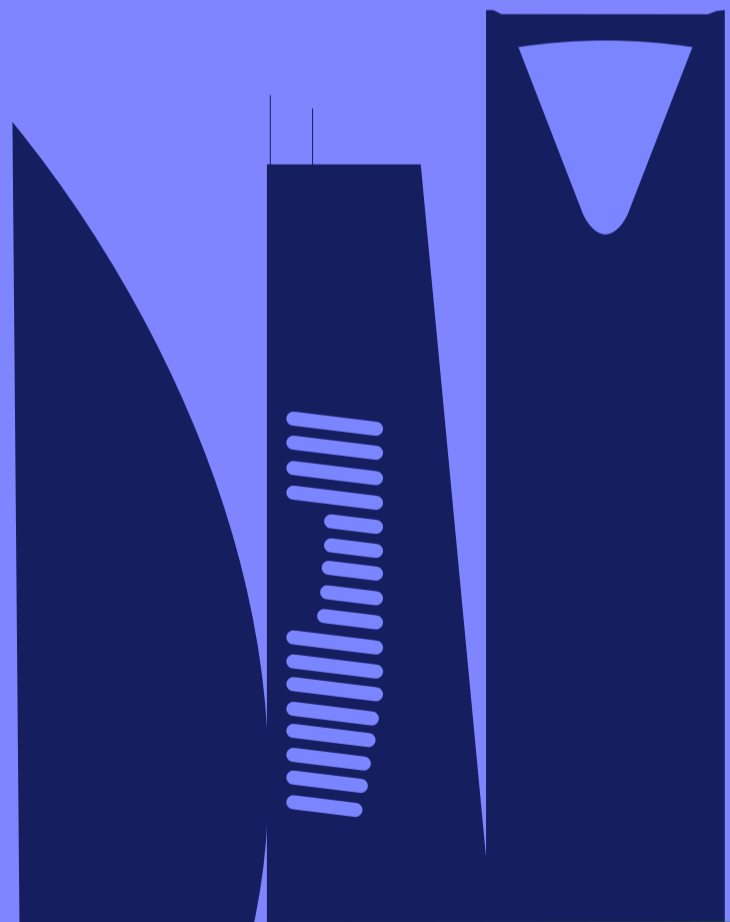


M Memo

Saudi Arabia's Influence on Sports Readership Report

July 2023



Overview

Saudi Arabia has a growing influence in the world of sports, utilizing diplomacy and cash to expand its international reach.

Previous rivals, PGA and the Saudi-backed LIV Golf recently agreed to a merger.

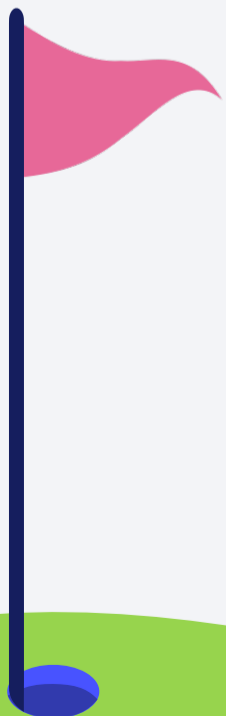
On the soccer front, Saudi Arabia has big plans to sign the top talent in soccer to the Saudi Pro League.

How much of the media surrounding golf and soccer is tied to Saudi Arabia? How has the narrative and sentiment on Saudi Arabian “sportswashing” shifted over time?

Memo analyzed over 7,000 articles between May 14, 2022 - June 27, 2023 across major national, local, and sports publications to identify readership trends.

Table of Contents

Saudi Arabia’s Impact	3
“Sportswashing” Trends	4
Evolving Sentiment	5
Athlete Involvement	6
Key Takeaways	7

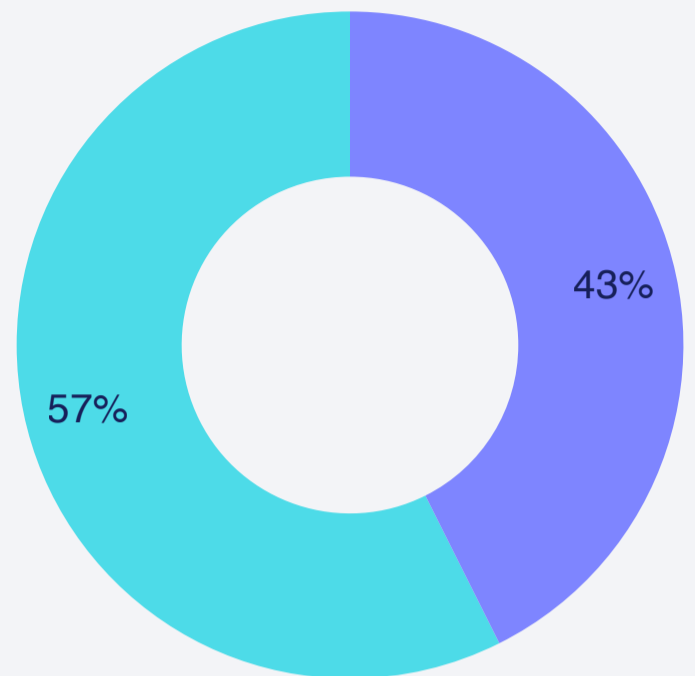


SAUDI ARABIA'S IMPACT

PGA and MLS have received more **widespread attention** nationally due to Saudi Arabian involvement. These articles have moved past the usual sports enthusiasts and into the global spotlight.

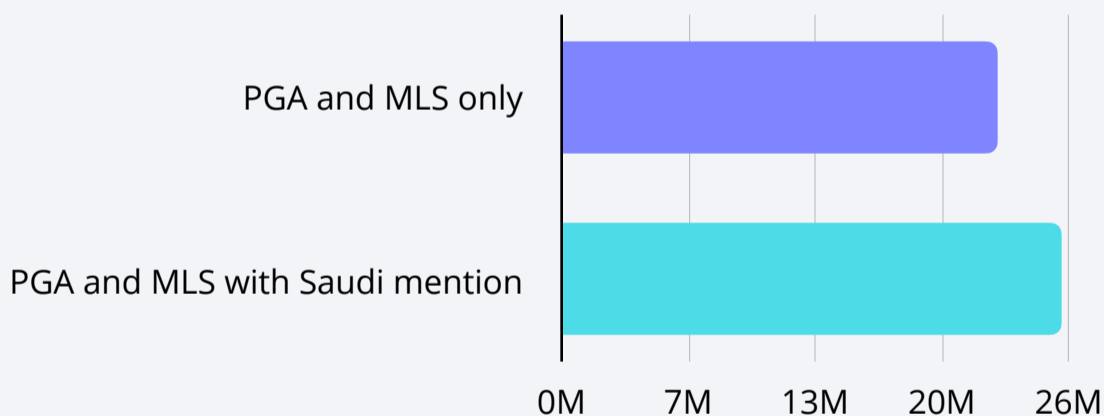
The **foreign affairs and controversy** has piqued audience interest. PGA and MLS articles mentioning Saudi Arabia and its respective sports leagues drove nearly 1.5X more readers than articles just discussing PGA and MLS.

Share of Readership

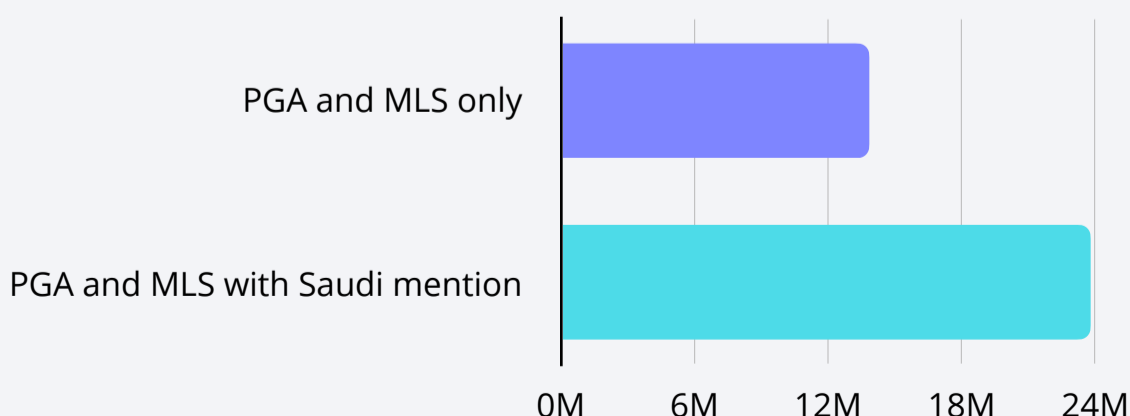


- PGA and MLS only
- PGA and MLS with Saudi mention

Total Readership: Sports Publications



Total Readership: National Publications



PGA and MLS saw

172%

more readers on national outlets when Saudi Arabia was mentioned.

“SPORTSWASHING” TRENDS

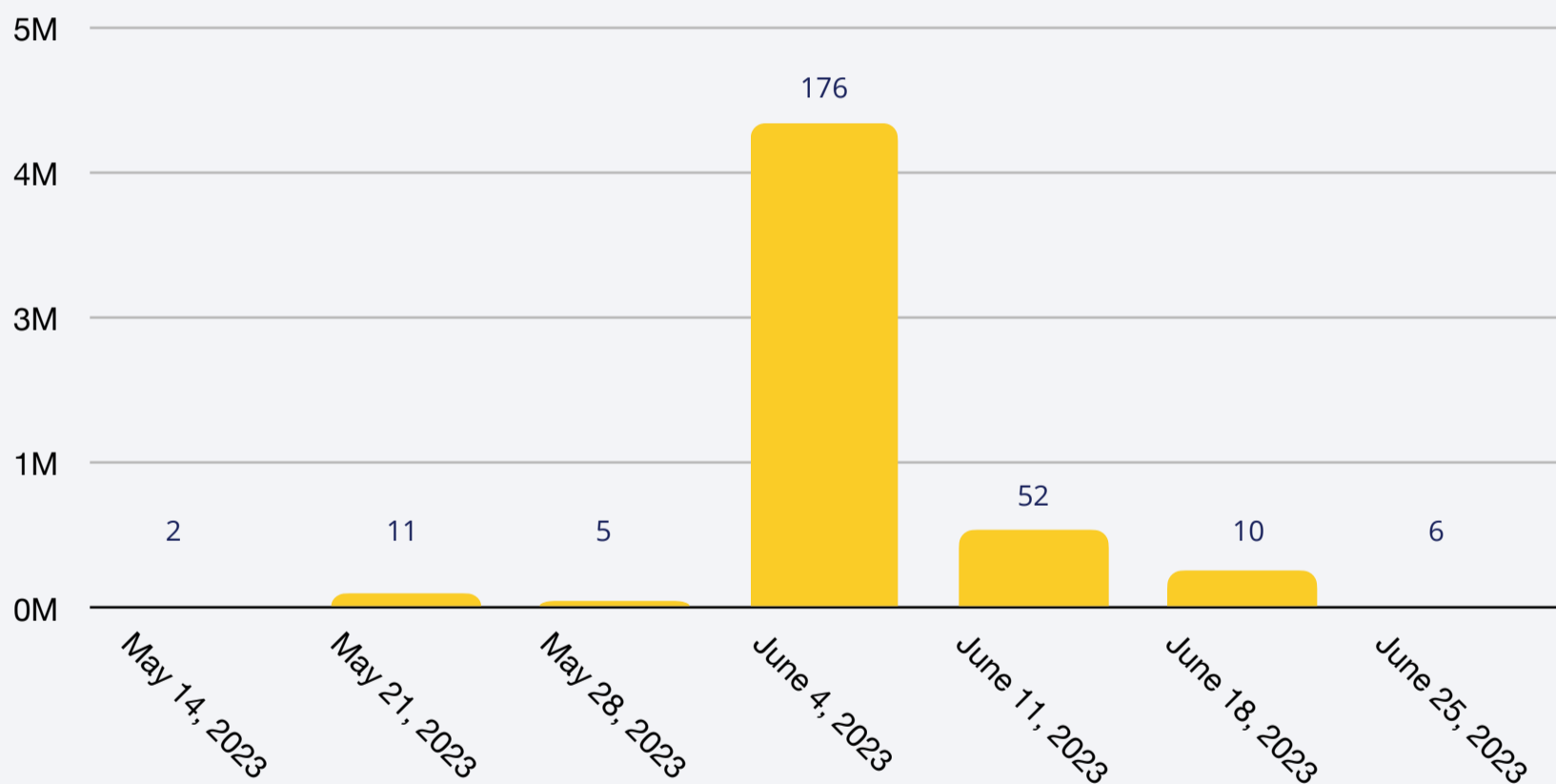
“Sportswashing” is when a country uses sports or events to overshadow human rights issues and improve the image of their country.

The concept has been around for decades, but the term was coined in 2015 “to describe Azerbaijan's use of the European Games to divert international attention away from concerns over human rights in the country” (Encyclopedia Britannica).

The vast amount of money that Saudi Arabia invested in sports recently received high criticism, and is frequently described as **“sportswashing.”**

Total Readership: “Sportswashing” Mentions

(Labeled with # of articles)

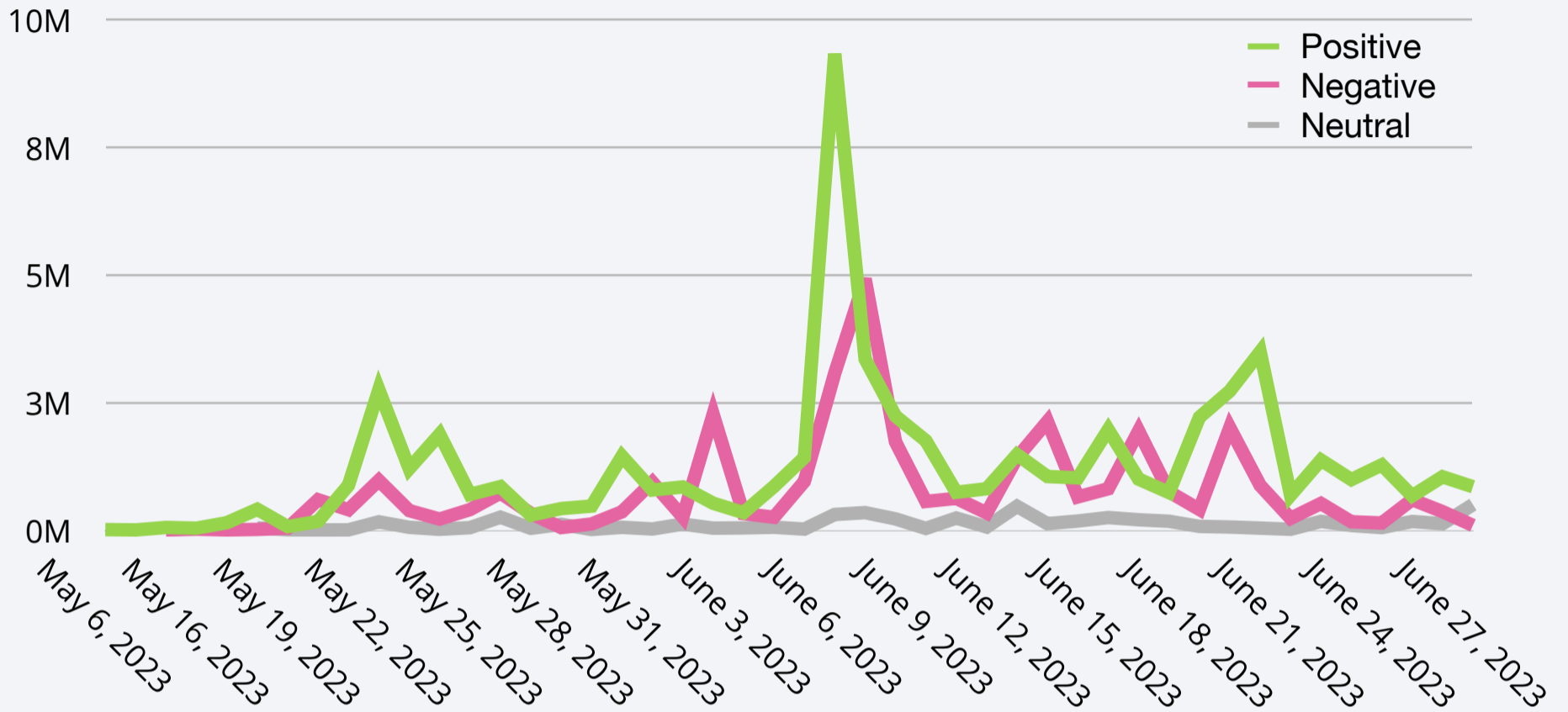


The term “sportswashing” was mentioned in 262 articles, driving 5.4M readers. Articles mentioning “sportswashing” peaked in coverage and readership the week of June 4th, as the **PGA and LIV merger** was announced.

Only 16 articles mentioned the term “sportswashing” in the headline, driving 53K readers. While “sportswashing” may not be the focus on many articles, it is an **underlying theme** of several articles and the overall controversy.

EVOLVING SENTIMENT

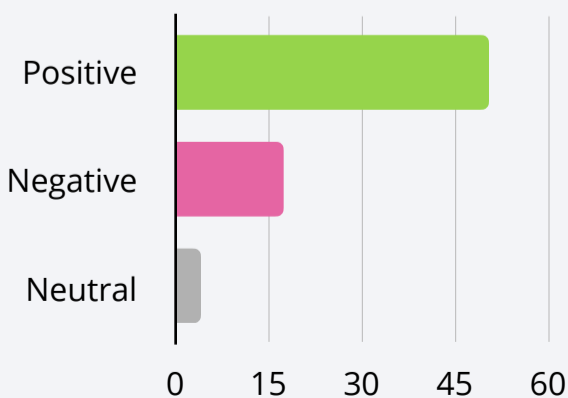
Readership over Time by Sentiment



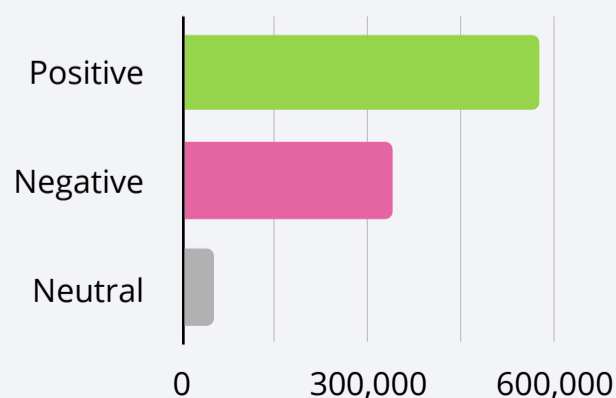
By the end of June 2023, sentiment around Saudi's involvement in sports was mostly **positive**. Positive sentiment saw a large spike following the announcement of the PGA and LIV **merger** on Tuesday, June 6th. After a year of tension between PGA and LIV, several articles see the merger as a benefit to all, "coming together to **unify the game of golf.**"

Negativity largely came from articles describing PGA **player responses**, as they feel betrayed by leadership in LIV union and are shocked. Jay Monahan and PGA have been called "**a hypocrite**" for the deal with LIV, fueling more negativity.

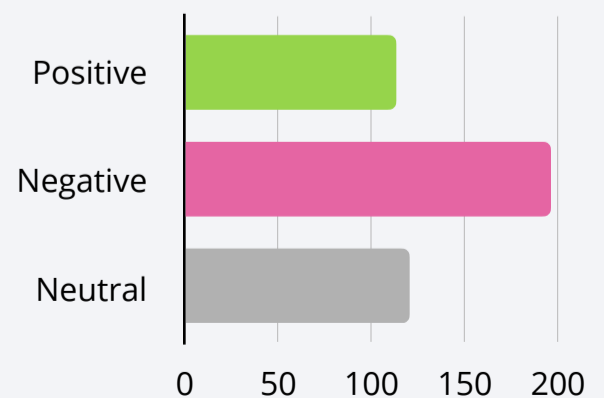
of Articles



Total Readership



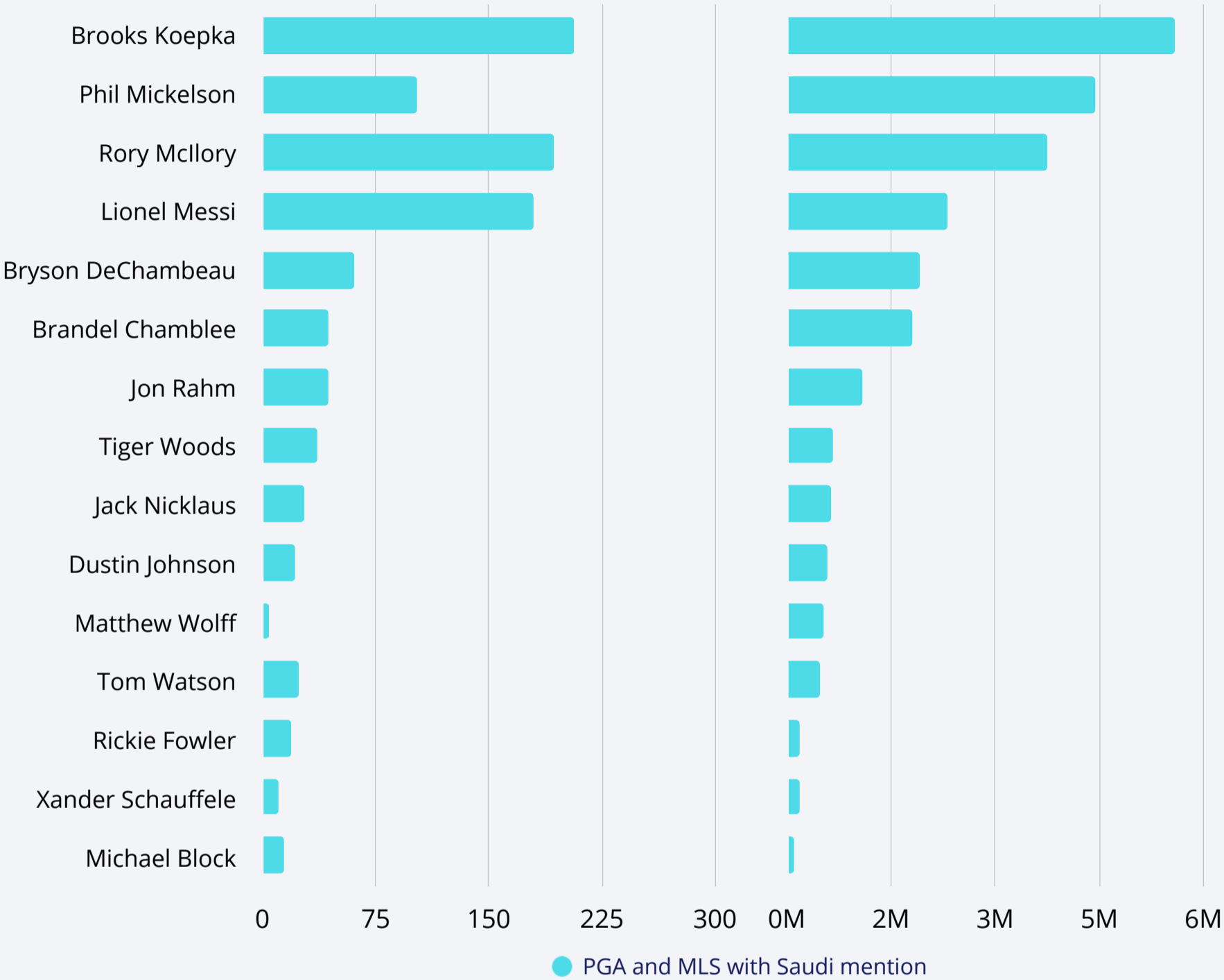
Avg. Readership



ATHLETE INVOLVEMENT

Coverage Volume by Athlete

Total Readership by Athlete



Brooks Koepka and **Phil Mickelson** drove the highest total readership, both formerly PGA golfers that switched to LIV in 2022.

Rory McIlroy is one of the loyal PGA golfers who have been vocal about disappointment surrounding the merger. In Interviews, McIlroy claims he feels like a “sacrificial lamb” and said, “I still hate LIV.”

Lionel Messi generated buzz as he recently chose MLS’ Inter Miami over both Barcelona and Saudi Arabia, reportedly rejecting a \$1.6 billion offer.

Key Takeaways

- 1 Majority of the readership surrounding PGA and MLS is tied to Saudi Arabia's involvement.** PGA and MLS saw an influx of readers across national publications when mentioned with Saudi Arabia and its sports leagues.
- 2 The term "sportswashing" gained traction with Saudi Arabia's growing influence in sports.** The media has frequently used the term when describing the PGA-LIV merger.
- 3 Lately, sentiment has been relatively positive,** as many view the PGA-LIV merger to be a benefit to all and unifying the game of golf.
- 4 Negativity largely came from PGA player's response to the merger.** Athletes are at the forefront of the controversy and were vocal about their response to Saudi Arabia's involvement. Fans are eager to see how these monumental changes to the sports world will impact their favorite players.



Accurate data leads to better decisions.

Only Memo reports readership direct from publications.



Find new media strategies
before anyone else



Show the ROI on PR with a
tangible metric



Improve efficiency across all
comms groups



memo.co

| info@memo.co