diversify the country's economy beyond oil. The government has made substantial investments in sports infrastructure, including football, to promote both local and global investments in sports (Joyner, 2020). The investments in sports are expected to attract foreign investments, increase domestic employment, spur tourism to Saudi Arabia, improve quality of life, and encourage fitness in a country that struggles with obesity (Ben-Nun, 2023). Saudi Arabia has spent at least $6.3bn in sports deals since early 2021, more than quadruple the previous amount spent over a six-year period. Critics have labeled this effort as "sportswashing," used to distract from a poor record on human rights. However, Saudi officials assert that sports investments will help boost foreign investment, increase domestic employment, and encourage fitness in a country that struggles with obesity (Michaelson, 2021). The Public Investment Fund (PIF) has been a significant player in Saudi Arabia's sports investments. The PIF has invested in various sports, including soccer, golf, boxing, and motor sports. The PIF has also made significant investments that have upended golf, making Saudi Arabia perhaps the most influential force in the sport. The PIF has also formed a new sports investment company, SRJ (an investment company dedicated to sport) Sports Investments, which will focus on acquiring and creating new sports events intellectual property (IP), commercial privileges of sports competitions, and hosting mega global events in KSA (Al-Nsour, 2019; Ben-Nun, 2023; CATERINA MINTHE, 2021; Dixon, 2023a).

Investments in sports have the potential to enhance the quality of life in the country. The Quality-of-Life Program (QOLP) aims to host around 400 major sporting

events yearly, through one hundred sports federations funded by the Ministry of Sports. The government has set national targets for getting the population moving, and the investments in sports have an apparent impact on public health (Al-Nsour, 2019; Ben-Nun, 2023; CATERINA MINTHE, 2021). A surge in the launch of football academies and coaching programs has been witnessed. Following the establishing of a women's football department within the Saudi Arabian Football Federation in 2019, it is estimated that up to 50,000 girls participate in school-based leagues (CATERINA MINTHE, 2021; Fahad Nazer, n.d.). Saudi Arabia's investments in sports, particularly football, have the potential to enhance the quality of life in the country. The government's focus on sports as an essential provider to future development and growth has attracted significant investments in the industry. The influence of Vision 2030 in stimulating sports investments is unquestionable, and the Quality-of-Life Program is committed to hosting around 400 sporting events each year, supported by 100 sports federations under the Ministry of Sports. The government has set national targets for getting the population moving, and the investments in sports have a discernible link to public health (Ahmed Reda, 2023; CHRIS SMITH, 2022; deloitte.com, 2023; Dixon, 2023a).

Saudi Arabia has been investing heavily in hosting international football events to promote sports development and bolster its reputation. The country has hosted several high-profile events such as the Dakar Rally and Formula One Grand Prix and has also launched initiatives to enhance sport activities in society. Coca-Cola and FIFA have collaborated to host an International FIFA Fan Festival event in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The event was held at the Prince Faisal bin Fahad Olympic complex from November 20 to December 18, 2022, and had feature live broadcasts of all 64 FIFA World Cup matches, food and beverages, an exciting entertainment program with performances from top local musicians, an exhibition featuring a collection of official World Cup footballs, and much more besides Hosting significant sporting events showcases Saudi Arabia's commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and cultural appeal on the global stage (Ahmed Reda, 2023; CHRIS SMITH, 2022; Dixon, 2023b; Fahmida, 2022). This helps attract more foreign direct investments (FDI) by demonstrating the country's high economic potential. A thriving sports industry initiates positive ripple effects throughout the economy, benefiting areas such as public health, tourism, culture, national identity, and, most notably, youth and social empowerment. These combined efforts contribute to an overall improvement in the quality of life (QOL). Hosting prestigious global sporting events
plays a pivotal role in fostering the growth of the tourism sector and, consequently, bolstering the nation's economic prospects. Saudi Arabia's role as a host for international football events not only instills a sense of pride among its citizens but also fortifies their national identity. These events serve as a platform for collective celebration and solidarity (RAWAN RADWAN, 2023; C. Smith, 2023; Tamimi, 2023). Hosting international football events is instrumental in elevating Saudi Arabia's reputation and further enriching its quality of life, therefore as depicted in Figure 1, we can propose that:

**Hypothesis three (H1)** investment in hosting international football Events has a positive effect in enhancing quality of life.

The football industry in Saudi Arabia has been growing rapidly in recent years, with many international players joining the league. The Saudi Professional League has athletes from 40 different nations competing, including Cristiano Ronaldo, who plays for Al-Nassr (**HRH Saudi Crown Prince Unveils Sports Clubs Investment and Privatization Project**, 2023). Investments in players and coaches can help improve the quality of football in the country, which can lead to more exciting matches and a greater sense of national pride. This can have a positive impact on the mental health and well-being of the population. Investments can also help promote a healthy lifestyle. The Quality-of-Life Program, which was launched since May 2018, aims to encourage mass participation in sports and improve Saudi athletes' performance in international competitions (CHRIS SMITH, 2022; Isomorphism, 2023; peachyessay, 2020). Football is in the middle of this program, with various initiatives aiming to grow the sports economy. Investments can also help promote a healthy lifestyle, consequently we can suggest that:

**Hypothesis two (H2)** investment in football players and coaches has a positive effect in enhancing quality of life.

![Figure 1: Research framework and hypotheses](image_url)
Football digital platforms and broadcasting have revolutionized the way people consume sports content (Zheng & Mason, 2022). The advent of digital technology has opened up unprecedented avenues for expansion within the sports industry, presenting the potential to engage fans in innovative and tailored ways. To effectively harness the power of digital media, sports organizations must formulate strategic approaches to establish direct connections with their fan base. One such method involves collaborating with broadcasters to excel in content delivery across various channels, thereby creating ample real-time marketing prospects (deloitte.com, 2023). The widespread adoption of smartphones and tablets has contributed to a decline in live game attendance, with more individuals opting for live streaming alternatives (Deninger, 2022). In Saudi Arabia, there are several digital platforms and broadcasting channels that cater to the needs of football enthusiasts. The Saudi Pro League is one of the most popular football leagues in the country, and it has attracted some of the biggest names in world football. The league is owned by the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF), which also owns the four biggest teams in the league - Al-Nassr, Al-Ittihad, Al Ahli, and Al-Hilal (Dixon, 2023b). The International Management Group (IMG) has sealed short-term TV deals for the Saudi Pro League across the world when Cristiano Ronaldo joined Al-Nassr (Ben-Nun, 2023). The IMG has also been tasked with finalizing international TV rights deals for the new campaign. In Australia, viewers can watch the league on streaming site 10 Play. In Canada, viewers will have to subscribe to Shahid to watch the league. In France, viewers will have to subscribe to Shahid to watch the league. In the United States, FOX Sports has obtained exclusive broadcasting rights for the Saudi Pro League starting from the 2023/24 season (C. Smith, 2023).

Shahid is an exclusive global right streaming service for the Saudi Pro League 13. It is available only in KSA and offers a subscription service that costs £8.99 per month or £76.99 for a year (Fahmida, 2022). AD Sports and Dubai sports are exclusive broadcasters of football matches in UAE only. Alrabiaa is an exclusive broadcaster of football matches in Iraq only. beIN Sports has broadcasting rights for all Arab countries except KSA, UAE, and Iraq (Al-Nsour, 2019; Fahmida, 2022). Digital transformation holds significance in the realm of sports as it plays a pivotal role in extending the reach of content and enhancing the overall fan experience. Contemporary sports enthusiasts are increasingly seeking more than just the game itself; they yearn for exclusive and shareable experiences that are greatly enhanced through technological advancements (Zheng &
Mason, 2022). As for quality of life, sports broadcasting can have a positive impact on mental health. Watching sports can be a great way to unwind and relax after a long day at work or school. It can also provide a sense of community and belonging, especially when watching with friends or family (deloitte.com, 2023; Fahad Nazer, n.d.). Therefore, we can propose that:

_Hypothesis four (H3) investment in football digital platforms and Broadcasting has a positive effect in enhancing quality of life._

Investment in football infrastructure in Saudi Arabia has the potential to enhance the quality of life in the country. There is a clear-cut strategy in place to boost grassroots sports, with specific national objectives aimed at encouraging physical activity, especially among the 20% of the population classified as obese (Joyner, 2020). The allocation of funds to football shows a noticeable connection to public health initiatives. Ibrahim Alkassim, the General Secretary of the Saudi Arabian Football Federation (SAFF), holds the belief that becoming a prominent force in football can significantly contribute to Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030. This ambitious vision aims to diversify the nation’s economy and reduce its reliance on oil. Alkassim emphasized that sports have the potential to influence a country’s economy through various direct and indirect means. He particularly highlighted how a nation with a strong sporting presence tends to spend less in other areas, ultimately stimulating economic growth and improving the overall quality of life for its citizens (Nasser Alshareef, n.d.). Accordingly, we can suppose the below hypothesis:

_Hypothesis one (H4) investment in football infrastructure has a positive effect in enhancing quality of life._

Football is not only a sport but also a tool for education and training (common goal, n.d.). According to a study, Sports, in a broader sense, exert favorable influences on the physical and social development of youth and adolescents (Yazicioglu et al., 2012). Football, in particular, imparts valuable life lessons encompassing teamwork, discipline, perseverance, goal setting, adeptness in handling both success and failure, efficient time management, and fostering physical fitness (Bell, 2005; Eime et al., 2010). Moreover, football can serve as an instrument for advancing educational pursuits among its young participants. The Common Goal initiative serves as an illustrative model of how football can bridge the gap between the sporting world and education (K. Kaplanidou, 2021). Professionals within the football industry commit to contributing 1% of their annual
earnings to football-oriented community organizations across the globe (common goal, n.d.). These organizations employ football as a means to facilitate education among young participants and enable them to attain educational standards that may have been otherwise unattainable due to a multitude of factors. The Saudi Arabian government has been investing heavily in sports as part of its Vision 2030 plan. The Public Investment Fund (PIF) has established a fund to support sports clubs and sports education in the country. The fund provides loans for sports clubs, promotes sports events, helps privatize sports clubs, and sets up and funds sports incubators with a view to creating up to 40,000 jobs (Dixon, 2023b), therefore we can propose that:

_Hypothesis five (H5) investment in football education and training has a positive effect in enhancing quality of life._

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 THE STUDY VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENTS DEVELOPMENT

We utilized various dimensions to assess the investment in the football industry in Saudi Arabia. These encompass investments in infrastructure, players and coaches, hosting international events, digital platforms and broadcasting, as well as education and training. In order to assess the satisfaction of Saudi football fans regarding these government investment efforts, we utilized the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) scale. The ACSI scale, which is based on a commonly employed measure of overall customer satisfaction in market research (Fornell et al., 1996) (also available on the ACSI website, www.theacsi.org), serves as a well-established national benchmark for evaluating the quality of products and services in the U.S. economy. This scale comprises elements such as an overall satisfaction anchor, a comparison to prior expectations, and a comparison to an ideal point. The justification for using these three indicators is based on the idea that a comprehensive satisfaction assessment is influenced not only by the perceived level of satisfaction but also by a comparison process involving specific reference points. Among these reference points, prior expectations and ideals are recognized as the most significant and universally applicable (Ryan et al., 1995). Therefore, in this study, to assess the overall satisfaction regarding government efforts in football investment, a ten-point scale ranging from "very dissatisfied" (0) to "very satisfied" (9) was utilized. Sample questions included, "How satisfied are you with the investments in players and coaches?" Likewise, to assess the expectations regarding
government efforts in football investment, a ten-point scale was employed where "Fall short of your expectation" was rated as (0), and "exceed your expectation" was rated as (9). For instance, a sample question was, "To what extent have investments in players and coaches met your expectations?". In a similar vein, to evaluate the government's investment efforts in comparison to an ideal situation, a ten-point scale ranging from "Not very close to the ideal" (0) to "very close to the ideal" (9) was used. For example, a sample question was, "How well did investments in players and coaches compare with the ideal investments in players and coaches?"

The assessment of the quality of life (QOL) was conducted using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) introduced by (Diener et al., 1985), which comprises a concise set of five questions. The SWLS serves as a comprehensive cognitive evaluation of an individual's overall contentment with their life. Participants were requested to indicate their level of agreement with statements pertaining to their happiness. For instance, sample items included: "The conditions of my life are excellent" and "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing."

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaires were disseminated and gathered from football enthusiasts attending events in KSA from June to September 2023. A dedicated organization was contracted to procure the required data. The study received support from a professional data collection firm. The research team ensured the adherence to the research protocol, which included elucidating the study's objectives to the participants and securing their informed consent. The data collection company facilitated communication and data retrieval from the chosen respondents. After obtaining consent from willing participants, we distributed questionnaires for completion. A total of 1500 participants were randomly selected and provided with self-administered surveys, following the methodology proposed by Ibeh et al. (Ibeh et al., 2004). To collect the necessary data, we employed a systematic random sampling technique that involved selecting attendees of various football events in Saudi Arabia. With the assistance of a data collection company, we decided to choose every fifth participant entering through the gate entrance. Upon selection, participants were approached for their consent to complete the questionnaire. At the event's exit gate, we collected the filled questionnaires deposited by the participants. Out of the 1500 surveys, 1200 were fully completed, resulting in an 80%
response rate with no missing data. To assess the impact of response time on average scores, a T-test was conducted, revealing no significant differences. This indicates that nonresponse bias did not affect the data. Among the 1200 valid responses, 80% were male (960), and the remaining 20% were female (240). A significant proportion of the respondents, constituting 85%, fell within the age range of 25 to 45, with 85% having attained a high school degree. Furthermore, a majority of the participants (70%) reported their marital status as unmarried, and a significant 70% indicated that they regularly attend sports events.

4 RESULTS

To fulfill the study's objectives, we employed the partial least squares (PLS) tool to examine the model and hypotheses. Given the exploratory nature of our research and its preliminary phase aimed at developing a theoretical model concerning the impact of football investment on the quality of life in the context of KSA, PLS was deemed suitable (Chin, 2001; Hair et al., 2019). As per Gefen et al. (Gefen & Straub, 2005), the data analysis proceeded in two steps, beginning with an analysis of the model measurements and followed by a structural model test. For these analyses, SmartPLS version 4 was utilized.

4.1 MEASUREMENT MODEL

Following the two-step approach developed by Gefen et al. (Gefen et al., 2000), this study subjected the measurement model to tests of discriminant, convergent, and content validity. To assess validity, we examined Cronbach's alpha, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) for each construct. As presented in Table 1, both the AVE and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, while all AVE values surpassed the acceptable level of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), indicating strong convergent validity. Discriminant validity was confirmed by three methods: (1) comparing the square root (SQRT) of AVE values, which are also reported in Table 2, to the inter-construct correlations. The results showed that the SQRT of AVE values for all constructs were greater than their correlations with other constructs, thus supporting discriminant validity. (2) We performed the Fornell and Larcker (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) test, and the results are presented in Table 2. These results indicate adequate discriminant validity. (3) Furthermore, we assessed the empirical distinctiveness
of each construct in the structural model using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (see Table 3), a more precise measure (Hair et al., 2019). Our findings were favorable, as all values in Table 3 were below 0.90, indicating the absence of substantial discriminant values among the research constructs. The analysis revealed a low level of multicollinearity, with variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranging from 1.262 to 3.901 (Daoud, 2017). In order to assess and control common method variance (CMV), Harman's single-factor test was applied (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and it revealed no excessive CMVs, affirming the appropriateness of the measurement model for further analysis.

Table 1. Psychometric properties of study measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors &amp; Items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Composite Reliability</th>
<th>Average Variance Extracted</th>
<th>Variance Inflation Factor</th>
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<td>Investment in hosting international events</td>
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<td>Investments in players and coaches</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.967</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>IPC_3</td>
<td>0.956</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Investment in football infrastructure</td>
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<td>0.908</td>
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<td>0.885</td>
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<td>IFET_3</td>
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<td>QOL_4</td>
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<td>QOL_5</td>
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<td>3.635</td>
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Source: Primary data.
Table 2. Fornell–Larcker Criterion.

<table>
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<th>IHIE</th>
<th>IPC</th>
<th>QOL</th>
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Source: Primary data.

Table 3. Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>IFI</th>
<th>IHIE</th>
<th>IPC</th>
<th>QOL</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>IPC</td>
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<td>0.470</td>
<td>0.598</td>
<td>0.607</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>QOL</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>0.575</td>
<td>0.641</td>
<td>0.720</td>
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</table>

Source: Primary data.

4.2 STRUCTURAL MODEL

Following the confirmation of good convergent and discriminant validity in the measurement model, we proceeded to analyze the structural model (Figure 2) to assess its capability to elucidate and forecast the impact of exogenous latent unobserved variables on the endogenous dependent unobserved latent variables (Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013). Several metrics were employed to assess the model's goodness of fit (GoF). To ensure a good fit, a minimum acceptable R² score of 0.10 was considered (Hair et al., 2019). The results reveal that “quality of life” as an endogenous latent unobserved variable, possesses R² of .569, signifying the model's strong predictive capacity. Furthermore, the Stone-Geisser Q² criterion of quality-of-life construct yielded a score of .565, providing additional evidence of the model's accuracy in making predictions (Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013).

In the final phase of the data analysis, a bootstrapping approach was employed with 5000 iterations to calculate the path coefficient weights and the statistical significance (t-values) for the direct relationships, as presented in Table 4. The study proposed and tested five direct hypotheses, as depicted in Figure 2. The results revealed that quality of life among football fans was positively and significantly impacted by investment in hosting international events (β=.166, t=4.249, P>.001), investment in
football players and coaches ($\beta=0.453, t=18.082, P>.001$), investment in digital platforms and broadcasting ($\beta=0.108, t=2.511, P>.05$), and investment in football infrastructure ($\beta=0.121, t=4.025, P>.001$), supporting hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4. However, investment in football education and training was found to have positive but insignificant effect on improving football fans QOL ($\beta=0.041, t=1.719, P=0.086$) rejecting hypotheses five (H5).

![Figure 2: PLS-SEM output model](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Hypotheses testing and recommendations.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
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<tr>
<td>H3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
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<td>H5</td>
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</table>
5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Saudi Arabia embodies a dual identity. Traditionally recognized for its oil reserves and deserts (Bowen, 2014), it is now fostering a new resource: football aspirations. It's almost as if they are following a unique playbook, one that begins with the question, "Why not us?". While the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region makes significant strides in the football industry, Saudi Arabia stands at the forefront of an exhilarating new era. The increasing number of international players and coaches, substantial investment in infrastructure, digital platforms and broadcasting, and the aspiration to host international tournaments all underline the nation's unwavering commitment to football's advancement. The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Sports has revealed that the country's Public Investment Fund (PIF) is set to assume ownership of four teams in the Saudi Pro League. These selected clubs happen to be the four founding members of the SPL: Al Ahli, Al Ittihad, Al Hilal, and Al Nassr. As a result, The Saudi Pro League has emerged as a major player in the global football arena, setting a new record with a whopping $957 million in expenditures during the 2023 football transfer window (Dixon, 2023b).

The current study explored the impact of investments in various facets of the football industry on quality of life (QOL), including infrastructure, players and coaches, hosting international events, digital platforms and broadcasting, education and training.

Notably, the results of the current study reveal that the investment in football players and coaches exhibits a robust path coefficient that surpasses the cumulative effects of all the other explored dimensions combined (investment in football infrastructure, investment in hosting international events, investment in digital platforms and broadcasting, and investment in football education and training) in enhancing the quality of life for football fans. These results come as expected when we enumerate the international players who have become part of the Saudi Pro League (SPL), which is referred to as the Roshn Saudi League (RSL) due to sponsorship, up to October 2023. For instance, Al-Nassr SFC boasts a roster of internationally acclaimed players, including Cristiano Ronaldo, Sadio Mané, David Ospina, Aymeric Laporte, Alex Telles, Marcelo Brozovic, Seko Fofana, Talisca, and Otávio. Al-Ittihad SFC also features renowned international talent, with players such as Karim Benzema, Romarinho, Fabinho, Luiz Felipe, N'Golo Kanté, Marcelo Grohe, Igor Coronado, and Jota. Furthermore, Al-Ahli SFC has welcomed several international stars, including Riyad Mahrez, Roberto Firmino,
Allan Saint-Maximin, Franck Kessié, Gabri Veiga, Merih Demiral, Roger Ibañez, Ezgjan Alioski, and Edouard Mendy. Lastly, Al-Hilal SFC counts several prominent international players among its ranks, such as Neymar, Rúben Neves, Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, Malcom, Aleksandar Mitrovic, Kalidou Koulibaly, and Bono (MacInnes, 2023b; peachyessay, 2020; Singleton & Schreyer, 2023). The presence of these numerous international players fosters a sense of pride among football fans in KSA and contributes to an enhanced perception of an improved quality of life.

The study has one more interesting finding that investment in football education and training failed to improve the quality of life among football fans in KSA. This result might be due to several challenges that must be addressed. These challenges range from the lack of comprehensive programs, lack of access to quality football education and training, lack of quality football education and training, lack of integration with local football clubs and the challenges of integrating football education into formal education. Overcoming these challenges will be essential in harnessing the full potential of football education and training to improve the QOL among football fans in KSA.

This research paper delves into the theoretical and practical implications of investment in the sports industry in Saudi Arabia, specifically focusing on its influence on the quality of life (QOL) of football fans. As Saudi Arabia seeks to diversify its economy and embrace a more sports-centric future, understanding the multifaceted effects of such investments is vital. This paper applies the Social Exchange Theory to explain how investments in the sports industry, such as the recruitment of international players, create a social exchange process between fans and the clubs. The benefits accrued by fans in the form of exciting matches, increased competitiveness, and international recognition influence their QOL.

From the practical point of view, investments in international players and high-profile coaches have led to an upsurge in fan engagement. The excitement and anticipation of watching globally recognized athletes on the Saudi Pro League teams have resulted in higher attendance at matches, boosting the atmosphere and fan experiences. Additionally, the sports industry investments have generated economic growth through increased ticket sales, merchandise, and tourism. Moreover, the professionalization of the football industry has created job opportunities for Saudis, thereby contributing to their economic well-being. Incorporating the previous theoretical perspectives with practical insights, this paper contributes to the broader understanding of the dynamics between
sports investments and QOL, providing a valuable reference for policymakers, sports organizations, and enthusiasts alike.

6 LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The study focused on football fans in Saudi Arabia, and the findings may not be directly generalizable to other sports or countries. Further research is needed to explore the applicability of the results in different sports and cultural contexts. Additionally, the research did not extensively address external factors, such as political changes, economic fluctuations, or social events, which may influence the quality of life of football fans. Future studies should consider these factors. Comparative studies with other countries or regions could provide insights into the unique aspects of sports industry investment in Saudi Arabia and its effects on fans' quality of life. Moreover, comparative studies with other countries or regions could provide insights into the unique aspects of sports industry investment in Saudi Arabia and its effects on fans' quality of life. Finally, the current study is quantitative in its nature, therefore qualitative studies, including in-depth interviews or focus groups, can offer an enriched understanding of fans' experiences and the intricacies of how sports investments influence their lives. By addressing these limitations and exploring further research opportunities, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between sports industry investments and the quality of life of football fans, providing valuable insights for policymakers, sports organizations, and fans themselves.

FUNDING

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD STATEMENT

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of King Faisal University (project number 5178).
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